

**“We Are Under One Law and Equal in its Eyes”: The Pursuit of Social Justice in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 and the Literacy Movement in “Seven Brothers”**

Mariana Virgínia Moretti Carvalho

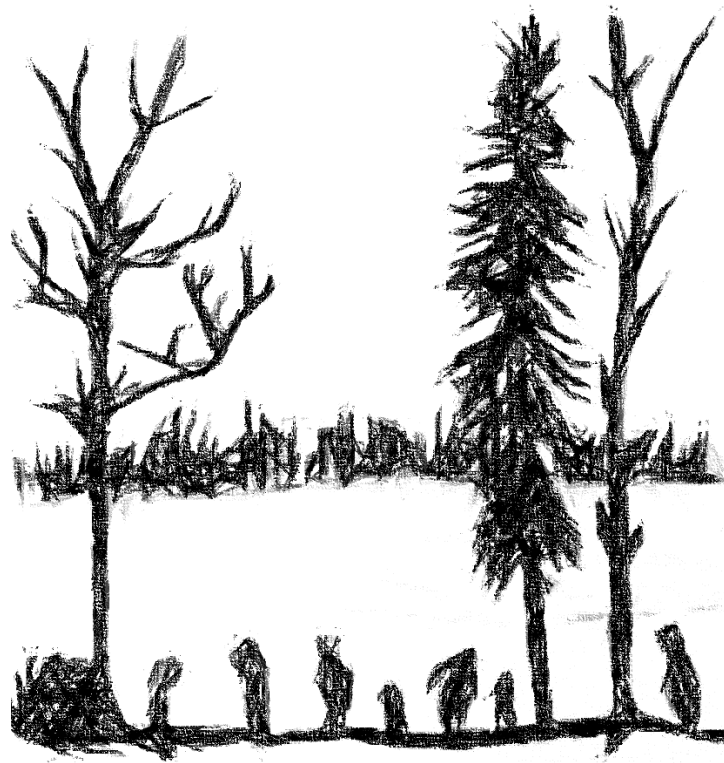
Faculty of Education and Welfare Studies

Åbo Akademi University

Master’s Degree in Teaching and Learning

Supervisor: Haiqin Liu

2023



He knew well where lay the country, that dear corner of the earth, where the Finns dwelt in toil and struggle, and in whose bosom the bones of his fathers rested. He knew its frontiers, its seas, its secret-smiling lakes and the pine-clad ridges that run like stake-fences throughout its breadth. The whole picture of the land of his birth, its friendly mother-face, had sunk forever into the depths of his heart.

And from it was born in him a desire to further the happiness and the prosperity of his country.

Aleksi Kivi, *Seven Brothers*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Brazilian poet Vinicius de Moraes once wrote that *life is the art of encounter (a vida é a arte do encontro)*, and I could not be more thankful for all encounters I have had in Finland, a country with harsh cold weather, yet with so many warm-hearted people that I was lucky to meet along the way.

I would like to thank my family and my friends in Brazil, who have always encouraged me. I am thankful to share my days with Stefan Westergård, who is probably the loveliest person I have ever met and who gave me support to finalize this process.

I thank my supervisor, Haiqin Liu, for providing me with essential guidance during my thesis writing. Special thanks to professors Camilla Svens-Liavåg, Annika Wiklund-Engblom, Blaine Taylor, Ream Barclay, Sven-Erik Hansen, and Mikael Nygård who also helped me with the research. Many thanks to all my professors in the master's degree, who played a pivotal role in my graduation.

All my gratitude to the TLearn 2021 group, the International Committee of ÅAS, the Equality Committee, the Vaasa Foxes Rugby Club, and the Vaasa International Talents Programme. Plus, my gratitude to Harriet Okumu, Pia Jünger, Anna Caldén, Susie Kimura, Ilias Missyris, Roland Nylund, and all Åbo Akademi staff (Tack så mycket! Kiitos paljon!). Many thanks to all my students, especially the kids, who have taught me so much since I started to be an educator.

And last but not least, I am thankful for my faith in God and for all my beloved orishas, who always open a bright path where I can walk toward my goals. *Epa-hey Iansã!*

## ABSTRACT

Author:	Year:
Mariana Virgínia Moretti Carvalho	2023
Title:	
“We Are Under One Law and Equal in its Eyes”: The Pursuit of Social Justice in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 and the Literacy Movement in “Seven Brothers”	
Unpublished thesis for master’s degree in education	Pages:
Vaasa: Åbo Akademi University. Faculty for Education and Welfare Studies	70
Abstract:	
<p>This study aimed to investigate the historical construction of social justice in Finnish education by analysing the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (FNCC 2014) through qualitative content analysis and using a literature vignette of the novel <i>Seven Brothers</i> to exemplify its historical origins. The investigation was based on Fraser’s concept of social justice and Freire’s critical pedagogy for an emancipatory education, focusing on the elements related to equity and political participation presented in the curriculum and the novel, terms that became codes in the NVivo 12 software to identify and categorize the extracts. The hypothesis that guided the study was the identification of elements that lead the teaching practices towards social justice at a policy level, which could justify, among other reasons, the success of Finnish education and the consolidation of the “Finnish miracle”. The results showed that the FNCC 2014 safeguarded essential aspects to enhance social justice in schools, nonetheless, further research is needed to understand how these principles are being applied in the school context. In addition, extracts from “<i>Seven Brothers</i>” were related to the development of Finnish education and the importance of the literacy movement for the peasantry, aiming at the construction of an egalitarian society.</p>	
<p><i>Keywords:</i> Finnish education, Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014, social justice, <i>Seven Brothers</i>, Paulo Freire</p>	

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	II
ABSTRACT.....	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	IV
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Aims .....	4
1.2. Research Questions .....	4
1.3. Structure of the Study.....	5
2. Literature Review.....	5
2.1. Land of Contradictions.....	5
2.2. Finnish Literature and the National Awakening .....	9
2.3. Finnish National Core Curriculum .....	10
2.4. Social Justice in Education.....	14
2.4.1. Equity in the Nordic Model of Welfare.....	16
2.4.2. Political Participation .....	18
3. Methodology .....	21
3.1. Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) .....	21
3.2. Data Analysis .....	24
3.2.1. Preparation.....	24
3.2.2. Organizing .....	24
3.2.3. Reporting .....	26
3.3. Researcher Positionality .....	26
4. Results.....	27
4.1. The Advent of Basic Education and the Pursuit of Equity .....	27
4.1.1. Equity in the FNCC 2014 .....	29
4.2. Political Participation and the Construction of Solidarity and Trust .....	34

4.2.1. Political Participation in the FNCC 2014 .....	36
4.3. Conclusion.....	39
5. Discussion.....	39
5.1. “Seven Brothers” and the Development of Finnish Education.....	40
5.2. Social Justice in the FNCC 2014.....	41
5.2.1. Equity.....	41
5.2.2. Political Participation .....	45
5.3. Conclusion.....	48
5.3.1. Limitations of the Study .....	49
5.3.2. Recommendations for Future Research.....	49
6. References.....	50
APPENDIX A.....	62
APPENDIX B.....	63
APPENDIX C .....	64

# 1. Introduction

The Nordic model of welfare and education has received attention globally for its high indexes of happiness, democracy, and fairness in society. The successful results of countries such as Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland in developing a concrete project of equality and social justice are associated with the outcomes of the public educational system (Holm, 2018). It became a trend for educators to refer to these countries as role models and try to understand the engines of their successful systems. Books concerning the project of Nordic education, for instance, have become best-sellers. As a result, many educators and policymakers nationwide have tried to export the model to other societies, but no country in the world has achieved similar results in the combination of exceptional student performance, wellbeing, and equity in education.

In this sense, among Nordic countries, Finland emerged as a role model for high-quality education in 2000, when its Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results were disclosed<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, many educators and researchers were intrigued by the PISA results and started investigating how a nation of five million people has achieved the top position on the world ranking. In this scenario, Finnish education became a product on the shelves to be sold to other nations, and considered by many educators as the panacea, a formula to be reproduced regardless of the social context to be applied. However, the student performance in the PISA test, the driving force of worldwide admiration, needs a deeper understanding of Finnish education and society. In fact, the country's successful results are intimately related to the development of its public education system based on a strong concept of social justice<sup>2</sup> (Holm, 2018), which was the focus of this study.

Firstly, it is essential to grasp the development of the Finnish educational system regarding equal opportunities for all citizens. At the beginning of the 19th century, basic education was still rudimentary and a privilege reserved for the upper classes, whereas the peasantry was educated in Sunday schools<sup>3</sup> arranged by the church or in voluntary circles.

---

<sup>1</sup> The PISA 2000 results showed that Finnish students outperformed other countries in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy skills, making the Finnish comprehensive schooling a role model worldwide and referred by many authors as a "miracle" in education (Simola, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> It is crucial to highlight that PISA 2000 results also showed that the variation in student and school performance in Finland was the one of the lowest among PISA countries. This fact is related to the combination of high-quality performance with a high level of equality in Finnish schools (Simola, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> According to Kotilainen (2013, p. 115), "in remote areas very few elementary schools were built, and often primary education was provided by the Sunday schools and the ambulatory schools organized by the church parishes."

The project of a basic schooling system for the masses, nonetheless, arose with the efforts of the nationalist movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, highly influenced by the work of philosopher Johan Vilhelm Snellman and educator Uno Cygneaus, intellectual leaders who proclaimed the national values and benefits of the basic schooling system and teacher education (Kotilainen, 2013). As a result, people's schools were founded across Finland and the first national law on such schools was passed by the parliament in 1921, opening the path for popular education (Autti & Hyry-Beihammer, 2014).

With regard to this scenario, the classic novel by Finnish writer Aleksis Kivi, "Seven Brothers" ("Seitsemän veljestä", 1870), is an in-depth view of the lives and the struggles of seven orphan brothers learning how to read and write and paving their way out of the wilderness. The rationale for choosing this book to exemplify the construction of social justice in Finland is its consolidation as an important representation of the emerging literacy movement and the transformations of society due to industrialization and population growth. Also, it depicts the urge for education to overcome the inequality issues in the country especially in rural areas, and the endeavours to moulding the national character. When the country became independent from Russia in 1917, schooling was expanded to all Finnish citizens as an instrument to develop the nation. Nevertheless, the connection between education and economic growth became undeniable first in the 1960s, when the initiatives to invest in education for the population were justified by the country's economic development (Leijola, 2004).

Undoubtedly, the improvement of Finnish education was triggered by economic growth and the urge for a literate and productive society in the late 1900s. If on the one hand, the fostering of the literacy movement allied with the enhancement of the national identity arose in the mid-19th century to develop the country in many aspects, on the other hand, its association with social justice and equal opportunities for Finnish citizens was not evident right from the very outset of this process. The social division to access education, characterised by the gap between a rich minority and the working class, was abolished in 1985 with the educational reform. It should be noted that the educational system based on the standards of class society continued until 1921, and equality started to be sought in the 1970s (Leijola, 2004).

Overcoming the contradiction between classes not only influenced the advent of a national curriculum system in Finland but also imposed several changes to it throughout the



years. Currently, the objective of the National Core Curriculum is to provide the aims and a list of contents to be approached in each subject area by the schools, principles that guide educators in implementing their practices in the classroom (Korkeamäki & Dreher, 2011). In 2014, Finland completed the reform of the National Core Curriculum for pre-primary and compulsory basic education, seeking an education for future competencies in Finnish society and the inclusion of the pupils in class planning (Søby, 2015). Thus, this study aimed to examine this document to understand its elements related to social justice, and the motivation for choosing the 2014 curriculum over the previous versions is justified by the democratic process of its collaborative design, its strong student-centered character, and its emphasis on the development of transversal competencies, factors that are highly related to the current demands of the 21st-century teaching and learning. Furthermore, it is the latest curriculum published so far, and its analysis contributes to the discussions on the reforms and the current challenges of education.

However, it is important to highlight that Finnish education is not a flawless system, and it was not the objective of this study to depict an idyllic scenario or minimize its weaknesses. Despite being considered by educators worldwide as the panacea for all educational issues, it is worth mentioning that this study also explored the counternarratives of this myth. It has been 22 years since the PISA results have put Finland in the spotlight, but challenges in the educational field are not static. What are the current obstacles to achieving equity in Finnish education? In a practical aspect, are students being included in the classroom regardless of their cultural background? Further study is needed to understand the implications of these challenges, and future research investigating these questions would be interesting for the field.

With regard to the theoretical framework for this study, since social justice is a vast and multidimensional notion, distinct ideas were presented according to sociological and political theories through a literature review on the theme. The conceptualization of identified elements related to social justice, such as equity and political participation were presented through the light of previous research. It is important to mention that Fraser's and Freire's concepts of social justice and political participation were also approached. The worldwide importance of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is undeniable in the educational field, as is his pioneering research on the notions of equality in educational contexts. In addition, his work

“Pedagogy of the Oppressed”<sup>4</sup>, which was a solid reference for this research, has been studied by Nordic educators<sup>5</sup>, such as the work of Suoranta & Tomperi (2021) dedicated to relating Freirean theories with the educational guidelines in Finland.

Nonetheless, through a literature review on how the country has developed its public education throughout the years, it was possible to notice a gap in research providing an investigation focused on social justice in the Finnish curriculum, relating the findings to Freirean ideas. Neither similar study in the English language has proposed to associate the development of Finnish education with the events of the novel “Seven Brothers”. Thus far, previous studies have focused on the principles of nationalism and the reinforcement of the Finnish identity presented in the novel.

Concerning the outcomes of this study, it is expected that further insights into the Finnish education system could help educators and policymakers to reflect on their countries’ public education towards a fairer society. In addition, the findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature on the educational field concerning an education that aims at social justice and equal opportunities for students regardless of their social and economic background. The fact of relating factual knowledge of Finnish education with fictional events of a literary classic contributes to a deeper understanding of the society through art, which provides valuable insights into the country’s culture and identity.

## **1.1. Aims**

This study aimed to investigate the historical construction of educational social justice in Finland by analysing the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 through qualitative content analysis and using a literature vignette of the novel *Seven Brothers* to exemplify its historical origins.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

- What are the events of “Seven Brothers” that can be related to the development of Finnish education in the pursuit of social justice?

---

<sup>4</sup> “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” was published in 1968 in the Portuguese language and is one of the most influential books in education worldwide (Green, 2016). In Finland, the interest in Freire’s ideas increased in the 1960s and early 1970s with the movements of social activism in the country (Suoranta & Tomperi, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> It is worth mentioning that major translations of Freire’s book occurred first in the 1970s in Sweden. In Finland, the translations began with the increasing interest in Latin American issues, such as the military dictatorship in Chile (Suoranta & Tomperi, 2021).

- How have the elements related to social justice been presented in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014?

### **1.3. Structure of the Study**

This study was divided into five chapters to organise its structure in a logical order. In the first chapter, the introduction, I presented the focus of this investigation, providing a brief overview of the development of Finnish education and the rationale for the chosen documents to examine. Furthermore, I highlighted the motivation for the research and its contribution to the educational field. The second chapter was dedicated to a literature review on the history of Finland and the development of the public education system, considering its particularities to construct the foundations for social equality. Moreover, I presented the importance of literature to the national identity, and an overview of the novel “Seven Brothers”, identifying the events presented in the book that can be related to the literacy movement in mid-19th society. Also, I examined the concepts of equity and political participation, elements related to the pursuit of social justice, as well as the rationale for focusing on these concepts. In the third section, I described the methodology used, explaining the content analysis procedures used to conduct the study. Chapter fourth presented a report of the results and further findings during the development of the investigation. Section five, the discussion, addressed the research questions relating the results to previous research and provided the conclusion.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Land of Contradictions**

The history of Finland could not be written without geographical, social, and cultural contradictions. Firstly, these contradictions can be encountered in its physical nature. Despite having a vast number of lakes, waterpower is scarce due to the small height differences that are unable to move the turbines of an electric power station. Although in area the country is among the largest in Europe, it is sparsely populated by a relatively small society. In the 19th century, even with poor climate conditions for growing grains, Finland constituted an agrarian country, when almost 70% of the population was engaged in forestry and agriculture (Hjerpe, 2008). Consequently, its expansive coniferous forests have not only represented an

essential economic resource but also have played an important role in developing the country's identity<sup>6</sup> (Sjöblom & Wolff, 2017).

