

World outlook groundings of finnish education

Vira Butova

Стаття присвячена філософським основам фінських освітніх досягнень, зокрема релігійним ідеям стосовно етики праці, принципу егалітаризму. Показана історична роль Лютеранської церкви в поширенні загальної грамотності та високих освітніх стандартів. Доведена особлива роль освіти у фінському суспільстві в історичному контексті. Проаналізована фінська система цінностей та її роль в успішній освіті. Розглянута спеціальна освіта для проблемних дітей.

Ключові слова: фінська освітня система, фінський світогляд, протестантська трудова етика.

Setting the problem. Finnish school education and its success (especially in PISA investigation) have been of great interest for the world pedagogical community at the beginning of the 21st century. The peculiarities of the world outlook groundings of the Finnish educational system are helpful in understanding the Finnish educational success. The role of Protestant religion and its work ethic in this question can't be overestimated.

The latest investigation analyses. The problem of the world outlook groundings of the Finnish educational system has not been investigated and clearly explained enough. Some aspects of the question have been studied in the works of the Ukrainian and Russian scientists such as I. Zhernokleev, V. Zagvozdkin, M. Brazhnik, O. Khustochka, I. Luhovska, A. Vasylyuk and others. Not enough level of investigating the problem of the reasons for Finnish educational system quality and the world outlook groundings of the Finnish education make up the actuality of the article theme «World outlook groundings of Finnish education».

The aim of the article. For solving the education quality problems Ukraine needs the other countries positive educational experience to use some aspects in its own educational practice. That is why the article is aimed at investigating the world outlook groundings of the Finnish educational system for possible using some results of the study in the Ukrainian educational practice.

The main material of the article. Finns is a rather unique nation in Europe. Of the two official languages of Finland, Finnish is the first language spoken by 93 % of the country's 5 million inhabitants. Finnish, unlike Scandinavian languages, is not Germanic but in a class of its own. The other official language, Swedish, is spoken by around 6 % of the population, most of whom live in the south west and are also speakers of Finnish. Sami is a minority language in Scandinavia that is spoken by around 2,000 people living in the north of Finland. The language is always an expression of the people's seeing the world, so Finns differ greatly from the other European nations.

While many social values are the same, there are subtle differences with Scandinavians. Finland is an egalitarian society, which is reflected in their language employing gender-neutral words. Finns are very modest and downplay their own accomplishments. They view being humble and modest as virtues. Finns believe there is a proper way to act in any circumstance. Talking in moderate tones and not doing anything to call attention to you is a Finnish social norm, interrupting is considered to be

rude [4].

Education has always been seen important in the Finnish society. Parents regard education still as the best policy to ensure a positive future for their children. Finland is regarded as one of the world's most literate societies. As a nation of modest people, Finland never actually intended to be the best in the world. Finns like to compete, but collaboration is a more typical characteristic of this nation.

Besides, parents' trust in teachers is high. Teachers have always played an important and respected role in the Finnish society. This high respect can be seen still today, for instance, in national surveys on public ratings for various professions and occupations. Teacher's profession has remained a popular choice among young people. For example, in a survey among secondary school leavers in 2004 teacher's profession was clearly the number one on their list of favourites. At the beginning of the 20th century Finns understood that without becoming literate and possessing broad general knowledge it would be difficult to fulfill one's aspirations in life. Becoming literate, therefore, marked one's entry into adulthood, with all its duties and rights [13]. Primarily due to their inherited high social position, teachers enjoyed great respect and also trust in Finland. Teaching as a profession is closely tied to Finnish national culture. Indeed, one purpose of formal schooling is transferring the cultural heritage, values, and aspirations from one generation to another. Teachers are, therefore, essential players in nation-building. The history left a deep mark on Finns and the desire for personal development through education, reading, and self-improvement. Teaching coincides with core social values of Finns: social justice, caring for others, and happiness.

Finland's teachers study education at government expense, receive strong professional support throughout their careers and this ongoing support creates what is high «working morale» in schools. Ambitious national content standards guide teachers' work without stifling their professional judgment or creativity. Finns don't have any evaluation of teachers. The working morale and the working ethics of the teachers are very high, and we can also trust that they are competent; they know what to do. In Finland they never publish results school by school; they do not make ranking lists, national reports are important for policymakers. Individual feedback report to each school is confidential because and isn't sent to any other school [7].

