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*Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation:
they are for such moments as this,
when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour...
If at my convenience I might break them,
what would be their worth?"*
Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre

Values in the School Subject of Ethics in the 2015 National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools of General Education in Finland

The author wants to reveal values within the subject of Ethics in Finnish general upper secondary education. Citizens of the Finnish society not only build on, but also reproduce meanings in their relations and interactions based on philosophy, humanities, social and cultural sciences. “The instruction of Ethics is build on a conception of humanity which places emphasis on people leading free, equal, active and goal-oriented lives”¹.

The author intends to explain the objectives of compulsory courses meant to educate thoughtful global citizens who are able to overcome the obstacles (consumerism, populism) presented by the contemporary world. The paper attempts to acknowledge values embodied in the *2015 National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools of General Education*, such as critical thinking, identity, wellbeing and culture in service of worldviews. In this scientific perspective I would like to underline the role of values, which could be pillars of learning in Upper Secondary Schools in Finland.

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¹ *National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools 2015 in Finland*, p. 209.



Values in education

Berkowitz² (1996) and Homplewicz³ (1996) saw values as indispensable in improving people's moral attitudes, because they stand for "everything that is valuable for us, everything in which we are prepared to engage our efforts and our will"⁴ with emphasis on what "is good or bad"⁵. It is compatible with Veugelers, who claims that teachers must study their own values to be able to monitor the values of their students⁶. It is a function of education to introduce young people to the world of values which constitute their foundation within the world of the culture of their own country, society and language. In this perspective, students recognise behavioural patterns, family habits, beliefs and social norms. In the process of upbringing, goals are determined by values which make it possible to understand who a person is, and what his/her nature is⁷ within a hierarchy of indispensable values.

Anna Bindek emphasises that rather than randomly and chaotically, values should be applied to the process of education in order of their importance. In other words, it must be considered what is more important "to have" or "to be" in the context of material and moral values. Values constitute a basis for our thoughts, attitudes or behaviours, and as such, they create our own world in which we achieve happiness in our personal or professional lives. Values reinforce our resistance to failures, determine our lifestyles, as well as shape our "attitudes toward other people, stimulate awareness, incentives, directions and stabilise development"⁸. It is indeed important to emphasise that contemporary education takes place in a world of diverse values, as "pluralistic societies offer their citizens the opportunity to choose in various spheres of life"⁹.

Values have their visible function in socio-cultural life and constitute the main part of "human-human and human-groups/social communities"¹⁰ relationships. Consequently, they shape "teacher-student, teacher-teacher, teacher-parents, student-student, school community-local social environment relationships"¹¹. Values create changes within school culture and build the roots of the

² M.W. Berkowitz, *The 'Plus One' convention revisited and beyond*, paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Moral Education, Ottawa, Canada (1996, November).

³ J. Homplewicz, *Etyka pedagogiczna*, Rzeszów 1996.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵ M. Łobocki, *Wartości tworzywem wychowania*, in: *Wychowanie chrześcijańskie a kultura*, eds. M. Nowak, T. Ożóg, Lublin 2000, p. 72.

⁶ W. Veugelers, *Teachers, values and critical thinking*, in: *Multi/intercultural conversations*, ed. S.R. Steinberg, New York 2001.

⁷ J. Maritain, *Od filozofii człowieka do filozofii wychowania*, in: *Człowiek Wychowanie Kultura*, Kraków 1993, pp. 63-64.

⁸ I.M. Świtła, *Wychowanie do wartości w zmieniającym się świecie*. „Studia Edukacyjne” 52(2019), pp. 159-172.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-171.

¹⁰ K. Chafas, *Edukacja aksjologiczna i wychowanie ku wartościom podstawą budowania szkoły jako wspólnoty życia, pracy i służby*. „Prima Educatione” 2018, no. 2, p. 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

system of educational activities giving direction to school relationships. Values are also main components of the Finnish curriculum for in the primary school subject of Ethics¹².