However, regarding the agrarian paradigm in the 19th century, Finnish society was “in a poverty trap” (Haapala, 2009, p. 50). The country struggled with low productivity of agriculture, high mortality rates, low standard of living, and low literacy rate, among an extensive list of problems. Undoubtedly, the lack of economic growth of the country, which was related to these issues, aggravated the disparities in society. In 1800, Finland was part of Sweden and one of the poorest places in the world (Haapala, 2009). During the Russian-Swedish wars of 1808-1809, Sweden lost its Eastern provinces to Russia (Kettunen, 2014). As a result, from 1809 to 1917, Finland was part of the Grand Duchy of Russia, and “an experiment of organized capitalism”, where manufacturing industries started supported by the state and foreign resources (Haapala, 2009, p. 53). The contradictions, however, remained in its incorporation as part of the Russian Empire. If on the one hand, Finland became part of the Grand Duchy of Russia in geopolitical terms, on the other hand, the constitutional monarchy, the Swedish civil and criminal law, and the Lutheran faith remained part of the national identity in cultural terms (Jakobson & Kennan, 1998).

In the 19th century, the country experienced a modest start of industrialization. Cotton factories were implemented in the 1830s, the first steam machines were introduced in the 1840s, while the first railroads<sup>7</sup> and the first telegraph came in the 1860s. In addition, electrical power started to be used in Finland in the 1880s, along with the telephone (Hjerpe, 2008). Regarding this scenario, most companies agreed to provide their workers with housing and education pressured by the state and public opinion. By the end of the century, living conditions were improved by a strong labour movement<sup>8</sup>, professionalization<sup>9</sup>, and state

---

<sup>6</sup> According to Sjöblom & Wolff (2017), Finnish leisure time is associated with nature, mainly facilitated by the everyman's right, which guarantees public access to forests and lakes to all inhabitants of the country. These outdoor activities include staying in a cottage in the countryside, picking mushrooms and berries, fishing, and hiking. Regarding the Finnish stereotype, Bertolt Brecht, German playwright and poet, described Finnish as people “who are silent in two languages”, referring to Finnish and Swedish, the official languages in the country (Aslama & Pantti, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> The railways and schools were built with money borrowed from Western banking houses, as an initiative of the Finnish Senate (Hjerpe, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> The Workers' Compensation Act was adopted in 1895, followed by the Act of Protection of Industrial Workers in 1889, establishing factory inspection (Kettunen, 2006). Also, it is important to highlight the flourishing of workers' newspapers in Finland. In Tampere, the first industrial town, for instance, “The People's Paper” (“Kansan Lehti”) had a prestigious role in working-class daily life (Turunen, 2019)

<sup>9</sup> In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, professionals of distinct fields travelled abroad with the support of the Finnish government to acquire knowledge in social-political, medical, and technical areas. It was undeniable the connection between professionalization and the consolidation of the nation-state (Kettunen, 2006).

social policy (Haapala, 2009). Despite experiencing considerable economic growth during this period, Finland's independence in 1917 and the Russian Revolution in the same year brought devastating consequences to the Finnish economy, as trade between the two countries was interrupted (Hjerppe, 2008). Also, the Civil War that occurred in 1918, and two wars against the Soviet Union during World War II had many political implications for the country (Kettunen, 2019).

During the post-war period, however, Finland managed to pay all war reparations on time and according to the agreements with the Soviet Union and foster its economic growth. Gradually, industry was reformed and timber exports to the Western countries started again, followed by the increasing investment rate facilitated by the government policy. Nevertheless, when the population reached four million in 1950, the educational system was underdeveloped and among the lowest in Europe (Hjerppe, 2008). In fact, since the late 1930s, Finland started building a welfare state<sup>10</sup>, a "growth-oriented society" in which all citizens had the right to equal services and benefits, but it only became consolidated after World War II (Haapala, 2009).

The welfare state followed the Nordic model, especially that developed by Sweden, with a certain delay compared to other countries. This model involved improvements in health and social care, such as education free at all levels, public health care system, pension plans, national unemployment programmes, cash allowances for children, and maternity leave (Hjerppe, 2008). In this context, economic growth enabled a redistribution of income, which meant that wealth and equal distribution of income appeared in a society for the first time in history (Haapala, 2009). Thus, Finnish income distribution became one of the most even in the world in the 1980s (Hjerppe, 2008), oriented by the philosophy of social equality, social security, and labour-power policy, reinforcing the idea that releasing people's productive capacities would "break the vicious circle between poverty and passivity" (Kettunen, 2006, p. 292).

The decade of the 1900s was decisive for understanding the characteristics of contemporary Finland. The country lost its trade with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the forest-related industries were lagging behind the international market, among other financial challenges that demanded a fast response to recover the economy. In other words,

---

<sup>10</sup> The emblematic book by Pekka Kuusi, "Social Policy for the 60s" ("60-luvun sosiaalipolitiikka"), was published in 1961 as a design for the Finnish welfare state project (Kettunen, 2006).

the future of the nation was uncertain due to a harsh post-war crisis. However, still in the 1990s, Finland managed to be ranked among the fastest-growing economies in the world. In this sense, the so-called “Finnish miracle” can be explained by its strong development of education. The young generation of the 1980s was among the most educated in the world due to a high-quality education that was provided equally to all Finnish citizens, focused on technological change, natural sciences, and engineering. These characteristics were the foundation of the basic education system and enabled a boom in the ICT market in the country, led by Nokia as the most valuable European company in the 1990s (Rouvinen & Ylä-Anttila, 2003). The ICT field<sup>11</sup>, undoubtedly, was one of the responsible factors for the remarkable recovery of the Finnish economy.

Unquestionably, the “Finnish miracle” was feasible due to a project that combined quality education and social policies with economic development. The country managed to overcome a challenging recession in the 1990s, investing in education to a knowledge-driven growth, led by the innovative sector of telecommunication (Kozma, 2005). Consequently, Finland became the first in the PISA results and one of the most competitive economies in the world at the beginning of the 21st century (Anttila & Palmberg, 2005). It should be noted that this position in both educational and economic ranking was achieved under a significant offer of social programmes, such as education for all citizens and free health services, as well as avoiding social inequality caused by great income differences (Kozma, 2005).

Therefore, investigating the history of Finland is not only about describing its geographic features, highlighting historical events, or providing data on its economic development throughout the years. The acknowledgment of the Finnish nation also involves its culture, the struggles of its people, and the broad tapestry of its identity. Undoubtedly, the development of nationalism combined with the fostering of a welfare state are among the essential characteristics of its development. Nowadays, Finland is claimed to be the happiest country in the world<sup>12</sup>, and this fact is inseparable from its history of struggles and the consolidation of its national identity, which laid the foundations for a society based on equality.

---

<sup>11</sup> It is important to mention that, according to the study of Aslama & Panti (2007, p. 56), “the ‘Nokia nation’ may still be just an elitist notion that involves only a fraction of Finns working in multinational information technology (IT) companies”.

<sup>12</sup> What does it mean to be happy? This question was asked and reflected by Oxfeldt et al. (2017) and can be related to the index of gender equality, class equality, security, and solidarity, among other factors. Nevertheless, the study conducted by Jinushi (2021), presents Finns’ disagreement with the results.

## 2.2. Finnish Literature and the National Awakening

When Sweden lost the war to Russia, Finland became part of the Russian Empire but kept the Swedish paradigm from the past and faced attempts to the Russification of its culture. This scenario started to change with the popular movements in the 1880s, reinforced by the workers' organization to defend the democratization of the political system. Also, it is important to highlight that women played an important role in the modernization of Finnish society, as they were part of popular movements, philanthropic organizations, and leaders in the health and social fields. Consequently, Finnish women<sup>13</sup> gained the right to vote much earlier than those in other countries due to their active role and recognition in society (Anttonen, 1998).

With regard to literature and Finnish identity, it was with the publication of the national epic "Kalevala"<sup>14</sup> in 1835, that Finnish people started recognizing their cultural heritage (Jakobson & Kennan, 1998) and experienced a sense of freedom due to the reconstruction of the past. "Kalevala" not only fostered pride in the country's history but also is considered the book of Finnish independence, and an undeniable milestone for starting to mould the national identity (Wilson, 1975). In this context, when Finland became independent in 1917, "cultural leaders quite naturally looked to the Kalevala and to the more genuine old heroic poems from which it had been formed to seek guidance in determining what kind of nation independent Finland should become" (Wilson, 1975, p. 134).

If on the one hand, "Kalevala" contributed to the growing sense of nationalism, on the other hand, the national identity was consolidated with the publication of the first Finnish novel. In 1870, Aleksis Kivi published "Seven Brothers", and became the founder of Finnish National Literature<sup>15</sup> (Robinson, 2017). In order to understand the importance of "Seven Brothers" to the development of Finnish identity, it is important to highlight some aspects such as the Swedish culture and language that were dominant for centuries in Finnish society. In fact, Finnish names were translated into Swedish even when Finnish-speaking children went to schools during the 17th and 18th centuries, as an illustration of this scenario

---

<sup>13</sup> Although Finnish women are pioneers in the conquering of their rights, feminism was a movement reserved for the bourgeois class in the past. After the Finnish Civil War, the disparity between bourgeois and working-class women became even more evident (Anttonen, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> "Kalevala" was written by Elias Lönnrot and based on old-heroic songs collected from the Finnish hinterlands, shaping the national spirit. It inspired the works of Eino Leino, Jean Sibelius, and Akseli Gallen-Kallela (Wilson, 1975).

<sup>15</sup> "The Heath Cobblers" ("Nummisuutarit", 1864), "The Betrothal" and "Seven Brothers" ("Seitsemän veljestä", 1870) are among Kivi's masterpieces (Nummi, 2007).

(Hyvärinen, 2004). This paradigm, divided into the Swedish-speaking impositions and the impact of Russification in the 19th century, culminated in a conflict in finding its own identity and recognition as a nation.

Before Kivi's novel, Finnish traditions were transmitted orally and barely represented in written form. "Seven Brothers", in this sense, is considered to be an education novel ("Bildungsroman" in German). Also, it celebrates the rural folk<sup>16</sup>, the pursuit of maturity, and the struggles of the seven characters to become citizens of emerging Finland (Philosophers, 2008). Above all the characteristics, "Seven Brothers" presents the spirit of egalitarianism as well as Finnish values<sup>17</sup>. In the words of Juhani, the eldest of the brothers, "we are under one law and are equal in its eyes. You came into this world as naked as I did, and you're not an inch better a man. [...] There is one law for every man!" (Helkama & Portman, 2019, p. 83).

Hence, it is undeniable that literature played an important role in shaping the Finnish nation in both political and cultural aspects. The two national masterpieces, "Kalevala" and "Seven Brothers" were true guides in the pursuit of Finnish identity as a country, rescuing its past of freedom and looking into a bright future, through the adventures of its remarkable characters. Thus, this study aimed to present extracts of "Seven Brothers" in the light of educational theories for an emancipatory education.

### **2.3. Finnish National Core Curriculum**

The development and reforms of the Finnish National Core Curriculum<sup>18</sup> throughout the years are key elements to understanding the role of Finnish education in dialogue with societal demands. The first curriculum was published in 1970 as a strongly centralized document (Kupiainen et al., 2009). Nonetheless, after the 1983 Basic Education Act, it was reformed focusing on teacher autonomy and decentralization in 1985, when the first core curriculum was implemented, and municipalities were granted more decision-making power as well as the autonomy to produce the local curriculum in dialogue with the context and necessities (Halinen, 2008). The decentralization aspect became even more emphasized with

---

<sup>16</sup> Rural folk is also celebrated in the writings of Teuvo Pakkala, Johannes Linnankoski and Zacharias Topelius, as well as the forests as part of the national identity (Puu, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Finnish values are associated with egalitarianism, work and education-related principles (called "Bildung" in German and "sivistys" in Finnish), and honesty, commonly shared in low-power distance cultures (Helkama & Portman, 2019, p. 83).

<sup>18</sup> "The National Core Curriculum is formulated pursuant to the Basic Education Act and Decree and Government Decrees [...] issued by the Finnish National Board of Education" (FNBE, 2016, p. 13).



the 1994 reform when local authorities were allowed to organize the educational process and funding, and in 1998, a total reform of educational legislation followed focusing on assessing the national learning outcomes, yet not creating a national testing system. In 2004, curriculum reform was more centralized than before, and national criteria for student assessment were introduced (FNBE, 2004). Nevertheless, from 2014 until 2017 all levels of education were reformed in Finland, in order to consistently align the pedagogical work in early childhood, pre-primary, basic, and upper secondary education, aiming at restructuring the curriculum to support the interdisciplinary pedagogy and higher skills for the 21st-century learners (Halinen, 2018).

In this sense, it is crucial to grasp the rationale for choosing the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (FNCC 2014) over the previous versions as the main document analysis in this investigation. For designing the 2014 curriculum, thirty working groups of experts, teachers, principals, parents, researchers, and municipal authorities were gathered and responsible for creating the draft and receiving feedback from the community, which gives evidence of the collaborative and democratic aspect of its production. Moreover, students were granted a central position on the values and guidelines reforms focusing on the joy and meaningfulness of learning. The pivotal role of the integrative approach in the 2014 curriculum is also noticed, as the development of transversal competencies fosters the ability of students to see the interdependence of the school subjects, attitudes, skills, and values (Halinen, 2018). Thus, is essential to mention that, for the scope of this thesis, as well as suiting the timetable for its development, the FNCC 2014 was the most appropriate version for investigation, considering the rationale mentioned and adding to the fact of being the latest version published so far, which contributes to the discussions about the reforms and the current challenges of education.

In general terms, the core curriculum approaches the contents to be covered by schools in each subject area and includes what kind of knowledge and skills are expected from students to achieve according to their age and grade (Korkeamäki & Dreher, 2011). Furthermore, the curriculum plays an important role not only in teaching practices but also to guide research and policymaking (Palsa & Ruokamo, 2015), and it cannot be defined as a neutral document (Lappalainen & Lahelma, 2016). Regarding this context, it is essential to understand the characteristics of this document when it dialogues with society, as stated by Vahtivuori-Hänninen et al. (2014):

The core curriculum is always the product of its time and reflects the current values and philosophies of the political and social situation. Different core curricula contain a variety of assumptions about knowledge and learning, which lead to different pedagogical solutions and learning environments. (p. 22)

If on the one hand, the objective of the core curriculum is to provide the schools and educators with a solid basis for teaching practices at a national level, on the other hand, it should be noted the importance of its flexibility when considering different circumstances in the local sphere. In other words, the core curriculum is not a static document. Instead, it is highly associated with the needs of society, its values and demands, which is a dynamic process and susceptible to change:

The values behind the Finnish core curriculum for basic education are human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability, endorsement of multiculturalism, individualism (both in terms of responsibility and as part of a community), and respect for rights and freedoms. (Vahtivuori-Hänninen & Lipponen, 2014, p. 23)

However, one of the great challenges of a country's educational system is to develop guidelines that can lead to the aims and purposes of education at a national level, but at the same time, to provide freedom to adapt its content to each school's reality in a local sphere. Thus, the applicability of the National Core Curriculum is intimately related to providing autonomy for teachers to adapt its content to distinct educational contexts. In this sense, Volmari et al. (2022) contributed to this discussion by punctuating the management of the document at both national and local levels:

In practice, the National Core Curriculum obligates the provider of education (in most cases, municipalities) to include its central aims as part of the educational program. On the other hand, broad degrees of freedom are at play in the implementation of the curriculum. The providers of education and schools can draw on the National Core Curriculum to create their own curricula. Importantly, apart from formal complaints, no direct methods for monitoring the implementation of the curriculum exist, which leaves much autonomy for teachers and schools. (p. 122)

In fact, giving teachers and schools the autonomy to decide on how the guidelines are applied to specific educational contexts is an essential factor to create meaningful learning

experiences for students, as the curriculum can be appropriately connected to different school realities. Therefore, the decision on how the curriculum is utilized in each educational context is made by the educators and the municipalities<sup>19</sup>, evidence of the extensive autonomy and trust present in the Finnish educational system (Vahtivuori-Hänninen et al., 2014).