The roots of Finnish school success should be looked for in the history of religion as it was the first to be responsible for the people's education. Before formal public schooling, since the 17th Century, cultivating public literacy was the responsibility of priests and other religious personalities in Finland. The church has always played a great role in forming the people's outlook. The Protestant reformation reached Sweden (Finland was included into the Kingdom till the XIX century) in the 1520s. Lutheranism spread through all of [Scandinavia](#) during the 16th century and the monarch of [Sweden](#) (also ruling [Finland](#)) adopted Lutheranism. Lutheranism became the state religion. [Michael Agricola](#), the first Lutheran Bishop of Finland, translated the New Testament into Finnish. In the period of Lutheran orthodoxy in the 17th and early 18th centuries the Church again had a cultural monopoly. It proclaimed loyalty to the state, brought up a strong sense of Christian morality and taught the Finns to read [15].

Finland became a Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire in 1809 but the Lutheran Church remained the state church of Finland. Now Finland is one of the most homogenous nations in Europe in the context of religion as 84 % of the population belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, though attitude to religion may vary. According to the Gallup Ecclesiastical report completed in 2003, 36 % of Finns believe in God as Christianity teaches, though some 12 % of Finns consider themselves completely

atheistic.

Religious instruction in Finland is given in comprehensive and upper secondary schools in accordance with pupils' own religions. According to the law, religious instruction does not involve practicing religion; it is a compulsory subject for all pupils and instruction must be pedagogically justified. Everyone who wishes may take part in the religious instruction that is given to the majority of pupils at school. If the school has a minimum of three pupils who belong to the same religious denomination, then religious instruction for that denomination is arranged for them. Pupils who are not members of any religious denomination receive instruction in ethical studies that may include religious and cultural knowledge. Religion together with ethical studies form part of the optional modern subjects section in the national matriculation examination [6].

The Protestant work ethic is a concept in [sociology](#), [economics](#) and [history](#), attributable to the work of [Max Weber](#). It is based upon the notion that the [Calvinist](#) emphasis on the necessity for hard work as a component of a person's calling and worldly success and as a visible sign or result (not a cause) of personal [salvation](#). [Martin Luther](#) had reconceptualised worldly work as a duty which benefits both the individual and society as a whole. Thus, the [Catholic](#) idea of [good works](#) was transformed into an obligation to work diligently as a sign of [grace](#). Whereas Catholicism teaches that good works are required of Catholics to be saved the Reformers taught that good works were only a consequence of an already-received salvation [3].

The Calvinist and Lutheran theologians taught that only those who were [predestined](#) to be saved would be saved, by [grace](#) alone through faith in [Jesus](#) alone. Since it was impossible to know if one was predestined, the notion developed that it might be possible to discern that a person was elect by observing their way of life. Hard work and frugality were thought to be two important consequences of being one of the elect; thus, Protestants were attracted to these qualities, seeking to be obedient to God to whom they owed their salvation. Lutherans believe that [good works](#) are the fruit of faith, always and in every instance. Good works have their origin in God. Lutherans do not believe that good works are a factor in obtaining salvation; they believe that we are saved by the grace of God – based on the merit of Christ in his suffering and death. Good works are the natural result of faith, not the cause of salvation. The Protestant work ethic originally celebrated labor as one's individual responsibility and calling, and later became the basis for modern capitalism.

From a historical perspective, the cultural norm placing a positive moral value on doing a good job because work has intrinsic value for its own sake was a relatively recent development. Two key religious leaders who influenced the development of western culture during this period were Martin Luther and John Calvin. Luther believed that people could serve God through their work, that the professions were useful, that work was the universal base of society and the cause of differing social classes, and that a person should work diligently in his/her own occupation. For Luther, a person's vocation was equated as his calling, and all callings were of equal spiritual dignity [6].

The attitudes toward work which became a part of the culture during the sixteenth century represented a significant change from medieval and classical ways of thinking about work. Max Weber, the German economic sociologist, coined a term for the new beliefs about work calling it the «Protestant ethic». The key elements of the Protestant ethic were diligence, punctuality, deferment of gratification, and primacy of the work domain.

Two distinct perspectives were evident in the literature with regard to the

development of the Protestant ethic. One perspective was the materialist viewpoint which stated that the belief system, called the Protestant ethic, grew out of changes in the economic structure and the need for values to support new ways of behavior. As time passed, attitudes and beliefs which supported hard work became secularized, and were woven into the norms of Western culture.

Technological developments and the improved living standards brought about the modernization of Finland from the end of the 1950s onwards. Finnish society went through a great transitional period in the 1960s. The next transitional period of civil society was in the 1980s. The Western ideal of individualism inspired Finnish people as well. People's growing interest in their own lives, instead of society, had an influence on non-formal adult education, too. People were studying languages, focusing on their interests and looking after their mental and physical health. There is wide agreement – at least at speech level - that adult education is the key to develop work related skills and competencies. Participation in liberal adult education indeed helps adults to become more active citizens and actors in the society. Participation in education also helps to develop and maintain social networks, which are the building blocks of social capital.