When collaborating within education, teachers and students have their sets of values. As Chałas and Winiarczyk emphasise, “people learn specific moral norms and values which are significant drivers of their activities”¹³. In this light, values are everything that is valuable to people, everything that “we want to engage our efforts and our will”¹⁴ recognizing what is good or bad. Teachers who work with students influence their values and contribute to their better moral functioning in schools. Students are closer spiritually and emotionally if they share similar values. Values create goals of students’ aspirations and allow for the understanding of their own behaviour against the backdrop of educational aims¹⁵.

Introduction and the reform process

From 2014 until 2017, Finland reformed its national core curricula for early childhood, pre-primary, basic and upper secondary levels. As a result of these reforms, there is a coherence in the core curricula throughout the whole education system. The goals of the Finnish contemporary reforms were to “build on the strengths of the Finnish education system and, at the same time, to meet the challenges of the rapidly changing and complex world”¹⁶.

Finnish educational thinking seems to be based on equality and high-quality. Respect to children and their childhood is apparent, which contributes to sustainable future for individuals. Moreover, the documents reveal “transparency and extensive participation, a strong knowledge base and future orientation, which are supported by research”¹⁷.

The steps of the reform process were based on the renewed Government Decree of 2012, which determined the main aims for pre-primary and primary education and the allocation of lesson hours at the primary level. The Finnish

¹² A. Suwalska, *Ethical Education for Grades 1 and 2 in Finland from the Values Perspective*, “Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education” 10(2021), no. 2, pp. 153-170; A. Suwalska, *Values in Ethics Teaching in Grades 3 to 6 of Finnish Basic Education*, “Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education” 11(2022), no. 2, pp. 311-324; A. Suwalska, *A Values Perspective on Ethical Education for Grades 7 to 9 in Finland*, “Studia z Teorii Wychowania” 13(2022), no. 1, pp. 169-181.

¹³ K. Chałas, E. Winiarczyk, *Introcepcja wartości moralnych jako zadanie i wyzwanie dla nauczyciela edukacji wczesnoszkolnej*, “Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny” 37(2018), z. 1, p. 144.

¹⁴ J. Homplewicz, *Etyka pedagogiczna*, op. cit., p. 142.

¹⁵ K. Chałas, *Edukacja aksjologiczna*..., op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁶ Niemi, *The new educational curriculum in Finland*, http://www.allianceforchildhood.eu/files/Improving_the_quality_of_Childhood_Vol_7/QOC%20V7%20CH06%20DEF%20WEB.pdf (accessed 28 February 2024), p. 2.

¹⁷ T. Airaksinen, I. Halinen, H. Linturi, *Futuribles of Learning 2030 – Delphi supports the reform of the core curricula in Finland*, “European Journal of Futures Research” 5(2017), no. 2.

National Agency of Education (FNAE) launched the national core curriculum reform process in the autumn of 2012. Head teachers, teachers, local education authorities and researchers from the whole country were invited to design the reforming process of the core curriculum. Moreover, the representatives from ministries, the workers of municipalities, Finnish teachers unions, labour unions, parents and different ethnic groups, etc. were working together as an advisory group.

The Finnish society contributes to a sustainable development policy which reflects lifelong learning and fast development of knowledge and skills indispensable for employees in the 21st century. "Finland's successful performance in OECD's PISA has contributed to its iconic status and position of an educational leader in the world"¹⁸. A visible, gradual process of reforms that are based on longer-term vision of education in Finland has been observed since 1963.

Until the 1990s, the Finnish government had an impact on the management of education, but since the mid-1990s there has been a widely observed tendency of changing the centralised policy into a decentralised one. The Ministry of Education has been responsible for the education policy since the 1990s. The National Board of Education took part in the curriculum development process and its evaluation. Therefore, the quality of education relies on local leadership and management, which are the main stakeholders that develop and monitor education in Finland.

Methodology of document analysis

In order to investigate ethics education from a Finnish point of view, the following research questions were prepared:

1. What values are included in the 2015 Upper Secondary School Curriculum for Ethics?
2. What elements in the national curriculum help in teaching thoughtful global citizens who are able to overcome obstacles of the contemporary world?