Moreover, is undeniable the inseparable character between the aim of education and the dynamics of the social scene. In other words, if society faces major changes and the core curriculum is no longer able to deal with these transformations, it is essential to renew the document to attend to its new demands. The reforms of the National Core Curriculum, indeed, have occurred in order to “remediate weaknesses” and improve its guidelines justified by the need to “be better prepared to current demands” (Korkeamäki & Dreher, 2011, p. 111). In this sense, the reforms of the Finnish curriculum are valuable insights into the changes in society:

Curriculum reform takes into account the social impact of globalization, climate change and environmental issues, technological change, the avalanche of information, and other changes in nature, work, and society. The growth of cultural and linguistic diversity in the country plays a central role. (Vahtivuori-Hänninen & Lipponen, 2014, p. 24)

Since the implementation of the Finnish comprehensive school in 1970, the reforms of the National Core Curriculum occurred approximately once a decade, in 1970, 1985, 1994, 2004 and 2014 (Tian & Risku, 2019). Concerning the reform in 1970, it is essential to highlight that its premises were based on egalitarian ideals, changing the entire educational system framework, and ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils, regardless of their economic or cultural background (Itkonen, 2018).

Hence, the general character of the curriculum establishes a dynamic dialogue with social demands and transformations, which is contextualized by each school at a local level (Palsa & Ruokamo, 2015). In the words of Lavonen (2020, p. 65), “the success of Finnish education has been explained in large part due to Finnish education policy and its

---

<sup>19</sup> According to Vahtivuori-Hänninen et al. (2014, p. 24), “the local-level curriculum is a dynamic and flexible document, designed at the grassroots level jointly with principals, teachers, parents, and local civil society organizations like athletic and cultural groups. Empowering and involving teachers to undertake this activity and engage in profound discussions are arguably even more important than the final document, because the joint nature of the process commits teachers and stakeholders to the local curriculum”.

implementation, which is always aiming to recognize challenges and overcome them through collaborative reform and strategy". For this reason, the reforms are necessary to conscientiously respond to these transformations and guide the educational system towards the new necessities.

## **2.4. Social Justice in Education**

Defining the concept of social justice in education has been the concern of several philosophers and academics throughout the years. As this conceptualization is not static but associated with different periods and contexts, distinct approaches are presented in this section to provide the development of its discussions according to different philosophical outlines and describe the elements chosen as the framework for this research.

From the educational perspective, Shapira-Lishchinsky (2016) claimed that social justice in teaching practices is mainly based on three philosophical theories: democratic education for civic participation, critical pedagogy to enhance dialogue and reflect on social matters, and culturally responsive education, which considers the socio-political context of the learning community focusing on interrupting inequalities. In this scenario, Gorski and Dalton (2020) emphasized the essential role of critical reflection in order to implement changes in the pedagogical work to overcome biases in daily practices and support justice-oriented student learning. Furthermore, the distinct approaches to the theme were summarized in the words of Hytten & Bettez (2011):

There are multiple discourses that educators draw upon when claiming a social justice orientation. These include democratic education, critical pedagogy, multiculturalism, poststructuralism, feminism, queer theory, anti-oppressive education, cultural studies, postcolonialism, globalization, and critical race theory. (p. 8)

Considering the scope of this master thesis, however, it is not feasible to cover all topics related to a multidimensional concept such as social justice. For this reason and supported by the definitions presented in the literature consulted, this study focused on the conceptualization of Fraser's framework summarized in the study of Hodgkinson & Trotter (2018).

Fraser (2001) conceived social justice as a process that consists of three dimensions: redistribution (economic), recognition (cultural), and participation (political). Redistribution involves overcoming inequalities in the economic structure, protecting the individuals from exploitation, deprivation, and marginalization by democratizing the resources available. Recognition includes representation, identity, and differences acknowledgement, contesting institutionalized values that have stigmatized groups when it comes to ‘gender, “race,” ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and nationality’ (p. 2). Participation is defined as the establishment of social actors, who act as peers to overcome subordination and misrecognition.

Consequently, according to Fraser’s perspective, justice occurs “when the structures of the economy reflect an equitable distribution of material resources, when the status order reflects equitable patterns of cultural recognition and when the constitution of political space ensures equitable representation” (Keddie, 2012, p. 265). The social justice framework developed by Fraser was summarized in the study of Hodgkinson & Trotter (2018, p. 208):

**Figure 1**

*Conceptualization of Fraser’s social justice framework*

Dimension	Injustices	Affirmative response: <i>addresses injustice with ameliorative reforms</i>	Transformative response: <i>addresses the root causes of inequality</i>
Economic	Maldistribution <i>of resources: economic inequality</i>	Redistribution: <i>of resources</i>	Restructuring <i>of economic model</i>
Cultural	Misrecognition: <i>attributes of people and practices accorded less respect, status inequality</i>	Recognition: <i>valued, respected, esteemed</i>	Re-acculturation: <i>plurality of perspectives, but always fallible</i>
Political	Misrepresentation: <i>lacking right to frame discourse, norms and policies</i>	Representation: <i>social belonging</i>	Re-framing: <i>parity of rights</i>

To enable the analysis process, economic and cultural dimensions consisting of the redistribution of resources and recognition of marginalized groups were categorized as the term “equity”, and the political dimension involving social transformation and education for democracy was categorized under the topic of “political participation”.

Nonetheless, the decision to merge the economic and cultural dimensions into the key element of “equity” and to preserve the political aspect under the single category of “political participation” is justified by two reasons. The first one is Fraser’s recommendation of a bifocal perspective uniting redistribution and recognition “in a two-dimensional concept of justice [...] without reducing either one to the other” (2001, p. 7). The second reason is the social context of this investigation, which takes place in a specific welfare model where both terms play a pivotal role in policymaking. To put it concisely, the values and practices of the Nordic model are encountered in the education system policies, which foundations rely on “equity, participation, and welfare” (Antikainen, 2010, p. 532). Hence, the focus of this research was investigating elements in the content analysis related to redistribution and recognition when it comes to equity and representation and social transformation regarding political participation in the FNCC 2014.

#### ***2.4.1. Equity in the Nordic Model of Welfare***

Grasping the notion of equity is crucial for the development of this study. In the words of Frønes et al. (2020, p. 2), “the goal of equity is always linked to the concept of justice, provided that an equality of opportunities is created”. With regard to education in the Nordic model, according to Arnesen & Lundahl (2006, p. 291), “providing equal educational opportunities regardless of gender, social class and geographical background have been a fundamental idea in the Nordic education policies during a major part of the twentieth century”. In the case of the Finnish education system, equity is expected to be achieved through the equal distribution of resources to remove obstacles and enhance educational opportunities (Frønes et al., 2020), with initiatives such as publicly funded and free education from basic school to university, extensive provision for special needs education, free meals, student grants, adult education with a high participation rate, among others (Antikainen, 2010).

Nevertheless, it is essential to understand the conceptualization of equity and equality and the rationale to focus on equity in this research. Equity and equality are not the same notions, although can be commonly addressed as synonyms depending on the context. In fact, a common use of these terms in educational documents, such as the National Core

Curriculum<sup>20</sup>, is citing both in the same statement<sup>21</sup>. However, the premise of this research concerning social justice is focusing on terms that are related to the pursuit of fairness and impartiality, which is precisely the definition of equity in the Oxford English Dictionary, whereas equality is defined as the equal distribution of quantities and values (Moreno Herrera, 2007). Equality, in this sense, does not consider necessities and differences as a departure point that might influence individuals in the pursuit of fairness, and an illustration of this context is provided below:

We believe equity is also different from “equality”, in which everyone has the same amount of something (food, medicine, opportunity) despite their existing needs or assets. In other words, whether you are two feet tall or six, you still get a five-foot ladder to reach a 10-foot platform. (Putnam & Russell, 2016, p. 2)

From the educational aspect, the principle of equity is crucial to achieving social justice and including all pupils in the learning process, since socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds are taken into consideration. In the words of Blossing et al. (2013, p. 7), “pupils should have equal access to educational resources, whereas there should be variations in curricula according to individual abilities or cultural conditions, but they should of course be of equally high quality”. In the Finnish schooling system, the opportunities for students to acquire key skills are the same all over the country, since the differences among the schools in rural or capital areas are relatively small and universities and highly trained teachers can be encountered in all parts of the country. Moreover, special attention is given to schools in remote areas, in order to guarantee high-quality education despite geographical factors. To put it concisely, the distribution of resources in Finnish education safeguards the pupils’ right to a high-quality schooling system, and since “education is free of charge also at higher levels, Finnish students’ plans for further studies can be based on their personal potential and goals and not on their parents’ wealth” (Linnakylä et al., 2010, p. 205).

---

<sup>20</sup> “Equal refers to an ideal and aim that people should have the same rights as each other without considerations of their sex, status or race. Equity is a policy-making concept that embodies the quality of being fair and reasonable in a way that gives equal treatment to everyone. The Finnish educational policy has aimed to operate under an umbrella that encompasses both meanings. The educational policy has systematically reinforced practices that provide equal opportunities for different learners” (Niemi, 2013, p. 131).

<sup>21</sup> According to Blossing et al. (2013, p. 7), “the English twin terms equity and equality are both part of the core of the notion of a School for All. In the Scandinavian languages, some terms (like the Norwegian *likhet* and *likeverd*) are frequently used in national policy documents, and their meanings do not coincide with the English terms. The first term (*likhet*) means being equal in quantity and quality, while the second one (*likeverd*) denotes being of the same qualitative value, but not necessarily equal in the more strict sense of the word”.

Concerning recognition, an essential aspect of equity for this study, Hegel's masterpiece "Phenomenology of Spirit" approaches the concept of self-consciousness in itself and for itself. From a philosophic perspective, it discusses the idea of how we humans, differently from other animals, are elevated to self-consciousness, which means we are capable to perceive ourselves and the world around us. It means that self-consciousness, or the ability I possess of being acknowledged or recognized, just exists because there is another individual capable of recognizing my own existence. Therefore, my self-consciousness exists, and it depends on other individuals to recognize it. This idea is presented in the master-slave dialectic "Lordship and Bondage", in which Hegel presents the struggle of one self-consciousness to be recognized by another self-consciousness, as a battle to gain satisfaction and recognition through the other self-consciousness (Hegel, 1977).

Based on the idea presented, recognition occurs through others' perceptions and not only affects the concept of identity but also influences the value individuals have in society. In patriarchal societies, for instance, the self-depreciatory image that marginalized groups may give to themselves is based on how they are treated by society and what is expected from them. Moreover, considering the context of social exploitation, Franz Fanon has written that the most powerful weapon colonizers used against the colonized was the imposition of an image of submission and inferiority on the subjugated ones, from which they got depreciating self-images (Taylor, 1994). In other terms, recognition is an aspect intimately related to overcoming oppression in society.

In this sense, rescuing the identity of the subjugated, and compensating cultural groups for past exploitation, exclusion, discrimination, and oppression are essential elements to consider when decolonizing the school curriculum. It means that cultures, races, and ethnicities deserve special acknowledgment of their differences, considering the challenge of preserving their own identity due to economic exploitation by the dominant group and consequently, social inequality and abuse.

#### ***2.4.2. Political Participation***

The concept of justice related to harmony and order in society has been underlined by many thinkers in different periods. Plato (427—347 B.C.E), in "The Republic", postulates that social justice is achieved by a society based on the division of three classes, where each individual excels when performing specialized tasks according to their intrinsic soul and natural capabilities: either a ruler, a trooper or a worker (Udoudom & Bassey, 2018). In this



sense, Book 4 of “The Republic” provides Socrates’ perspective of human society, in which individuals are not self-sufficient, but naturally disposed to perform distinct tasks in the pursuit of goodness and wellbeing for all citizens. In other words, Socrates claims that justice is achieved, among other factors, through the labour of each individual, which role in society is assigned to each person by nature (Ladikos, 2006). Thus, in the light of Plato’s theory, justice occurs when society thrives due to individuals fulfilling their duty according to their capabilities a priori and working towards truth and order (Udoudom & Bassey, 2018).

However, the infallibility of order and reason, fostered by the Age of Enlightenment, positivism, and the triumph of science<sup>22</sup>, began to be contested by several philosophers in the 20th century. The foundation of the critical theory had a great contribution from thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Jürgen Habermas, and Herbert Marcuse, exponents of the Institute of Social Research<sup>23</sup> (“Institut für Sozialforschung”), also known as the Frankfurt School (Corradetti, 2012). In its core reflections, the critical theory analysed the structure of society and raised questions concerning the pursuit of social emancipation (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). In the light of Horkheimer’s theories, for instance, “there is no individual emancipation without social transformation, that is, the possibility of genuine self-realization is inconceivable without the overthrow of the systemic structures” (Susen, 2015, p. 1031). Marcuse, in this sense, highlighted the importance of social movements, which “can play a pivotal role in transforming behavioural, ideological, and institutional patterns under capitalism, thereby subverting the total domination of the established order and contributing to the construction of emancipatory life forms” (Susen, 2015, p. 1032). Among other issues, these analyses involved a critique of modern society, mass industry, the capitalist paradigm, and theories on social change (Corradetti, 2012).

Undeniably, in a world where inequality is among the major challenges of the global development agenda, real emancipation can only be achieved through political participation. In this context, the association between social change and education is a milestone for critical pedagogy, which theoretical foundation is a humanizing pedagogy based on the development

---

<sup>22</sup> According to Ardao (1963), positivism is a philosophical theory that conceives the application of the scientific method as the basis for all genuine knowledge acquisition. It became established in the 19th century greatly influenced by the first Scientific Academies and systematized by the theories of Auguste Comte (1798-1857).

<sup>23</sup> The Institute of Social Research was established in 1923 in Frankfurt, Germany, and is also known by the name of Frankfurt School. The creation of the aimed to reflect on a cultural crisis due to the fast growth of capitalism in Germany in the 20th century, and, among the characteristics of the School, it is important to highlight the academic effort to renew the Marxist ideas under the perspective of Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch (Fatah, 2012).

of critical consciousness through dialogue and democratic participation (Kirylo et al., 2010). The prominent figure of this school of thought is the Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire, who dedicated his work to designing an education for freedom. According to his ideas, social justice is achieved through a democratic education to humanize the teaching and learning practices and nurture the critical consciousness of each student along the process, thus, preparing them for their duties as citizens committed to changing society (Lucio-Villegas, 2015). In addition, Freire claimed in his work that there is no neutral education, but a call for action (Gibson, 1999), and education for liberation is only possible by the combination of theory and praxis<sup>24</sup> (Inglis, 1997). Concerning his contribution to emancipatory education, Kincheloe (2007, p. 12) stated that “emerging from Paulo Freire’s work in poverty-stricken northeastern Brazil in the 1960s, critical pedagogy amalgamated liberation theological ethics and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School in Germany with progressive impulses in education”.

The influence of critical pedagogy in Finland arose in the 1970s when Freire’s masterpiece “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”<sup>25</sup> became known worldwide and emerged in study groups, seminars, and adult literacy movements in the country<sup>26</sup> (Suoranta & Tomperi, 2021). The concepts of the “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” were summarized by Sriraman (2007):

Freire (1998) addressed the power dynamics between the oppressed and the oppressors (including the dynamic between teacher and student), and that the way toward liberation is through political movements and political struggle, of which literacy is but one part. Thus his emphasis on writing the world, is beyond literacy. Clearly, literacy (i.e., reading the world) is also an integral and necessary part of this process. (p. 4)

---

<sup>24</sup> Praxis can be understood as “a way of acting on the world in order to change it” (Denzin, 2015, p. 135).

<sup>25</sup> “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (“De förtrycktas pedagogic” in Swedish), published in the Portuguese language in Brazil in 1986, is the third most cited book in social sciences worldwide (Green, 2016). However, an interesting aspect highlighted by Gibson (1999), is how Freirean ideas became a product to export a method, against Freire’s will. Although his work was committed to social criticism and emancipation, Freire was transformed into an icon, therefore, became a “commodity” (Gibson, 1999, p. 131) to be sold by publishers. The same phenomenon occurred with the Finnish educational system being sold as a product to other countries, as stated before in this research.

<sup>26</sup> It is worth mentioning that the Finnish interest in Latin American culture and the work of authors such as Paulo Freire, Pablo Neruda, and Gabriel García Márquez was highly related to the military coup in Chile in the 1970s when Finland harboured solidarity movements to support the dictatorship’s opposition (Suoranta & Tomperi, 2021).

In 2005, Freire received great academic attention with the translation of “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (“Sorrettujen pedagogiikka”), which contributed to a deeper understanding of his ideas in the Nordic countries (Suoranta & Tomperi, 2021). As a result, his work has influenced social pedagogy theory-building in Finland, due to the recognition of the importance of dialogue, participation, and a sense of community for human development (Hämäläinen & Eriksson, 2016). Despite having an undeniable academic appreciation, Freirean ideas are still under development in Finnish mainstream education, as indicated in a study conducted by Suoranta (2021). Nonetheless, it is essential to grasp that his theory is intimately related to some principles of Finnish education as well as the teachers’ perspectives regarding the learning objectives, as FitzSimmons et al. (2015) stated in their research:

For us educators in Finland, it is not important that Finland may be number one in math or science in PISA rankings but rather that we have a student body that walks through life with “eyes wide open” –eyes that are not only engaged with their community but also with eyes that are keen on observing the oppressive nature of their own realities; and that students are able to find their voice in the classroom and in the community. (p. 24)

Consequently, the acknowledgment of Freirean ideas was essential to comprehend the construction of the FNCC 2014 in the light of critical pedagogy regarding political participation.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)**

The methodology chosen for this study was the qualitative content analysis for investigating the FNCC 2014, in which the identified terms related to social justice were classified and coded using the NVivo 12 software, to be later examined in the larger piece. In addition, extracts from the book “Seven Brothers”, by Aleksis Kivi, were approached through the vignette method to establish a parallel between the events of an emergent literacy movement of the mid-19th century, presented in the novel, and the development of the Finnish education system towards social justice.

In this sense, it is essential to understand the rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology for this investigation. According to Malterud (2001, p. 284), qualitative

approaches “involve the systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of textual material derived from talk or observation. This approach is used in the exploration of meanings of social phenomena as experienced by individuals themselves, in their natural context”. In addition, qualitative methods are commonly used in research in the educational field, once considering its complexity and contradictions (Cohen et al., 2017). Regarding this complexity, the author explains the importance of employing qualitative methods in this kind of research:

It [the social and educational world] is multilayered and not easily susceptible to the atomization or aggregation processes inherent in much numerical research. It has to be studied in total rather than in fragments if a true understanding is to be reached. (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 288)

Not only the qualitative methods facilitate the comprehension of the complexity of the mentioned scenarios, but also provide deeper possibilities for interpreting the data collected, according to the aims of the investigation. In this context, however, similarities between qualitative and quantitative approaches in research concerning the interpretation paradigm should be noted. According to Schreier (2012), the interpretative nature is present in both approaches, as stated below:

The difference between qualitative and quantitative research is that in qualitative research, interpretation is at the heart of the research process, whereas in quantitative research it tends to be peripheral, and quantitative researchers are typically less aware of the role it plays in their work. (p. 21)

Therefore, even with undeniable similarities between the two research approaches, the qualitative methodology is more pertinent for this study considering the premise of understanding the multiple and complex reality of the educational field. In the words of Cohen et al. (2017, p. 288), “people, situations, events and objects are unique and have meaning conferred upon them rather than possessing their own intrinsic meaning. Knower and known are interactive, inseparable”. Thus, this investigation is committed to approaching the research questions in the light of multiple interpretations and perspectives of the data

collected<sup>27</sup>, as well as counternarratives to confront the arguments and theories presented when necessary.

Regarding the content analysis of the FNCC 2014, it is essential to comprehend the conceptualization of this term. Content analysis can be broadly defined as “a research technique for making replicable and valid references from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). However, concerning the conceptualization of the term, several definitions have been employed by distinct authors to define this research technique and its principles (Duriau et al., 2007). The definition on which this study was based is the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which conceives content analysis from the linguistic relativism perspective. In this postulation, the construction of the language plays an important role in establishing ideas and perceptions regarding a determined context, and consequently, shaping the apprehension of reality (Koerner, 1992). According to Zygmunt (2016), language is intimately related to the formulation of thoughts and judgments of each individual, influencing their behaviour, values, beliefs, and therefore, in a broader sphere, the advent and maintenance of each culture:

Therefore, viewing Linguistic Relativity through the prism of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis we again find evidence of a strong interrelationship between language and culture, especially when we come across the coining of a different number of names for one and the same object functioning in many cultures and thus – languages. (p. 114)

Hence, when analysing the FNCC 2014, it was essential to acknowledge the cultural context in which it has been produced and its dialogue with societal demands. The comprehension of the terms used in this document, as well as the investigation of the language used for describing its principles, were indissociable with the social and cultural circumstances in which it has been developed, and a solid cornerstone for the content analysis framework of this study.

With regard to the research approach to the book “Seven Brothers”, the vignette technique was employed in this study to present the events of the novel relating them to the

---

<sup>27</sup> According to Cohen et al. (2017, p. 644), “meanings and interpretations of situations and data are not singular or unitary [...]. In other words, there are many possible analyses and interpretations of data, and care must be taken to avoid indefensibly privileging one interpretation over another equally possible interpretation (e.g. the researcher’s) if both are sustainable by the data”.

development of the Finnish educational system towards social justice and the foundations of an egalitarian society. According to Finch (1987, p. 105), the relevance of this technique is justified by a research scenario that “reaches to the heart of theoretical and philosophical questions about the relationship of individuals to social structures (...) and in what ways human actions are shaped by cultural prescriptions or ideological forces”. Although this method has been widely used in social sciences as a technique to present data obtained through the application of interviews or questionnaires (Hughes & Huby, 2002), in this study, however, the extracts of the novel were presented according to the keywords related to social justice to exemplify the historical origins of the Finnish education system.

### **3.2. Data Analysis**

Considering the premise that QCA aims to systemically summarize a large volume of text into key results (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017), the data analysis process for this study followed a protocol that divides the process into three stages: preparation, organizing, and reporting (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), in order to examine data in a clear and accessible format (Cohen, 2017).

#### **3.2.1. Preparation**

According to Elo & Kyngäs (2008), this phase involves choosing the unit of analysis, which can be a word or a theme to classify the text contents into smaller categories, always keeping in mind the research questions. In this context, social justice was the theme of interest for this research, and the categories were created accordingly to the theoretical framework concerning this theme. Also, this stage requires immersing<sup>28</sup> in the data and obtaining a “sense of whole” (p. 109), in other words, to become familiarized with the data and the context of its production before breaking the text into smaller categories (Bengtsson, 2016). In addition, the choice of either an inductive or deductive framework for QCA is essential to tackle the data appropriately (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 111). Hence, this investigation was based on the deductive approach, in which the general theories regarding social justice were tested in the specific context of the FNCC 2014 and the events of the book “Seven Brothers”.

#### **3.2.2. Organizing**

The FNCC 2014 was analysed using the NVivo 12 software program, developed by Qualitative Solutions and Research International, also denominated QSR (Welsh, 2003).

---

<sup>28</sup> Immersing involves reading, re-reading, reflecting on the data and its possible associations and meanings, as well as organizing data and its key points accordingly (Cohen, 2017).

Regarding the terminology, the software's coding feature is employed to create categories<sup>29</sup> by labelling specific topics using words, phrases, and ideas, which are explored during the data analysis (Welsh, 2003). In other words, the researcher codes data to condense<sup>30</sup> sentences or terms into fewer categories respecting the units of content and meaning (Sori et al., 2015) and to make sense in relation to the research questions (Elliott, 2018). This feature not only reduces the volume of data in order to identify the elements relevant to approaching the research questions but also makes the material manageable, by excluding text that is not pertinent to the investigation.

In this context, following the deductive QCA protocol (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) an analysis matrix (pre-existing categories) based on theories and previous studies concerning social justice was developed to guide the analysis of the FNCC 2014 (Armat et al., 2018). The selected terms (Table 1) also denominated codes<sup>31</sup>, function as nodes in the software (Schreier, 2012), and are associated with the theoretical framework of this study, presenting perspectives related to the concept of social justice.

**Table 1**

*Coding Book*

Coding Terms	Description
Equity	Opportunity to acquire formal knowledge regardless of socioeconomic or geographic factors, removing obstacles from students with disadvantaged backgrounds (Linnakylä et al., 2010). Constructing a welfare society implies moving away from conflicts of interest characterized by unnatural divisions of society, which marginalizes groups and perpetuates relations of oppression and exploitation (McCowan, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> "A category is formed by grouping together those codes that are related to each other through their content or context" (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 94).

<sup>30</sup> According to Erlingsson & Brysiewicz (2017, p. 94), "condensation is a process of shortening the text while still preserving the core meaning".

<sup>31</sup> "Codes are organised into a category when they are describing different aspects, similarities or differences, of the text's content that belong together" (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 94). Defining and naming the codes is an activity associated with the research questions for the investigation (Elliott, 2018).

---

Political Participation	Education committed to fostering the critical consciousness and political participation of the pupils creates the conditions to transform society in the pursuit of social justice. In addition, cooperation with others reinforces the importance of the collective to overcome barriers and develop common humanity and solidarity (McCowan, 2006).
-------------------------	---

---

Regarding the analysis of the book “Seven Brothers”, extracts from the novel were selected and organized considering their relevance to each term of the codebook, in order to present the events of the book through a literature vignette to exemplify the historical origins of the identified elements of the FNCC 2014 related to social justice.

### **3.2.3. Reporting**

According to Elo et al. (2014), “results should be reported systematically and carefully, with particular attention paid to how connections between the data and results are reported” (p. 6). This phase involves reporting the content analysis in an objective structure to make sense of data for the reader, using a clear and understandable approach. For this research, a typological analysis was chosen, to assemble data in subsets or subcategories, allowing a classificatory process. In this sense, presenting the results included summarizing the findings and the use of quotations when necessary (Cohen et al., 2016). Also, sub-categories were included a posteriori to report the results obtained for each coding term in a logical order in the larger piece, and the results’ topics were named under the key ideas presented in each section, to ease the reader’s comprehension of the discussed points in relation to the research questions of the study.

### **3.3. Researcher Positionality**

I acknowledge my standpoint in this investigation as a Latin-American educator, who believes in the importance of critical pedagogy since my early days of teaching practices in Brazil, a country that struggles with social inequality and neglected public education. From my professional experience, I conceive education as a tool of emancipation, freedom, and social justice. I have been intrigued by the “Finnish miracle” and chose to investigate Finnish public education that, despite its current challenges, is more inclusive and equal than most educational systems worldwide. I also conceive literature as a valuable document of the culture and identity of a country, and for this reason, I have chosen the classic novel “Seven Brothers” as a tool to illustrate the historical origins of my findings.



## 4. Results

### 4.1. The Advent of Basic Education and the Pursuit of Equity

And to crown all, the new Vicar of the parish turned out to be terribly strict in all that pertained to his office. Especially towards backward readers was he without mercy, harrying them in every way, even to confinement in the stocks. Thus, his sharp eye had fallen also on the Jukola brothers. He had already delivered to them a stern command, actually through a writ-server, to get themselves at more than their usual speed to the churchwarden for teaching in reading. (Kivi, 1952, p. 20)

Aapo: God have mercy! Isn't it a fact that we don't even know our "a", the first letter of the alphabet, and yet the art of reading is an essential duty of a Christian citizen? But we can be forced to it by the power of the law, the power of church law. And you know what Crown contraption waits for us, eager to get its teeth into us, if we don't dutifully learn to read. (Kivi, 1952, p. 32)

The role of the church in the education of the masses, especially concerning the literacy movement, was crucial to the maintenance of education for all citizens in Finland (Sinnemäki et al., 2019). Even though the 1866 Decree on Elementary Education<sup>32</sup> transferred the responsibility of educating the citizens from the church to local authorities, in practice, the parish ambulatory school still had a pivotal role in educating the citizens, predominantly in rural areas (Kotilainen, 2013). If on the one hand, the high classes had the privilege of receiving formal education, on the other hand, peasantry education was part of the Sunday schools' effort to mould the character of the "Christian citizens" as highlighted by one of the brothers, Aapo, in the extract from "Seven Brothers". Nevertheless, it does not mean that the efforts of the Sunday schools solved the literacy issue of the peasantry. In the words of Kotilainen (2013, p. 118), "the functional literacy skills of the population were still extremely weak in the mid-19th century", as illustrated in the dialogue below from the novel:

Simeoni: We are baptized Christians, warriors of the Lord.

---

<sup>32</sup> According to Kotilainen (2013, p. 116), "the 1865 Local Government Act distinguished the municipal and parochial administrations from each other and gradually shifted the responsibility for education to the municipalities". Consequently, the 1866 Decree on Elementary Education transferred to the municipality the responsibility to arrange elementary education for the citizens. In 1890, however, over three-fourths of Finnish children living in towns were attending school, whereas less than one-fifth of children living in rural areas were sent to school, most of them still receiving education from the church or at home.

Juhani: We are baptized Christians, warriors of the Lord, Christ's soldiers!

Simeoni: Even though we cannot read.

Juhani: Even though we cannot read. (Kivi, 1952, p. 119)

With regard to this context, Kivi (1952) shows that the attempt of the seven brothers to learn how to read and write, harshly pressured by the character of the Vicar<sup>33</sup>, was not a smooth process. On the opposite, the struggles of the Jukola brothers are emphasised in the text on many occasions and can be identified in the extracts below. Driven by the thought of being accepted as Christian citizens, fearing the anger of the Vicar, and adapting themselves to the transforming Finnish society, the brothers successfully achieved their objective:

Diligently the brothers worked again at their reading, and their skill increased, though slowly. They could read fairly well by now, and were trying to learn the paragraphs in the a-b-c book by heart, jabbering and mumbling to themselves in every corner of the room, they strove to reach the cockerel at the end of the book. And one after the other they arrived at their goal [...]. (Kivi, 1952, p. 263)

The brothers spent the winter as they had done the last, practising reading; and finally the Lesser Catechism had been memorized. [...] With hungry stomachs they sat by the books for days at a time; for game had been scarce that autumn and they had had less time than before for hunting. (Kivi, 1952, p. 266)

The influence of the nationalist movement in education, led by philosopher Johan Vilhelm Snellman and educator Uno Cygneaus, played an essential role in proclaiming the benefits of a basic schooling system for Finnish education at the end of the 19th century. In 1921, the Compulsory Education Act concerning a common national education comprised mandatory school attendance, and obliged municipalities to arrange education for all children aged 7-12 (Paksuniemi et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the expansion of the schooling system did not solve the distinction between education in the cities and the countryside (Uusiautti et al.,

---

<sup>33</sup> The character of the Vicar in "Seven Brothers" is depicted as an authoritarian figure responsible for the attempts to domesticate the wilderness of the Jukola brothers. In an extract from the novel, Mäkelä speaks to Juhani, the eldest of the brothers: "I have strict orders from the Vicar to bring you to church next Sunday" [...] "to put in the stocks, to speak plainly" [...] "you know that the Vicar's sternest vengeance will befall you. Now is without pity for you" (Kivi, 1952, p. 91).

2013) and it was only with the education reforms of the 1970s that equity and equality started to be sought:

From 1970s onwards there has been a national curriculum for all the primary schools in Finland, making sure education is equally accessible for all aged 7–15. This was a development strongly supported and pushed for by President Kekkonen, who in his speeches framed it as a question of equality. Thus education, while being a central cultural value on its own, is also deeply engrained with another core element of Finnishness: equality. (Sinnemäki et al., 2019, p. 89)

The Basic School law was implemented between 1972 and 1977 executing school reforms and fostering large-scale teacher training to adapt the teaching practices to the first national curriculum for basic education. This framework curriculum was passed in Parliament in 1970, designed by representatives of political parties and university experts on education, and represented a milestone for educational guidelines in the country (Kupiainen et al., 2009). To put it concisely, the values of equity and equality can be highly related to the comprehensive school reform<sup>34</sup> and its successful outcomes in basic education (Kuusilehto-Awale & Lahtero, 2014).