The analysis of the curriculum, which constitutes the main part of this research, began with a review of the reform process and the main goals of general upper secondary education. The research takes into account values analysis within the subject of Ethics. In order to contrast different views, regularities and principles, the problem method, together with critical discourse analysis were used to study the documents concerning values in the subject of Ethics in upper secondary schools. The analysis of selected documents was conducted through meanings, which were usually contextual. The discourse, which designates not only language with its meanings, but also conventions and codes

¹⁸ A. Suwalska, *Lifelong Guidance in Finnish Education in the context of globalisation*, "Studia Pedagogiczne" 50(2017), p. 69.

which are typical of particular societies anchored in their cultures and history was used in this article¹⁹. Discourse is understood here as “social texts... particular signifying practices of a given group that are both constituted by and constitutive of the discourse field in which members of the group live and function”²⁰.

The author intended to use primary sources in this article. The first step in the research was to create an archive of documents and government publications, taking into account validity and reliability of the texts. The author chose representative documents accessed at the library of the University of Helsinki and analysed their meaning. The next step was to choose materials for the final analysis. This research used sample materials which are the most relevant and supportive for the topic. To analyse a text means to focus equally on the documents with emphasis on “the constructive mechanisms contained in the arguments, ideas, or concepts”²¹, as well as to describe “the trajectory of all of these modern ideas, practices and identities that are currently taken for granted”²².

The main goal of general upper secondary education

The analysis of the documents revealed that the main goal of general upper secondary education is to empower students’ transversal general knowledge and abilities. On this level, transversal general knowledge and abilities “consist of values, knowledge, skills and attitudes and will”²³, which are linked to critical and independent thinking. General upper secondary education focuses on guiding students with their understanding of complex interdependencies that are superior in life and the surrounding world. This period is significant in building students’ identity and worldview. They try to find their place in the world and philosophy of their life. This level of education builds skills which are indispensable at universities, polytechnics and vocational education. General upper secondary education helps students to plan their future and lifelong learning.

Underlying values in general upper secondary education

Finnish tradition of education, knowledge and ability (*Bildung*) constitutes a significant influence on society and culture and seems to influence the values of the 2015 National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools.

¹⁹ M. Hammersley, *What is qualitative research?*, London 2013.

²⁰ F. Elbaz, *Knowledge and discourse: the evolution of research into teacher’s thinking*, in: *Insights into Teacher’s Thinking and Practice*, eds. C. Day, M. Pope, P. Denicola, London 1990, p. 15.

²¹ T. Rapley, *Analiza konwersacji, dyskursu i dokumentów*, Warszawa 2007, p. 194.

²² R. Wodak, M. Krzyżanowski, *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in The Social Sciences*, New York 2008, p. 205.

²³ *National Core Curriculum for Upper-secondary Education 2015*, The Finnish National Agency of Education, Helsinki 2016, p. 12.

General knowledge and abilities make it possible for each student to make decisions, to think reflectively and to put themselves in other students' shoes. As a result, they take care of themselves and are open-minded. They perceive the surrounding reality as comprehensive and are encouraged to create positive changes. The educational ideal of general upper secondary education is related to truth and justice. Moreover, it is based on human rights conventions, especially the European Union Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Upper-secondary school education promotes equality and equity as well as well-being and democracy. Moreover, it encourages students to consider the opportunities, alternatives, and disadvantages of the Finnish society and international development. In upper-secondary school education, eco-social knowledge, together with sustainable way of life are well understood. As a result, students perceive the significance of their own actions and global responsibility in the sustainable use of natural resources, climate change and preservation of biodiversity. On the other hand, upper-secondary school education allows people to recognise mutual values and principles for good life with in diverse linguistic, worldview and religious backgrounds.

Document analysis

The analysis of primary sources related to the subject *Worldview and Critical Thinking (ETI)* reveals that it suggests students' understanding and their ability to apply concepts which are linked to worldviews. The document reveals the objectives of compulsory courses included in the 2015 NCC for General Upper Secondary Schools. As a result, students are obliged to understand concepts connecting worldviews and are able to take into consideration the characteristics and connections within varied worldviews. Secondly, students perceive the significance of individual and societal factors' creation with their ability to consider their own worldviews and beliefs. Furthermore, students are able to analyse critically not only their own, but also other people's beliefs. Students take into account media information and acquire indispensable knowledge in shaping their worldviews in order to understand the differences between scientific and non-scientific perceptions of the world.