#### ***4.1.1. Equity in the FNCC 2014***

The first paragraph of the FNCC 2014 states that “the purpose of the steering of basic education is to ensure the equality and high quality of education and to create favourable conditions for the pupils’ growth, development and learning” (FNBE, 2016, p. 13). The social goals of basic education, in this sense, are mentioned in the extract below:

The social task of basic education is to promote equity, equality and justice. Basic education builds up human and social capital. Human capital consists of competence, whereas social capital comprises contacts, interaction and trust between people. Jointly they promote individual and social well-being and development. The mission of basic education is to prevent inequality and exclusion and to promote gender equality. (FNBE, 2016, p. 32)

---

<sup>34</sup> According to Sabel et al. (2011, p. 4), “in the 1970s Finland, in response to long-standing egalitarian complaints against the rigid and early tracking of students, and again like many other societies in its neighborhood, created comprehensive schools in which students of differing aptitude were taught together in the same building and often in the same classes”.

In this regard, it is important to grasp how the principles of equity are presented in this document and which actions are recommended to achieve through the teaching and learning practices. For this purpose, the present section approaches the discussions related to the pursuit of equity regarding a) provision of free meals and free materials; b) special needs education; c) instruction for ethnic minorities and cultural awareness; and d) gender diversity, sub-categories identified a posteriori to ease the chapter organisation.

According to the FNCC 2014, “a pupil attending basic education shall be provided with a balanced and appropriately organised free meal on every school day” (FNBE, 2016, p. 22). Currently, the provision of free meals is recognized in the Basic Education Act (628/1998) and represents an essential factor to guarantee that every pupil has equal access to education. Additionally, it is important to mention that the school meals should be arranged accordingly to “health-related, social and cultural significance” (FNBE, 2016, p. 81), in order to take all dietary habits into consideration. Regarding the provision of free material, the FNCC 2014 postulates that:

Instruction, the necessary textbooks and other learning materials, and school equipment and materials shall be free of charge for the pupil. A pupil shall also be entitled to free pupil welfare necessary for participation in education and the statutory social benefits and services for pupils. (FNBE, 2016, p. 22)

In this context, having all resources free of charge is an essential premise to safeguard the right to quality education for every pupil. The learning materials and school facilities mentioned consist of a wide range of resources that include access to indoor and outdoor amenities, equipment and tools for independent study, library services, contact with nature, and partnerships with sports, art, and environmental centres, which are used to support the pedagogical development in distinct learning scenarios and enhance the students’ participation in the school community. Moreover, other features such as “ergonomics, ecological qualities, aesthetics, accessibility and acoustic conditions, as well as the lighting, indoor air quality, comfort, order and tidiness of the premises” (FNBE, 2016, p. 54) are also considered in this matter.

When it comes to special needs education, the FNCC 2014 ensures support and flexibility to include pupils in the learning process by identifying the issues at an early stage. In this regard, the document states that once the decision of special support is made “under

the Basic Education Act, the pupil is entitled to remedial teaching and part-time special needs education, also as part of special needs education”, aiming, “for example, difficulties with linguistic or mathematical skills, learning difficulties in individual subjects, or problems with their study skills, interaction skills or school attendance” (FNBE, 2016, p. 143). In fact, one core principle of the Finnish special education system is the early identification<sup>35</sup> of learning difficulties and immediate support from a multi-professional team that consists of a school counsellor, public health nurse, a doctor, and a psychologist, free of charge for the student’s family. Concerning students with impaired hearing, instruction must be given in sign language if it is their first language, a right safeguarded in the Basic Education Act:

Basic education in sign language may be provided either in a sign language group or in a group that consists of pupils using sign language and spoken language. The goal of basic education delivered in sign language is to build up the pupils’ sign language skills and their capabilities of acting in different environments. (FNBE, 2016, p. 172)

In the case of pupils with severe developmental disabilities, their instruction is guaranteed by having activity areas as the departure point for the learning process, rather than subjects. These areas consist of “motor skills, language and communication, social skills, skills in activities of daily living, and cognitive skills” (FNBE, 2016 p. 138). The main objective of arranging education in activity areas is to provide the pupils with the knowledge and skills needed to manage daily tasks and perform them independently if the circumstances allow them to rely on this possibility. Additionally, their individual planning is based on their strengths to foster motivation and engagement in meaningful learning experiences. If the pupil is unable to complete the compulsory education in nine years due to severe disabilities, however, extended compulsory education is possible to be granted to complete their studies.

Pertaining to the language of instruction aiming to include ethnic minorities in the schooling system, the FNCC 2014 states that “the curriculum shall be adopted separately for education given in the Finnish, Swedish and Sámi languages and in other languages, where needed”. It is also assured that “the language of instruction shall be either Finnish or Swedish. The language of instruction may also be Sámi, Roma or sign language” (FNBE, 2016, p. 169). The objective of the inclusion is justified by the importance of the Sámi culture

---

<sup>35</sup> “These diagnostic tests are created and continuously refined by a battery of institutes specializing in cognitive development and related disciplines, as well as specialized textbook publishers, in close consultation with the classroom teachers who actually use the instruments they make” (Sabel et al., 2011, p. 5).

as an element of the country's cultural heritage, as well as promoting respect between groups and recognizing one's language as a fundamental right (FNBE, 2016, p. 51). Regarding the instruction in the Sámi language, the FNCC 2014 also presents the rationale for its implementation:

In instruction provided in the Sámi language, the particular objective is supporting the pupils in growing into their language, culture and community and giving them an opportunity to embrace the Sámi cultural heritage. The aim is to improve the pupils' capabilities for acting in a Sámi language environment, to learn the Sámi language and to study in Sámi. (FNBE, 2016, p. 169)

Hence, students are encouraged to raise their cultural awareness whereas getting familiar with different languages and their dialects. The FNCC 2014 also states that "the instruction builds up the pupils' appreciation of their personal linguistic and cultural background and their understanding of its significance for themselves, the community, the society and other indigenous peoples alike", confirming the Constitutional right to protect one's language and culture (FNBE, 2016, p. 169). In this sense, regarding cultural awareness, the document also conveys that:

The school as a learning community is part of a culturally transforming and diverse society where the local and the global overlap. [...] The community recognises the right to one's own language and culture as a fundamental right. The pupils become acquainted with cultural traditions, constructively discuss different ways of thinking and acting, and create new ways of acting together. (FNBE, 2016, p. 51)

About the distinct backgrounds and personalities of the pupils, as well as their cultural recognition, the FNCC 2014 safeguards the pupil's right to their own cultural traditions claiming that "a learning community promotes equity and equality" (p. 52). Also, it defines the foundation for "culturally sustainable development" when fostering the collaboration between cultures (p. 27). It is essential to mention that, concerning the students' individual characteristics and needs to be considered during the pedagogical planning, the document clarifies the concept of equality to ensure the acknowledgment of differences:

Members of the community are encountered and treated as equals, independently of any personal characteristics. Equality does not mean that everyone is the same. Equal

treatment comprises both safeguarding everybody's fundamental rights and opportunities for participation and addressing individual needs. (FNBE, 2016, p. 52)

In addition, the recognition of the cultural identity of each pupil is stated to be "supported in a versatile manner" (FNBE, 2016, p. 169), in which pupils are guided to appreciate different cultures and languages, and teachers can plan activities where the students are encouraged to use the languages they know, focusing on "building their personal cultural identity and their growth into active actors in their own culture and community while promoting their interest in other cultures". Moreover, the FNCC 2014 claims that "basic education is built on a diverse Finnish cultural heritage. It has taken shape and is being formed in interaction between different cultures" justified by the premise of "cultural diversity as a richness" (FNBE, 2016, p. 26).

With regard to the recognition of gender diversity and the equal treatment of students, the FNCC 2014 states that, according to "the Constitution of Finland and the Non-Discrimination Act, nobody may be discriminated against on the basis of gender" and "the Act on Equality between Women and Men obliges all educational institutions to ensure that women and men have equal opportunities for education and training" (FNBE, 2016, p. 23). The goal of basic education, according to the document, is encouraging "girls and boys to study different subjects equally" and promoting the comprehension of the diversity of gender, whereas "recognizing their personal potential and selecting learning paths without role models determined by gender" (FNBE, 2016, p. 32). About a gender-awareness approach to educational practices, the document postulates that:

The pupils' conceptions of their gender identity and sexuality evolve during their time in basic education. A learning community promotes gender equality by its values and practices and supports the pupils in forming their gender identity. The approach of the instruction is characterised by gender-awareness. The community encourages the pupils to recognise their potential and to study various subjects, make choices and commit to studies without gender-related role models. By selecting and developing learning environments, working methods and learning materials, appreciation of human diversity can be made visible. (FNBE, 2016, p. 52)

Undoubtedly, the recognition of cultural differences and gender diversity implies developing the emotional skills of the pupils such as empathy. The FNCC 2014 claims that

“pupils learn to look at issues from the perspectives of other people’s life situations and circumstances. Learning together across the boundaries of languages, cultures, religions and beliefs creates a setting for genuine interaction and communality” (FNBE, 2016, p. 27). Nonetheless, conflicts may arise when dealing with such differences in the school environment and student well-being is one of the priorities of the Finnish educational system. Hence, in order to protect the pupils’ right to fair treatment, the FNCC 2014 also guarantees that:

Bullying, violence, racism or other types of discrimination are not acceptable, and inappropriate behaviour is intervened in. School work aims at predictability in daily activities and at a peaceful atmosphere. Experiences of being heard and treated fairly are building blocks of trust. A calm and accepting mood, good social relationships and an attractive environment promote a harmonious and pleasant working atmosphere. (FNBE, 2016, p. 50)

In fact, the development of the FNCC 2014 had a strong character of fostering pupils’ joy and wellbeing, due to its collaborative design that included the insights of teachers and students. The document states that “it is important that each pupil receives encouraging feedback and is provided with opportunities to experience success and the joy of learning. [...] No form of bullying or discrimination shall be tolerated at school” (FNBE, 2016, p. 194). Consequently, “pupils are guided to learn to work together, to be independent, and to take responsibility for their own assignments” (p. 194), which is also evidence of the student-centered learning processes to acquire the skills needed to civic action.

## **4.2. Political Participation and the Construction of Solidarity and Trust**

Eero, youngest of the brothers, lived and toiled on Vuohenkalma Farm, on a stony hill beside the church road. He was the wise and active Sheriff’s Man of the parish, who caused many a wolf, lynx and bear to lose its life in a well-baited trap. He was much in demand by the Sheriff as an assistant, for all the matters entrusted to his care were wont to turn out exceedingly well. His skill in writing and arithmetic also brought him much work, and likewise income. (Kivi, 1952, p. 336)

The prioritization of an education for democracy was the departure point for educational politics in the Nordic countries from World War II until the 1980s, when the project of the welfare state started to emerge, and the support of citizens was crucial for the



nation-building process (Moos, 2013). In this context, the German concept of “Bildung” was the approach guiding the purpose of education, in which pupils “understand themselves as parts of bigger communities and, at the same time, as authoritative individuals by acquiring common knowledge, insight and historical, cultural and global understanding” (p. 11). As a result, the objective of education was to build strong relations between individuals and their role in the community, fostering their political participation, and “leaving many curriculum decisions to professional teachers in collaboration with students and parents” (p. 10).

Nonetheless, the Finnish concept of “Bildung” arose in the 19th century based on “democracy and inclusive equality” (Autio, 2021, p. 43), in which “the principle of social inclusiveness regardless of one’s ethnicity, cultural, social, or socioeconomic background rendered the cornerstone of Peruskoulu<sup>36</sup> to be materialized as a free (of charge) access to schooling from the first grade on to the PhD level” (p. 43).

In this sense, the development of the character Eero, the youngest of the Jukola brothers, illustrates the importance of popular education and its positive outcomes for the working class and their advancement in life, as well as moulding their character as Finnish citizens. Despite the lack of resources and struggles to become literate, Eero, in his adult years, actively participated in the community’s life with his work and skills acquired through education, yet rudimentary for the peasantry in that period. The extract shows the commitment of the Jukola brother to the development of his community, which is highly connected to the education he received through the Sunday schools organized by the church in the rural areas:

On Sundays or holidays he either studied his newspaper, or wrote the news or described parochial happenings from his own parish for the same newspaper. And gladly the editor accepted these writings of his, whose contents were always to the point, their style pithy and clear, often showing genius. And with these interests his outlook in life and the world broadened. The country of his birth was to him no longer a vague part of a vague world [...]. By his strenuous and unresting efforts a kind of elementary school was built in the parish, one of the first in Finland. (Kivi, 1952, p. 337)

---

<sup>36</sup> “Grundskola” in Swedish.

Eero not only provided the district with an elementary school, “one of the first” in the country as Kivi depicts in the novel, but also “other useful institutions, too, he brought into the district” (p. 337). Other than institutions for the development of the community, Eero also manifested the intention of having quality education for his eldest son, “whom he decided to educate into a man of knowledge and skill” (p. 337). This statement shows the importance that Eero gave to education and his intention to perpetuate its acquisition to his future generations. Hence, the character’s efforts to contribute to the improvement of his district are motivated by the “desire to further the happiness and prosperity of his country” (p. 337), an undeniable inspiration to his democratic participation and attempt to social change.

The initiative of the character Eero to improve his district facilities illustrates the importance of solidarity through the fictional events of “Seven Brothers”, which is an essential characteristic of the Nordic model of welfare and the Finnish education system, along with the culture of trust. Newton (2001, p. 202) defined the elements of constructive social behaviour as “trust, reciprocity, solidarity, and cooperation”. Also, the author claimed that “trust plays a central role, perhaps the main one, in this constellation of concepts” for social life (p. 202).

#### ***4.2.1. Political Participation in the FNCC 2014***

Regarding the curriculum reform and its relation to political participation, it is essential to grasp that the FNCC 2014 was based on multidisciplinary learning and transversal competence areas, which are: (1) thinking and learning to learn; (2) cultural competence, interaction, and expression; (3) managing daily life, (4) multiliteracy; (5) ICT competence; (6) working life and entrepreneurial competence; and (7) participation, influence, and building a sustainable future (FNBE, 2016). These competence areas relate to the demands of the 21st-century teaching and learning and the necessary skills that pupils are expected to develop to be global citizens. Moreover, as mentioned before in this investigation, the FNCC 2014 document was created through a collaborative process that involved teachers, students, parents, educational experts, and the Finnish society, evidence of its democratic character. To put it concisely, “the 2012-2014 reform of the national core curriculum provides an opportunity to bring the process-related collaboration to unprecedented level. The reform is also more focused on the evidence-based and future-orientated aspects of the work than the earlier endeavours” (Halinen & Holappa, 2013, p. 56). Thus, considering its cooperative production and aims to attend to the needs of a constantly globalizing society, it is important

to understand how this document presents the elements related to political participation in teaching and learning practices.

The FNCC 2014 states that “education promotes participation, a sustainable way of living and growth as a member of a democratic society. Basic education educates the pupils to know, respect and defend human rights” (FNBE, 2016, p. 32). In this context, the document presents the concept of political participation and the guidelines to develop the pupils’ skills for citizenship:

Participating in civic activity is a basic precondition for an effective democracy. Skills in participation and involvement as well as a responsible attitude towards the future may only be learned by practising. The school environment offers a safe setting for this, while basic education also lays a foundation of competence for the pupils’ growth into active citizens who use their democratic rights and freedoms responsibly. The mission of the school is to reinforce the participation of each pupil. (FNBE, 2016, p. 44)

In fact, not only the school environment fosters the interest of pupils to engage in “planning, implementing, assessing and evaluating their own learning” (p. 44) but also creates the opportunity for students’ participation at an early age in the school community through the development of their critical thinking, decision-making, and responsibility in relation to the societal issues. Furthermore, students “gather knowledge and experiences of the systems and methods for participation and involvement in civic society and communal work outside the school” (p. 44). Nevertheless, it is crucial to comprehend how the civic action of students is presented in the document and the skills that the teaching and learning practices are expected to develop for building a sustainable future:

The pupils understand the significance of protecting the environment through their personal relationship with nature. They learn to assess the impacts of media and to exploit the potential it offers. By experience, the pupils learn about involvement, decision-making and responsibility. They also learn to understand the significance of rules, agreements and trust. Through participation both at school and outside it, the pupils learn to express their views constructively. They learn to work together and are offered opportunities to practise negotiation skills, arbitration and conflict resolution as well as critical examination of issues. The pupils are encouraged to consider

proposals from the perspectives of equality of the different parties, fair treatment and a sustainable way of living. (FNBE, 2016, p. 44)

The FNCC 2014 also presents the idea of a “learning community” (p. 50). According to the document, cooperation between different school agents builds the foundations of the operational methods for its maintenance, encouraging the “democratic dialogue and participation”, where students are heard and appreciated as community members (p. 52). To put it concisely, “a school culture that promotes participation, realises human rights and operates democratically lays a foundation for the pupils’ growth into active citizens” (p. 52). Also, the FNCC 2014 emphasises that “cooperation with various branches of administration, parishes, organisations, companies and other actors expands the pupils’ ideas of the society and action in a civic society. Contacts with schools in different countries improve skills in acting in a globalised world” (p. 52), which reveals the importance of connecting the school with the community.

Pertaining to the school practices to foster political participation, the FNCC 2014 states the importance of daily activities to incorporate civic action in the pupils’ routines, such as morning assemblies and recesses, which “play a key role for the school’s community spirit and the pupils’ healthy development, social relationships and ability to cope with the studies” (p. 50). In addition, “the pupils are encouraged to take part in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of school meals and the meal breaks in particular” (p. 82). Another important characteristic of democratic practices in school planning is the participation of guardians to cooperate with the teaching practices:

It is vital that the pupils’ guardians are also given opportunities to take part in the curriculum work, preparation of the annual plan and planning of the school’s operation, in particular as regards educational goals, the school culture and cooperation between home and school. Special attention is focused on participation methods that are meaningful for the guardians and the pupils, versatile, and sensitive to the pupils’ developmental stage. (FNBE, 2016, p. 16)

Thus, not only the students are motivated to be active members of the school community, but also the cooperation of guardians with the school is crucial to the democratization of educational planning and evaluation. Furthermore, the collaboration between the school and community plays a pivotal role in avoiding the idea of the school as an isolated island from society, bringing meaningful learning experiences for the pupils.

Also, pupils are encouraged to develop their citizenship skills, essential for the globalized world and 21st-century learning, as fostered by the multiliteracy and the transversal competencies areas presented in the FNCC 2014.

### **4.3. Conclusion**

The extracts of “Seven Brothers” presented a valuable illustration of the development of Finnish education throughout the years, and how people from rural areas in the 19th century were relying on a rudimentary education that was organized by the local parishes. Through fictional events, the extracts of the novel also showed the need for an educational reform to provide all citizens with equal opportunities to access school regardless of their economic resources. Furthermore, the book events provided insights into the values of the Finnish culture that are also encountered in education, such as trust and solidarity.

Additionally, the hypothesis that elements of social justice could be found in the FNCC 2014 was confirmed by the results obtained. These elements have been presented under the category of equity concerning the provision of free meals and free materials, special needs education, instruction for ethnic minorities and cultural awareness, and gender diversity. Regarding the category of political participation, guidelines for education for democracy and civic participation were also encountered in the document, reinforced by the skills and competencies required for 21st-century teaching and learning, which had a strong character in the FNCC 2014. Nevertheless, it is essential to understand how these guidelines are related to the theories of social justice and previous research on the theme.

## **5. Discussion**

The main purpose of this investigation was to analyse the elements of the FNCC 2014 regarding social justice utilizing the events of the novel “Seven Brothers” to illustrate the findings. As postulated in the first chapter, the research questions were:

- What are the events of “Seven Brothers” that can be related to the development of Finnish education in the pursuit of social justice?
- How have the elements related to social justice been presented in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014?

In this regard, the departure point for this study was the successful results of Finnish students in the PISA exam and the Finnish education system consolidated as a role model worldwide. In order to grasp the outcomes of Finnish education and its contribution to the

pursuit of social justice, it was necessary to critically analyse not only the construction of Finnish society and its development but also the consolidation of the national identity. In this sense, the classic novel “Seven Brothers” was chosen to illustrate the scenario due to its importance to depict the origins of the literacy movement in the country and the struggles of the working class to access education. Thus, a literature review on the history of the country and the development of education for all citizens was conducted, and the pivotal role of literature to build the national character was also approached.

To understand the principles that guided the Finnish education system towards social justice, the National Core Curriculum was chosen as the main document to be analysed, focusing on the 2014 reform due to its collaborative design, its emphasis on student wellbeing and the competencies and skills’ fostering for the 21st-century teaching and learning. A literature review on the construction of this document and the importance of autonomy for teachers to implement in the local context was also acknowledged.

Also, the concept of social justice defined by Fraser (2001) was chosen to identify the key elements that were investigated in the FNCC 2014: equity and political participation. A literature review of both terms focused on the critical pedagogy theory, especially the Freirean principles for an education committed to democracy, solidarity, and freedom. These two terms became codes in the NVivo software, to organize the content analysis in both FNCC 2014 and “Seven Brothers”, which involved identifying the extracts, categorizing them according to the codebook, and reporting the findings in the results chapter. In this regard, the results showed crucial elements to the pursuit of education based on equity and political participation in the FNCC 2014, whereas the novel “Seven Brothers” presented valuable events to illustrate the struggles of working-class people to become literate and thrive in a growing society.

### **5.1. “Seven Brothers” and the Development of Finnish Education**

Pertaining to the book “Seven Brothers”, the extracts of the novel coded as equity were related to the development of the Finnish education system, presenting the role of the church to educate the peasantry, especially in rural areas, before the nationalist movement started to flourish and the comprehensive reform occurred. Even though the Sunday schools’ efforts were not enough to solve the inequalities, the identification of such extracts was necessary to recognize the differences between the education of the peasantry and the upper classes in that period, and to relate the scenario to the urge for educational reform.

Through the fictional events of the novel, nonetheless, it was possible to understand the poverty, the negligence, and the injustice faced by those who walked before in the country, whose struggles and efforts opened the path for shaping the new order, a paradigm where every child has the right to high-quality education, regardless of their financial resources. The hard work, trust, and solidarity, which are key elements of the Finnish culture, were also presented through the lives of the characters of the book, especially Eero, the youngest of the brothers, who thrived in his work and contributed to the development of the district due to the skills acquired in the parish school, harshly commanded by the character of the Vicar. Kivi (1952) not only presented Eero's positive outcomes associated with the emerging, yet rudimentary literacy movement but also added evidence of the importance of solidarity for political participation, the second code investigated for this research. In this context, the author mentioned the intention of the character "to further the happiness and prosperity of his country" (p. 337), a statement that deserved to be pinpointed in distinct parts of this study due to its powerful connection with the principles of the critical pedagogy and the aim of education according to Freirean ideas.

Hence, the awakening of the Finnish identity could not be cited in this investigation without grasping the valuable register that Aleksis Kivi left as a legacy in his masterpiece, nor the historical development of the literacy movement in the country could be depicted without the struggles of the seven orphan brothers, who represent the working class, the peasantry, the poor people that played a pivotal role in building an egalitarian society that is currently a role model for other countries.

## **5.2. Social Justice in the FNCC 2014**

### ***5.2.1. Equity***

With regards to the FNCC 2014, the aspects related to equity were identified in the extracts presenting the provision of free meals and free materials, special needs education, instruction for ethnic minorities and cultural awareness, as well as gender diversity. Even though these sub-categories were not included in the codebook a priori, as the investigation was not specifically focused on these subjects, it was necessary to group the extracts a posteriori, to ease the chapter organisation and results reporting.

Concerning the provision of free meals, from a historical perspective, the initiative of public-school meals was introduced during World War II to help solve children's nutrition issues and has been arranged by the municipalities for elementary education since 1948, whereas subsidized meals for university students were established in 1979 (Raulio et al.,

2010). In this regard, well-balanced free meals are the pre-condition for pupils' welfare and the foundation for successful learning achievements (Kairiene & Sprindziunas, 2016). Nonetheless, Tikkanen & Urho (2009) claimed that "the challenge for school caterers is how to offer a school meal that is preferred by pupils and is simultaneously nutritionally balanced" (p. 115), and research conducted by Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Manninen (2010) on the theme stated that the provision of healthy food for the pupils has been compromised by the economic crisis in municipalities, which affected the quality of the school meals. Hence, these current discussions should also be considered when addressing the challenges regarding this topic.

Pertaining to the provision of free materials, the core principle of educational equity plays an important role in all levels of the schooling system, where "education is free at all levels of education from pre-primary to higher level in Finland" (Ustun & Eryilmaz, 2018, p. 109). Consequently, all learning resources are also free of charge for the pupils, which enables the construction of a democratic school environment, where each student has the opportunity to utilize the tools to achieve educational goals. It is important to mention that the FNCC 2014 also lists "ergonomics, ecological qualities, aesthetics, accessibility and acoustic conditions, as well as the lighting, indoor air quality, comfort, order and tidiness of the premises" (FNBE, 2016, p. 54) as essential factors to promote a safe and comfortable learning environment for all pupils and to provide inclusiveness for students with special needs.

Another key aspect concerning equity found in the document was the guidelines for special needs education. According to the words of Sabel et al. (2011, p. 21), "the comprehensive school curriculum mandated that all students be given an equal opportunity to achieve the same learning outcomes, regardless of their background, personal characteristics or abilities and learning styles". In this context, the Finnish education system is based on the early identification of learning difficulties, well-being checks are assured by law, and special attention is given to the transition of the pupil to the first-grade classes (Sabel et al., 2011). In fact, Finnish education provides intensive support for language-related difficulties in basic education, justified by the importance of this approach for the development of mental abilities. Thus, the number of children receiving support for language-related special needs in Finland is much higher than in other countries, where this type of support can be seen as a



“luxury”, neglecting the importance of language development for the acquisition of other abilities<sup>37</sup> (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007, p. 294).

The current challenge of Finnish education is, however, finding solutions for the decline of student performance in core subjects such as Finnish and Swedish languages, with girls outperforming boys in reading skills, and maths. This decline contrasts with the idealization of a system where the educational model provides the opportunity for every pupil to thrive. According to the study conducted by Hakkarainen et al. (2013), “the finding that both mathematical and reading difficulties strongly affected school achievement and, through school achievement, also transition to secondary education, confirms findings of earlier studies” (p. 499), conclusion that challenges the core principle of equity. If on the one hand, the “Finnish miracle”, reaffirmed by the PISA results, is still a role model for education worldwide, on the other hand, the challenges of the Finnish education system have increased in the past years and demand practical solutions from educators and policymakers. In this sense, further reflections on the theme are necessary, as well as research to deepen the acknowledgment of the causes of these issues. Nevertheless, it is at the core of this investigation the premise that reforms in education are triggered by the transformations of society. The case of immigrant kids in Finnish schools, for instance, illustrates the urge for a shift in policymaking, teacher training, and the improvement of daily routines to enhance equity for these pupils. On this matter, Kilpi-Jakonen (2012, p. 178) has found that “children of immigrants in Finland tend to have lower levels of school achievement at the end of comprehensive school than the majority” and this fact is justified “by their lower parental resources”. This statement brings a reflection that needs to be addressed to policymakers and educational experts: “Equity to whom?”.

With regard to the educational practices for the inclusion of kids with severe intellectual disabilities, Kontu & Pirttimaa (2010, p. 178) concluded in their study that “choosing inclusive methods for teaching and providing a curriculum model for students diagnosed as having intellectual disabilities is a challenge in Finland”. Inclusiveness is also a challenge for pupils with physical disabilities, and it is essential to understand the importance of promoting a learning environment to foster their social interaction and the sense of belonging of these

---

<sup>37</sup> In the words of Kivirauma & Ruoho (2007, p. 295), “the hierarchical development of mental abilities – starting from the sensory-motor system, continuing with spoken and written language and ending up in language-related formal mental operations – has created strong confidence in the usefulness of working with language problems: if teachers can ease the language development and solve language-related problems, they can at the same time create the basic foundation for the future mental functioning of a student”.

pupils to the school community. In this context, a study conducted by Vetoniemi & Kärnä (2021) stated that not only the students did not feel part of the community, but they also claimed to have “little support from teachers and assistants” (p. 11). This statement shows the disconnection between the curriculum guidelines and pedagogical practice in schools. Nevertheless, the authors also concluded that “it is valuable to pay attention to their narratives” (p. 12), which can be an essential departure point to adapt the curriculum guidelines to the students’ needs and aspirations.

Inclusiveness, in this context, is highly related to the recognition of minorities and strategies to foster their active participation in the learning processes. In the case of ethnic minorities and cultural awareness, such as the Sámi people, even though their instruction is safeguarded by the FNCC 2014, the decolonization of the curriculum and the democratization of teaching endangered languages to children are crucial to combat the process of cultural assimilation. In this regard, textbooks in both Finnish and Swedish languages in Finland show poor knowledge about the Sámi culture, frequently reinforcing stereotypes and “creating an image of the Saami<sup>38</sup> people as a group belonging to the past without their own history” (Thrupp et al., 2023, p. 305). Another challenge is the fact that the Basic Education Act does not guarantee the teaching of Sámi language outside the Sámi homeland, and in order to solve this issue, the Pilot Project on Distance Education in the Sámi Languages<sup>39</sup> was created to provide supplementary Sámi language classes for pupils living outside the Sámi homeland. According to Thrupp et al. (2023, p. 314), “Saami language online classes must be made permanent; otherwise, it will be difficult to offer Saami teaching throughout Finland due to the small number of pupils and limited teacher resources”. However, the goal of consolidating a distance educational system needs to be combined with other initiatives, such as decolonizing the pedagogical resources and investing in teaching training for endangered languages.

Undoubtedly, cultural awareness is essential in a changing society, where an anti-racist education is needed to promote social justice in schools. In this regard, further investigation is necessary to understand what “versatile manners” (FNBE, 2016, p. 169) teachers are using to implement the curriculum guidelines in the classrooms, to guarantee each pupil’s right to their own cultural traditions, premise safeguarded by the FNCC 2014. Considering this

---

<sup>38</sup> It is worth mentioning the use of different spellings of the word Sámi. The author chose the spelling “Saami” in his research, while this study refers to the spelling “Sámi”, as presented in the FNCC 2014.

<sup>39</sup> The municipality of Utsjoki is in charge of the Pilot Project on Distance Education in the Sámi Languages management, and the Sámi Parliament is responsible for coordinating its activities (Thrupp et al., 2023).

scenario, research conducted by Sommier & Roiha (2018) has concluded that better teaching material and courses on anti-racism education are essential to raise cultural awareness in Finnish classrooms. It is unquestionably that theory must relate to practice, and the statement “equality does not mean that everyone is the same” (FNBE, 2016, p. 52) needs to be taken into consideration when executing the pedagogical planning, to reinforce the constitutional right to one’s culture and mother tongue, and therefore, the recognition of their identities.

Finally, the results showed the FNCC 2014 guidelines for gender diversity, another important aspect related to recognition and equity. The document safeguards the right of non-discrimination “for girls and boys to study different subjects equally” while promoting the diversity of gender (FNBE, 2016, p. 32). The issue of gender binarism, however, is a current discussion for achieving gender equality and avoiding heteronormative practices in school. Regarding the construction of anti-oppressive education, Suominen et al. (2020, p. 363) wrote that “queering<sup>40</sup> structures and education entails learning how to question and confront injustice to advance the goals of social justice, equity and equality in a way that does not produce further marginalization and create unnecessary exclusions [...]”. In this sense, a study of gender binarism in the Finnish core curriculum conducted by Myyry (2022) showed that although the curricula of 1970, 1985, 1994 and 2004 were oriented by gender-neutral policies, the analysis of the FNCC 2014 revealed that policymaking for gender diversity is gradually “transitioning towards transformative approaches” (p. 1087).

### ***5.2.2. Political Participation***

From a historical perspective, Antikainen (2010) discussed the construction of the Nordic welfare state and attributes its foundation, among other factors, to the outcomes of the Great Depression which enabled a rise in solidarity and political compromises. Consequently, the Finnish education model follows Nordic values and practices that are manifested in the publicly funded and free education from basic school to university, extensive provision for special needs education, free meals, student grants, and adult education with a high participation rate, among other factors. It is crucial for the national core curriculum, in this sense, to safeguard these values through educational practices, giving the principals and teachers autonomy to implement the guidelines according to the needs of each educational context.