All objectives have been widely rooted in the core contents of Ethics with special emphasis on philosophy of life and the position of philosophy in students' lives. Varied worldviews, i.e. secular, religious, political or related to lifestyle and basic presumptions provided by different scientific field, are used. Moreover, the authors of the *2015 Finnish National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools* mention work on "cognitive distortions related to typical information processing and structuring the surrounding reality in both their own as well others' thinking" and "the impact of school, media, politics, science, art, entertainment industry as well as religious and cultural communities on the perceptions of the world and worldviews as well as student's own

philosophy of life”²⁴. All in all, these sources of information suggest the usage of critical thinking according to different viewpoints and an analysis of argumentation.

Human Being, Identity and Good Life (ET2)

The analysis of the document for this subject of Ethics reveals the contradictory questions and answers presented from varied conceptions and ideals. From this point of view, students are able to discuss parts of their human identity and acquire indispensable knowledge about worldviews and conceptions of humanity in order to discover what is a good life for them. They understand the importance of human dignity in the context of key human rights and thinking about human rights from varied perspectives. As a result, students become aware of various good life conceptions and are able to consider them from surrounding principles.

The following are core contents of the *Human Being, Identity and Good Life* course (ET2):

- “conceptions and ideals of humans in natural sciences, humanities, secular and religious worldviews, philosophy and popular culture,
- fundamental questions about human existence: interpersonal relationships, gender and sexuality, studying and work, ageing and death,
- identity, life choices and means of life management: individuals’ potential to influence their own lives, the role of genetic and environmental factors,
- the value of human being, human dignity and human rights, human rights documents: UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child, The European Convention on Human Rights,
- different conceptions of a good life and the position of other people, animals and the environment within them”²⁵.

Individual and Community (ET3)

Three specialisation courses are suggested within the document. The first one is named *Individual and Community* (ET3). The document puts emphasis on the importance of togetherness for humanity and personal identity of each human being. Students obtain indispensable tools for building their own identities in the light of positive togetherness. They are obliged to understand the influence of societal structures, social changes, social phenomena on individual life choices. They discover their position within their communities, state and particular economic system to be able to consider their opportunities to participate in the society.

On the other hand, students are able to discuss and justify “the principles of human rights, freedom of religion and conscience, equality, democracy, peace, social and global justice as well as building a sustainable future”²⁶. As a result,

²⁴ Ibid., p. 210.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 211.

²⁶ Ibid.

students are able to perceive the societal world critically and to increase their societal imagination. They are able to see the future as opportunities and a chain of life events which are related to their own decisions and actions.

The core contents of the *Individual and Community (ET3)* course reveals contents in which “human beings as social creatures interact in private and public contexts and recognise significant roles and norms within their community”²⁷. This document involves students’ need to read about social facts and features of the contemporary Western societies with the influence on individuals. There is attention to the economic and political authorities in the Finnish society with the influence on consumers’ choices at the different levels of the society.

Cultures as Shapers of Worldviews (ET4)

The objectives of the course *Cultures as Shapers of Worldviews* is to understand culture within individual worldviews to obtain ways of building a positive cultural identity. Moreover, the document pays attention to various concepts of culture study, to the recognition of hate speech and responsible usage of the freedom of speech. Furthermore, this document strengthens the need to understand Finnishness in a historical context, as well as social change continuum, all to be able to experience internal cultural diversity. All in all, the documents emphasise a need to understand “that cultures interact and that no culture has developed without external influence on its core features, such as ways of living, language, technology, and beliefs”²⁸.