---

<sup>40</sup> According to Suominen et al. (2020, p. 363), the notion of queer “enables considerations of the multiplicity of gender by pointing out the weak points of heterosexist ideas and practices that fervently divide the world into a binary opposition of two gendered categories maintained by the normative dichotomies of sex/ gender, nature/culture, physical/social, etc.”

In fact, the results obtained showed that FNCC 2014 emphasizes the importance of teaching practices that reinforce the pupils' participation not only in the school's daily routines but also in a constantly changing society, fostering the critical examination of societal issues to enable the construction of democracy and freedom. According to the document, "participating in civic activity is a basic precondition for an effective democracy" (FNBE, 2016, p. 44), and critical thinking, negotiation skills, conflict resolution, fair treatment of individuals, and social responsibility are among the skills that the students are expected to develop for citizenship. Moreover, the document also affirms the importance of "democratic dialogue and participation", where students are heard and appreciated as community members (FNBE, 2016, p. 52). The collaborative design of the FNCC 2014, which took into consideration the students' perspectives of their own learning experiences, is also evidence of the democratic character of this document compared to previous versions.

Undoubtedly, for pupils to develop citizenship skills and become active members of the community, it is necessary to have an educational model committed to fellowship, solidarity, and trust. Regarding solidarity and trust, essential values in the Finnish culture, and therefore, encountered in the educational system, Freire (2000) stated that "whereas faith in humankind is an a priori requirement for dialogue, trust is established by dialogue" (p. 75) and "solidarity requires true communication" (p. 77). Indeed, the importance of the dialogue for educational practices in critical pedagogy theories and especially in Freirean ideas is to avoid the "banking education"<sup>41</sup>, enabling teaching practices to engage students in "critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization" (p. 75). In this scenario, the role of the teacher is to overcome the teacher-student contradiction by creating a partnership with students based on mutual respect and dialogue, with "a profound trust in people and their creative power" (p. 75). These conditions seem to be an inherent aspect for fostering the political participation of pupils in Finnish education, whose rights of decision-making, assessing, and evaluating are safeguarded by the FNCC 2014, and the cooperation of school staff, students, and guardians is a key element for the construction of a democratic school.

Building a democratic school, however, is only possible by overcoming the contradictions and providing a meaningful experience for the students. One factor that poses a challenge to this premise is the influence of global economic trends and neoliberalism in education. Regarding the competitiveness brought by the capitalist state, curriculum planning

---

<sup>41</sup> "Banking education" is an important concept presented in Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (2000, p. 77), and its notion is related to an oppressive education that conceives the students as "receiving objects", controlling their thinking and action to adapt to an existent world, as well as eliminating their creative power.

has been modified to accommodate new school subjects such as entrepreneurship, and the autonomy given to the local authorities is accompanied by the obligation to assess education and its effectiveness in internal and external evaluations (Antikainen, 2010). The Nordic education model, in this regard, is “an attempt to construct a national education system on the foundation of specific local (or Nordic) values and practices, but at the same time subject to international influences” (p. 532). Regarding its restructuring, decentralization, deregulation, accountability, and rationalization have been guiding the education policy process in Finland, whereas “equity and trust generated social conditions of competitiveness” (p. 546) in a scenario of accelerated globalization. Moreover, the author claims that sociocultural conditions for competitiveness have not changed in the Nordic context so far, however, for establishing the new path<sup>42</sup> and the model of competition state “long-term legitimization and accordant socialization are required” (p. 546), which needs to be enabled by education.

The neoliberalist influence in education worldwide, nevertheless, does not seem to affect Finnish education in the same proportion as other countries. Undoubtedly, the demands of a globalized education aiming at economic efficiency and competitiveness highly contrast with a model committed to humanization and social change. On the one hand, in the words of Blossing et al. (2014, p. 2), “criticism claims that the Nordic educational ideology, focusing on the child and a comprehensive school system in solidarity with the weak members of society, is on the retreat and does not produce the qualities necessary in a competitive, global perspective”. It also means, according to the authors, that the concept of “School for All” is not a priority in neoliberal education policy. On the other hand, Freire (2000, p. 85) claimed that “the pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity; therefore it cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed”. In fact, in a world where the educational systems are influenced by multinational organizations and economic institutions, this statement shows the importance of education for democracy and social transformation, to change this paradigm that enhances power relations and oppression. Nonetheless, a study conducted by Hakala et al. (2015, p. 260) revealed that despite an accelerated globalized

---

<sup>42</sup> The path transformation discussed by Antikainen (2010), therefore, involved the demands of a knowledge-based economy and the pedagogical legitimization of competitiveness which included a curricula reform, where innovation and creativity played a pivotal role. In addition, education tended to be a crucial factor not only in legitimate its establishment but also to break “the old path dependency”. Thus, even with the paradigm change, the Nordic model of education “has largely retained its basic framework and structures on the sociocultural level” (p. 546).

system to homogenize the educational systems, “creativity or innovation is, undoubtedly, still considered to be the main objective of education” in Finland.

### 5.3. Conclusion

The proverb “*oppia ikä kaikki*” (Antikainen, 2010, p. 532), indicates the powerful statement that “all life is learning” and can be highly related to the Finnish education system and its intimate association with the values and practices of the Nordic model of welfare. In fact, Finnish education has been constructed around the principle of equity, where even though the students belong to different social classes, these disparities are relatively low in international terms (p. 535). This factor also explains the response of the Finnish education system in regard to the capitalist state, where the principles of competition, managerialism, and performativity did not represent a shift in the sociocultural conditions but were enabled by trust and equity instead.

Even though the FNCC 2014 shows a strong character in the maintenance of equity for all pupils, studies on the theme have brought reflections about the difficulties to merge theory with practice in a constantly changing society. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure the recognition of ethnic minorities and gender diversity in daily routines in schools, in order to foster teaching practices committed to social justice. Therefore, it is not sufficient to state that discrimination and racism are not acceptable in schools but to ensure that an anti-racist education is enabling cultural awareness, by promoting the decolonization of school materials and a shift in teacher training.

Finnish education, in conclusion, has developed in a social context that historically enabled the foundations for social justice. The struggles of the seven orphan brothers, although fictional events, gave evidence of a path that was constructed by the peasantry, the working class, the poor people that built a nation and found its national identity along the way. The events of the novel showed the adversities of people from rural areas to advance in life, justified the urge for an egalitarian society, and illustrated the pivotal role of education to make this paradigm change possible. Paraphrasing the emblematic words of the character Juhani, it is possible to state that, at the policy level, all pupils are under one law and equal in its eyes. However, further research is needed to investigate if the execution of these laws, in a practical aspect, is ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to thrive in daily school routines.

The myth of the “Finnish miracle” as the panacea for solving educational issues worldwide also needs to be deconstructed. The results of this research contribute to reinforcing the argument that it is not possible to replicate the successful aspects of the Finnish education system in other education models without advocating for a deep transformation of society. In this sense, there is no “miracle” without a welfare model committed to safeguarding the constitutional right of all pupils to have a high-quality education, regardless of their family’s financial resources. Also, there is no “miracle” in education without fostering a culture of trust and solidarity, which the fictional events of “Seven Brothers” showed in this study. Finally, it is by overcoming the structures that perpetuate oppression and safeguarding the recognition of minorities that a country can pave its way to prosperity and justice, enabling its citizens to achieve true happiness.

### ***5.3.1. Limitations of the Study***

There were two major limitations in this study that could be addressed in future research. Considering the scope of this master’s thesis, as well as the time constraints for its completion, it was not possible to deepen the discussion on the guidelines for the subjects presented in the FNCC 2014. Thus, this investigation did not focus on analysing how the elements of social justice were incorporated into the subjects and the contents proposed for its execution according to each school grade. The second limitation was the codes chosen to conduct the document investigation. Although I based my codes on the concepts of scholars regarding social justice, it was my personal choice to have “equity” and “political participation” as the main categories to identify the document’s extracts, nevertheless, deeper investigations focused on a single aspect of these themes, such as cultural awareness or gender diversity, would provide interesting results in future studies on social justice. and justice, enabling its citizens to achieve true happiness.

### ***5.3.2. Recommendations for Future Research***

This research was focused on the content analysis of two documents to relate the elements identified with the social justice framework. It is essential to understand, however, to what extent the national curriculum is being implemented in the schools. For future research, it would be interesting to investigate how the principles of social justice found in the curriculum are being executed in a real-life scenario, as well as teachers’ and students’ perspectives of their experiences in schools. In this regard, the identification of the challenges and the reflection on these issues could be valuable to orientate future reforms of the core curriculum.

## 6. References

- Antikainen, A. (2010). The capitalist state and education: The case of restructuring the Nordic model. *Current Sociology*, 58(4), 530-550.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392110367988>
- Anttonen, A. (1998). Vocabularies of citizenship and gender: Finland. *Critical Social Policy*, 18(56), 355-373. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026101839801805605>
- Ardao, A. (1963). Assimilation and transformation of positivism in Latin America. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24(4), 515-522.
- Armat, M. R., Assarroudi, A., Rad, M., Sharifi, H., & Heydari, A. (2018). Inductive and deductive: Ambiguous labels in qualitative content analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(1), 219-221.
- Arnesen, A. L., & Lundahl, L. (2006). Still social and democratic? Inclusive education policies in the Nordic welfare states. *Scandinavian journal of educational research*, 50(3), 285-300. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313830600743316>
- Aslama, M., & Pantti, M. (2007). Flagging Finnishness: Reproducing national identity in reality television. *Television & New Media*, 8(1), 49-67.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476406296263>
- Autio, T. (2021). From Knowledge and Bildung Toward Competences and Skills in Finnish Curriculum Policy?: Some Theoretical, Historical, and Current Observations Related to Finland. *Euro-Asian Encounters on 21st-Century Competency-Based Curriculum Reforms: Cultural Views on Globalization and Localization*, 41-56.
- Autti, O., & Hyry-Beihammer, E. K. (2014). School closures in rural Finnish communities. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 29(1).
- Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *NursingPlus open*, 2, 8-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001>
- Blossing, U., Imsen, G., & Moos, L. (2014). Nordic schools in a time of change. *The Nordic Education Model: 'A School for All' Encounters Neo-Liberal Policy*, 1-14.
- Bowers, R. (2005). Freire (with Bakhtin) and the dialogic classroom seminar. *Alberta journal of educational research*, 51(4). <https://doi.org/10.11575/ajer.v51i4.55185>



- Cohen, L. et al. (2017). *Research Methods in Education*, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Corradetti, C. (2012). The Frankfurt School and critical theory. *The internet encyclopedia of philosophy*.
- D'Ambrosio, U. (2013). *Um sentido mais amplo de ensino da matemática para a justiça social*.
- Denzin, N. K. (2015). The politics and ethics of performance pedagogy. *Contesting Empire, Globalizing Dissent: Cultural Studies After*, 9(11).
- Duriau, V. J., Reger, R. K., & Pfarrer, M. D. (2007). A content analysis of the content analysis literature in organization studies: Research themes, data sources, and methodological refinements. *Organizational research methods*, 10(1), 5-34.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428106289252>
- Elliott, V. (2018). Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(11), 2850-2861.
- Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 62(1), 107-115. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x>
- Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE open*, 4(1), 2158244014522633. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522633>
- Erlingsson, C., & Brysiewicz, P. (2017). A hands-on guide to doing content analysis. *African journal of emergency medicine*, 7(3), 93-99.
- Fatah, D. (2012). The history of the Frankfurt school from criticism to emancipation movement. *Historia: Jurnal Pendidik dan Peneliti Sejarah*, 13(1), 95-108.
- Feinberg, W., & Torres, C. A. (2001). Democracy and education: John Dewey and Paulo Freire. *Education and society*, 59.
- Finch, J. (1987). The vignette technique in survey research. *Sociology*, 21(1), 105-114.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038587021001008>
- Finnish National Board of Education (2004). *The Core Curriculum for Basic Education*. Helsinki: Next Print Oy

- Finnish National Board of Education (2014). *The Core Curriculum for Basic Education*. Helsinki: Next Print Oy
- Finnish National Board of Education (2016). *The Core Curriculum for Basic Education*. Helsinki: Next Print Oy
- FitzSimmons, R., Uusiautti, S., & Suoranta, J. (2015). An action-oriented critical pedagogical theory. *Critical eye on education*, 9-28.
- Fraser, N. (2001, May). Social justice in the knowledge society: Redistribution, recognition, and participation. In *Gut zu Wissen conference paper, Heinrich Böll Stiftung* (Vol. 5, pp. 1-13).
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. (Original work published 1996)
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed: 30th anniversary*. Continuum. (Original work published 1968)
- Freire, P. (1970). Cultural action and conscientization. *Harvard educational review*, 40(3), 452-477. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.40.3.h76250x720j43175>
- Frønes, T. S., Pettersen, A., Radišić, J., & Buchholtz, N. (2020). *Equity, equality and diversity in the Nordic model of education—Contributions from large-scale studies*. In *Equity, equality and diversity in the Nordic model of education* (pp. 1-10). Springer, Cham.
- Gibson, R. (1999). Paulo Freire and pedagogy for social justice. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 27(2), 129-159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.1999.10505876>
- Good, P. (2006). *Language for those who have nothing: Mikhail Bakhtin and the landscape of psychiatry*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Gorski, P. C., & Dalton, K. (2020). Striving for critical reflection in multicultural and social justice teacher education: Introducing a typology of reflection approaches. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 71(3), 357-368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487119883545>
- Green, E. D. (2016). What are the most-cited publications in the social sciences (according to Google Scholar)? *Impact of Social Sciences Blog*.

- Haapala, P. (2009). Modernisation of Finland 1800–2000. In: Perkiö M (ed.) *Perspectives to Global Social Development*. Tampere: Tampere University Press, pp. 48–66.
- Hakala, J. T., Uusikylä, K., & Järvinen, E. M. (2015). Neoliberalism, curriculum development and manifestations of ‘creativity’. *Improving Schools*, 18(3), 250-262. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480215596239>
- Hakkarainen, A., Holopainen, L., & Savolainen, H. (2013). Mathematical and reading difficulties as predictors of school achievement and transition to secondary education. *Scandinavian journal of educational research*, 57(5), 488-506. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2012.696207>
- Halinen, I. (2008). Basic education curriculum system in Finland. *Ministry of Education Publications 2008: 44*, 223.
- Halinen, I. (2018). The new educational curriculum in Finland. *Improving the quality of childhood in Europe*, 7, 75-89.
- Halinen, I., & Holappa, M. S. (2013). Curricular balance based on dialogue, cooperation and trust—The case of Finland. *Balancing curriculum regulation and freedom across Europe. CIDREE yearbook, 2013*, 39-62.
- Hämäläinen, J., & Eriksson, L. (2016). Social Pedagogy in Finland and Sweden: A comparative analysis. *Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria*, (27), 71-93.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit (1807)*, trans. AV Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 10, 28.
- Helkama, K., & Portman, A. (2019). Protestant roots of honesty and other Finnish values. *On the Legacy of Lutheranism in Finland*, 81. <https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.25>
- Hjerppe, R. (2008). An economic history of Finland. *EH. Net Encyclopedia of Economic and Business History*, edited by Robert Whaples. Economic History Association. <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/an-economic-history-of-finland>.
- Hodgkinson-Williams, C. A., & Trotter, H. (2018). A Social Justice Framework for Understanding Open Educational Resources and Practices in the Global South. *Journal of Learning for Development*, 5(3), 204-224.

- Holm, G. (2018). Justice through education in the Nordic countries: Critical issues and perspectives. *Education Inquiry*, 9(1), 1-3.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2018.1429770>
- Hughes, R., & Huby, M. (2002). The application of vignettes in social and nursing research. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 37(4), 382-386. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.2002.02100.x>
- Hytten, K., & Bettez, S. C. (2011). Understanding education for social justice. *Educational foundations*, 25, 7-24.
- Hyvärinen, M. (2004). The recalcitrant nation of Seven Brothers. *Qualitative inquiry*, 10(3), 412-430. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1077800403259444>
- Inglis, T. (1997). Empowerment and emancipation. *Adult education quarterly*, 48(1), 3-17.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/074171369704800102>
- Itkonen, T. H. (2018). Contradictions of Finnish education: Finnishness, interculturality and social justice. *Helsinki Studies in Education*, number 28.
- Jakobson, M., & Kennan, G. (1998). *Finland in the new Europe* (Vol. 175). ABC-CLIO.
- Jinushi, A. (2021). The World Happiness Report and the “Happiest Country” Finland: Why do Finns tend not to agree with the results?. <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:hulib-202106162945>
- Kairiene, B., & Sprindziunas, A. (2016). Social equality as groundwork for sustainable schooling: The free lunch issue. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 18(1), 127-139.
- Kantasalmi, K., & Hake, B. J. (1997). Popular adult education in Finland 1890-1939: a critical reinterpretation of the ‘people's enlightenment project’. *History of Education*, 26(4), 353-374.
- Karseth, B., Sivesind, K., & Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2022). *Evidence and Expertise in Nordic Education Policy: A Comparative Network Analysis*. Springer Nature.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-91959-7>
- Keddie, A. (2012). Schooling and social justice through the lenses of Nancy Fraser. *Critical Studies in Education*, 53(3), 263-279. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2012.709185>

- Kettunen, P. (2006). The power of international comparison. *The Nordic model of welfare: A historical reappraisal*, 31-65.
- Kettunen, P. (2006). The tension between the social and the economic: A historical perspective on a welfare state. *The road to prosperity: An economic history of Finland*, 285-313.
- Kettunen, P. (2014). The language of social politics in Finland. *Analysing Social Policy Concepts and Language: Comparative and Transnational Perspectives*, 157-76.
- Kettunen, P. (2019). The conceptual history of the welfare state in Finland. 2019) *The Changing Meanings of the Welfare State: Histories of a Key Concept in the Nordic Countries*, 226-8.
- Kilpi-Jakonen, E. (2012). Does Finnish educational equality extend to children of immigrants?. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 2(2), 167.
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2007). Critical pedagogy in the twenty-first century. *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now*, 9-42.
- Kirylo, J. D., Thirumurthy, V., Smith, M., & McLaren, P. (2010). Issues in education: Critical pedagogy: An overview. *Childhood Education*, 86(5), 332-334.
- Kivi, A. (1952). *Seven Brothers. A Novel*. Tammi. (Original work published 1870)
- Kivirauma, J., & Ruoho, K. (2007). Excellence through special education? Lessons from the Finnish school reform. *International review of education*, 53, 283-302.
- Koerner, E. K. (1992). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: A preliminary history and a bibliographical essay. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 2(2), 173-198.  
<https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.1992.2.2.173>
- Kontu, E. K., & Pirttimaa, R. A. (2010). Teaching methods and curriculum models used in Finland in the education of students diagnosed with having severe/profound intellectual disabilities. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 38(3), 175-179.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-3156.2009.00571.x>
- Korkeamäki, R. L., & Dreher, M. J. (2011). Early literacy practices and the Finnish national core curriculum. *Journal of curriculum studies*, 43(1), 109-137.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220271003801959>

- Kotilainen, S. (2013). From religious instruction to school education: elementary education and the significance of ambulatory schools in rural Finland at the end of the 19th century. *NordWel Studies in Historical Welfare State Research*.
- Kozma, R. (2005). ICT, education reform and economic growth. Retrieved December, 26, 2006.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Sage publications.
- Kupiainen, S., Hautamäki, J., & Karjalainen, T. (2009). *The Finnish education system and PISA*. opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-485-779-6>
- Kuusilehto-Awale, L., & Lahtero, T. (2014). Finnish case of basic education for all—with quality learning outcomes. *Journal of Education and Research*, 4(1), 6-23.
- Ladikos, A. (2006). The pursuit of justice in Plato's Republic. *Phronimon*, 7(2), 73-88.
- Lappalainen, S., & Lahelma, E. (2016). Subtle discourses on equality in the Finnish curricula of upper secondary education: reflections of the imagined society. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 48(5), 650-670. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2015.1069399>
- Lavonen, J. (2020). Curriculum and teacher education reforms in Finland that support the development of competences for the twenty-first century. In *Audacious education purposes* (pp. 65-80). Springer, Cham.
- Leijola, L. (2004). *The education system in Finland: Development and equality* (No. 909). ETLA discussion papers.
- Linnakylä, P., Välijärvi, J., & Arffman, I. (2010). Finnish basic education: When equity and excellence meet. In *Equity and excellence in education* (pp. 202-226). Routledge.
- Loima, J. (2014). A Case Study of Education and Nationalism: The Multicultural Fight for “Souls and Minds” in Finland, 1891–1921. *The Historian*, 76(4), 750-765. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hisn.12052>
- Lucio-Villegas, E. (2015). Paulo Freire. La educación como instrumento para la justicia social. *Revista Internacional de Educación para la Justicia Social*, 4(1), 9-20.
- Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: standards, challenges, and guidelines. *The lancet*, 358(9280), 483-488. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(01\)05627-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(01)05627-6)

- McCowan, T. (2006). Approaching the political in citizenship education: The perspectives of Paulo Freire and Bernard Crick. *Educate*, 6(1), 57-70.
- McLaren, P., & Kincheloe, J. L. (Eds.). (2007). *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now?* (Vol. 299).
- Moos, L. (2013). Prelude: Tuning the instrument. In *Transnational influences on values and practices in Nordic educational leadership: Is there a Nordic model?* (pp. 1-16). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Moreno Herrera, L. (2007). Equity, equality and equivalence: a contribution in search for conceptual definitions and a comparative methodology. *Revista Española de Educación Comparada*
- Myyry, S. (2022). Designing the Finnish basic education core curriculum: the issue of gender binarism. *Gender and Education*, 34(8), 1074-1090.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2022.2126443>
- Newton, K. (2001). Trust, social capital, civil society, and democracy. *International political science review*, 22(2), 201-214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512101222004>
- Niemi, H. (2013). The finish teacher education: teachers for equity and professional autonomy. *Revista española de educación comparada*.
- Nummi, J. (2007). Much Ado in Paradise. *AVAIN-Kirjallisuudentutkimuksen aikakauslehti*, (4), 6-28.
- Oxfeldt, E., Nestingen, A., & Simonsen, P. (2017). The happiest people on Earth? Scandinavian narratives of guilt and discontent. *Scandinavian Studies*, 89(4), 429-446.  
<https://doi.org/10.5406/scanstud.89.4.0429>
- Paksuniemi, M., Uusiautti, S., & Määttä, K. (2013). From teachers into multiply skilled persons: How was art education implemented at a Finnish teacher training college in 1921–1970. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 2(2), 71-82.
- Palsa, L., & Ruokamo, H. (2015). Behind the concepts of multiliteracies and media literacy in the renewed Finnish core curriculum: A systematic literature review of peer-reviewed research. In *Seminar. net* (Vol. 11, No. 2).

- PHILOSOPHERS, B. O. (2008). The European Gypsy stereotype is a monstrous self-contradiction. 2. "Gypsies" in *European Literature and Culture: Studies in European Culture and History*, 45.
- Philpott, R. J., & Beynon, J. D. (2005). Pause to reflect: Exploring teachers' notions of social responsibility. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 51(1).
- Putnam-Walkerly, K., & Russell, E. (2016). What the Heck Does 'Equity' Mean?. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.
- Puu, K. K. (2017). Eva Ryyänänen. *Sacred to the Touch: Nordic and Baltic Religious Wood Carving*, 31.
- Raulio, S., Roos, E., & Prättälä, R. (2010). School and workplace meals promote healthy food habits. *Public health nutrition*, 13(6A), 987-992.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980010001199>
- Robinson, D. (2017). *Aleksis Kivi and/as world literature*. Brill.
- Rouvinen, P., & Ylä-Anttila, P. (2003). Little Finland's transformation to a wireless giant. In *The Global Information Technology Report: Toward an Equitable Information Society*, ed. S. Dutta, B. Lanvin, and F. Paua. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press with World Economic Forum.
- Rule, P. (2011). Bakhtin and Freire: Dialogue, dialectic and boundary learning. *Educational philosophy and theory*, 43(9), 924-942. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2009.00606.x>
- Sabel, C., Saxenian, A., Miettinen, R., Kristensen, P. H., & Hautamäki, J. (2011). Individualized service provision in the new welfare state: Lessons from special education in Finland. *Helsinki: Sitra Studies*, 62.
- Sarlio-Lähteenkorva, S., & Manninen, M. (2010). School meals and nutrition education in Finland.
- Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. Sage publications.
- Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal?: An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*. Teachers College Press.



- Shapira-Lishchinsky, O. (2016). *From ethical reasoning to teacher education for social justice. Teaching and teacher education, 60*, 245-255.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.08.010>
- Shih, Y. H. (2018). Some Critical Thinking on Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy and Its Educational Implications. *International education studies, 11*(9), 64-70.
- Simola, H. (2005). The Finnish miracle of PISA: Historical and sociological remarks on teaching and teacher education. *Comparative education, 41*(4), 455-470.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03050060500317810>
- Sinnemäki, K., Portman, A., Tilli, J., & Nelson, R. H. (2019). *On the legacy of Lutheranism in Finland: societal perspectives* (p. 353). Finnish Literature Society/SKS.
- Sivesind, K., Afsar, A., & Bachmann, K. E. (2016). Transnational policy transfer over three curriculum reforms in Finland: The constructions of conditional and purposive programs (1994–2016). *European Educational Research Journal, 15*(3), 345-365.
- Sjöblom, P., & Wolff, L. A. (2017). “It wouldn't be the same without nature”—The value of nature according to Finnish upper secondary school students. *The Journal of environmental education, 48*(5), 322-333. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2017.1367637>
- Sommier, M., & Roiha, A. (2018). Dealing with culture in schools: A small-step approach towards anti-racism in Finland. *Antiracism education in and out of schools, 103-124*.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56315-2\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56315-2_5)
- Sori, C. F., Maucieri, L., Bregar, C., & Kendrick, A. (2015). Training graduate students to work with children and families: A content analysis of students' perceptions of a child-focused course. *The Family Journal, 23*(4), 427-434.
- Sriraman, B. (2007). On the origins of social justice: Darwin, Freire, Marx and Vivekananda. *International Perspectives on Social Justice in Mathematics Education. The Montana Mathematics Enthusiast, Monograph, 1*, 1-6.
- Strukčinskienė, B. (2021). Building up sisu, a nordic cultural construct for the comprehensive development of health and harmony. *Tiltai: socialiniai mokslai, (2)*, 136-150.  
<https://doi.org/10.15181/tbb.v87i2.2323>
- Sullivan, P. (2012). *Qualitative data analysis using a dialogical approach*. SAGE.

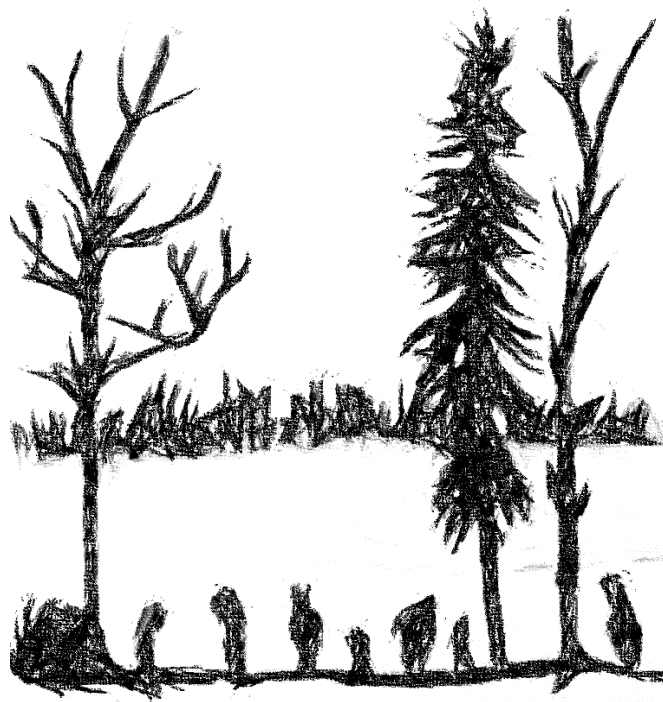
- Suominen, A., Pusa, T., Raudaskoski, A., & Haggrén, L. (2020). Centralizing queer in Finnish art education. *Policy Futures in Education*, 18(3), 358-374.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210319837836>
- Suoranta, J., & Tomperi, T. (2019). Freire en Finlandia: trayectorias de la presencia de Paulo Freire en el Norte global. *Archivos de Ciencias de la Educación*, 13(16), e069-e069.  
<https://doi.org/10.24215/23468866e069>
- Suoranta, J., & Tomperi, T. (2021). Is There a Nordic Freire? The Reception History of Freirian Ideas in Finland. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:tuni-202105114798>
- Suoranta, J. (2021). Paulo Freire's Spirit Has Guided My Work: Confessions Of The Finnish Working-Class Academic. Susen, S. (2015). Emancipation. *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (pp. 1024-1038).
- Søby, M. (2015). Finnish education system. *Nordic Journal of Digital Literacy*, 10(2), 64-68.  
<https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1891-943X-2015-02-01>
- Taylor, C. (1994). Multiculturalism. In *Multiculturalism*. Princeton University Press.
- Thrupp, M., Seppänen, P., Kauko, J., & Kosunen, S. (2023). Finland's famous education system: Unvarnished insights into Finnish schooling.
- Tian, M., & Risku, M. (2019). A distributed leadership perspective on the Finnish curriculum reform 2014. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 51(2), 229-244.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2018.1499806>
- Tikkanen, I., & Urho, U. M. (2009). Free school meals, the plate model and food choices in Finland. *British Food Journal*.
- Turunen, R. (2019). From the Object to the Subject of History. Writing Factory Workers in Finland in the Early 20th Century. *Handwritten Newspapers: An Alternative Medium during the Early Modern and Modern Periods*, 26, 170.
- Udoudom, M. D., & Bassegy, S. A. (2018). Plato and John Rawls on Social Justice. *Researchers World*, 9(3), 110-114.
- Uljens, M., & Nyman, C. (2013). Educational leadership in Finland or building a nation with Bildung. *Transnational influences on values and practices in Nordic educational leadership: Is there a Nordic model?*, 31-48.

- Ustun, U., & Eryilmaz, A. (2018). Analysis of Finnish Education System to Question the Reasons behind Finnish Success in PISA. *Online Submission*, 2(2), 93-114.
- Vahtivuori-Hänninen, S., Halinen, I., Niemi, H., Lavonen, J., & Lipponen, L. (2014). A new Finnish national core curriculum for basic education (2014) and technology as an integrated tool for learning. *In Finnish innovations and technologies in schools* (pp. 21-32). Brill.
- Volmari, S., Kauko, J., Anturaniemi, J., & Santos, Í. (2022). Evidence and Expert Power in Finnish Education Policy Making: The National Core Curriculum Reform. In *Evidence and Expertise in Nordic Education Policy* (pp. 115-148). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Uusiautti, S., Paksuniemi, M., & Määttä, K. (2013). At the Roots of Finnish Elementary Education--How Were Children Raised in the First Finnish Elementary Schools?. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 5(2), 171-184.
- White, F. C. (1988). Justice and the Good of Others in Plato's "Republic". *History of philosophy quarterly*, 5(4), 395-410.
- Wilson, W. A. (1975). The "Kalevala" and Finnish Politics. *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 12(2/3), 131-155. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3813922>
- Yang, C. L. (2016). Encounters between the 'oppressed' and the 'oppressor': Rethinking Paulo Freire in anti-racist feminist education in Sweden. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 19(4), 835-855. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2014.885421>
- Ylä-Anttila, P., & Palmberg, C. (2005). *The specificities of Finnish industrial policy: Challenges and initiatives at the turn of the century* (No. 973). ETLA Discussion Papers.
- Zygmunt, T. (2016). Language education for sustainable development. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, 7(1), 112. <https://doi.org/10.1515/dcse-2016-0008>

## APPENDIX A

### Figure A

*The Seven Brothers and a Finnish lake*



*Note.* Own work

**APPENDIX B****Figure B***The Vicar**Note.* Own work

## APPENDIX C

### Figure C

*Young Eero*



*Note.* Own work