This document involves core contents of the *Cultures as Shapers of Worldviews* course with special attention to the significance of culture and its different types. It presents culture as a human activity which has its roots in different meanings, theories and relations. This document mentions cultural heritage with its customs, self-presentation and the individual perception related to philosophy of life in the light of the *Unesco World Heritage Programme*. Moreover, the core contents present the diversity of Finnishness and Finnish minority cultures. The contents involve such topics as multiculturalism and the global culture and their different impact on worldviews and society. Also, the core contents pay attention to the ethnocentrism, racism, respect and equality in cultures.

A World of Worldviews (ET5)

The main objective of this specialisation course seems to be students’ ability to read, interpret and widely understand not only religious, but also secular worldviews. Students’ attention is directed to comparisons between them according to different lifestyles and philosophy of life. Each student is encouraged to understand historically rooted constructs of religion, worldviews, cultural and societal meanings. Moreover, this course familiarises with definitions,

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 212.

scientific research and explanation of religions and secularism. All in all, students understand skills, concepts and knowledge to be able to analyse questions linked to different viewpoints. They get acquainted especially with “the religions of the Middle East as well as some other religions and worldview systems, their key features, internal diversity as well as with their impact on culture and society, particularly from the Finnish viewpoint”²⁹.

The authors pay attention to core concepts of religiousness, sacredness, rite, symbol and theism, atheism, criticism of religion, agnosticism, as well as to philosophical roots of secular humanism. All in all, the authors discuss the paradigm of geographical and historical spread and division. They mention holy books, Christianity, Islam, Judaism and the other world religions, as well as emphasise the relationship between secular humanism and religions with the society, customs, moral, politics, and science.

Technology, Worldviews, and the Future of Humanity (ET6)

The objective of this part of the document seems to be to recognise the turning points in humanity’s way of living in the context of the changing history, culture and philosophy. Students are obliged to study and understand evolution of abstract ethical systems, enlightenment and scientific-technological revolution as influences on the philosophy of their lives. They study how technical and scientific changes tend to build different societies, cultures, environments and modern worldviews. Students are able to incorporate technical changes into their sustainable future and into participation in discussions about the future of humanity.

The core contents of the *Technology, Worldviews, and the Future of Humanity (ET6)* course tell us about evolution of human species and cultural revolution. Students’ attention is directed to the role of language and innovativeness in the emergence of human cultures. The authors suggest topics from Prometheus myths to techno utopias and dystopias, from ideas of enlightenment in human ideals to technological development. Moreover, the document involves such ideas as artificial intelligence, humanism, transhumanism and research of the future. It reveals breakthrough points connected to the perception of the world and worldviews, as subsequently influential on people’s conceptions of the world. In this light, people are perceived as shapers of their world.

Conclusion

This article reveals a document analysis in the context of the subject of Ethics in Finnish upper secondary schools since 2016. Values within the subject of Ethics in Finnish education with “a concept of humanity which places emphasis on people leading free and equal, active and goal-oriented lives” were examined (*National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools*

²⁹ Ibid.

2015 in Finland, p. 209). The author explained the objectives of the compulsory courses included in the 2015 NCC for General Upper Secondary Schools. Consequently, the Finnish educational changes contributed to the country's position of an educational leader in the world that offers or suggests educational changes to other countries.

On the other hand, the article highlights the reform process and the main aims of the general upper secondary education level. It is undisputed that all the analysed components of the documents present ways of teaching thoughtful global citizens who are able to overcome obstacles of the contemporary world. Firstly, students take into account media information and acquire indispensable knowledge in shaping their worldviews in order to understand the scientific and non-scientific perceptions of world better and deeper. Secondly, students realise the importance of human dignity in the context of human rights documents. Additionally, they see future as opportunities and chain of life events which are related to their own decisions and activities. Moreover, they understand culture as influencing individuals' ways of living. They are able to perceive differences and viewpoints in other religions, worldview systems and societies. All these steps contribute to such a perception of the world in which students are able to shape their own worldviews.

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Summary

The research analyses values within the subject of Ethics in general upper secondary education in Finland. Also, the link between the curriculum, the reform process, the main goals of general upper secondary education and ways of teaching thoughtful global citizens who are able to overcome obstacles of the contemporary world is presented.

Keywords: values in education, subject of Ethics, National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools 2015 in Finland, a world of worldviews.

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