Due to the technological progress and the establishment of the welfare state after the Second World War, the standard of living has been divided quite evenly among Finns. In addition, the common values and attitudes reflect greatly those of the middle class, though the high educational level is generally speaking a good thing, it has caused some unexpected challenges in the contemporary Finnish society that have effects on psychology as well, globalization and the diversification of media have created new challenges such as multiculturalism and information overload, which are sometimes seen to threaten Finland's sovereignty and cultural identity.

Primary responsibility for children lies, of course, with the parents, but the adults in a school community are an important support for young people. Many foreign visitors to Finnish schools remark on the friendly relationship between teachers and pupils. The pupils are on familiar terms with their teachers and address them by their first names, and they chat informally in the classrooms and corridors.

Finnish young people are smart, society-oriented, gregarious and family-centered. Parents are interested in their schooling and support it; cooperation with families is good. Finnish schools are producing young people who are not only capable but also mentally strong and well-balanced and who have a lot to offer the world. A school is not a separate island of excellence – and there is a lot of room for improvement in schools too. Children and adolescents grow up in an environment where education is highly valued across the board and where there is a high level of preparedness to do work. The value base is never questioned, there is generally a good, non-disruptive atmosphere in which to work, and there is a practical approach in all things [1].

Even if school is a privately owned, as far as the pupils are concerned there is hardly any difference between it and municipal schools. Tuition is free of charge at all levels in the school, the costs being covered mainly by central and local government grants. In the Nordic countries in particular, the state has long provided health care, education, unemployment benefits and pensions to citizens ready to pay high taxes. All Finnish schooling, for instance, is free. The school's socioeconomic environment does not

show in student performance, school resources or teachers' work conditions nearly as strongly as in most other countries. Schools competition for the best students has remained at a reasonable level, although parents are increasingly interested in the quality of teaching and the choice of school for their children.

Finnish school is aimed at training pupils for successful adult life and becoming a worthy citizen of the country. The school curriculum includes the subjects and the material useful or necessary for pupils' future life in society. As a result Finnish comprehensive school can boast one of the best results in the international assessments of student performance such as PISA [5]. The Finnish educators explain such results by competence approach to studying the main subjects and doing analogical to the surveys tests in the process of teaching pupils [8].

School results success in Finland may be explained by special place of special education and training special teachers for the work with problem children. From 1983 onwards, a new law concerning comprehensive schools changed the field of special education. The auxiliary school for students with learning difficulties and the «observation classes» for students with emotional and behavioural problems were now superseded by a system which could be characterised as principally a non-categorical system of special education. During the eighties the proportion of special class students in comprehensive schools grew approximately from two to three percent. This change in perception from «badness» to «sickness» also helped to give new legitimacy to special education. The last ten years have witnessed a rapid growth of segregated special education in Finland. During the school term of 2006–2007 of the students in comprehensive schools, 22,2 % received part-time special education [12].

Large towns slightly more often use special class placements than rural schools. The least number of placements are in the Swedish speaking part of Finland. This may indicate a cultural influence from Sweden where special class placements are much rarer than in Finland. The significant distances in the countryside of Finland explain why integration is more common in rural areas. Finland differs in the amount of segregated education from its Nordic neighbours Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, where the proportion of segregated education is very low. According to statistics collected by the European Agency of Special Education in 2003, Finnish numbers are more comparable with the situation in Germany, Switzerland, and Belgium.

A simple explanation for the large percentage of segregated education is the models of financing. In Finland local authorities receive extra money for each student removed into special education. The second reason is linked with teacher professionalism. If a teacher can have a difficult student from her class removed, she can secure for herself a less stressful future in her work. The third reason for the large proportion of segregated education lies in the Finnish set of values, the traditional values of agricultural and industrial societies still prevail in Finland to a greater extent than in many other countries. These traditional values stress overall conformity and tend to reject people who are considered socially deviant. The Finnish traditional set of values manifests itself in the internationally high proportions of disabled people in institutions.

Traditional Finnish sets of values combined with strong teacher professionalism together explain the high legitimacy of segregated special education in Finnish society. The sustained, exceptionally high regard and general trust for teachers in Finland can't be explained by their salary benefits: in a comparison across OECD countries (in 2006), in Finland primary school teachers' annual pay equaled USD\$35,798 on average, while the OECD average was USD\$37,832. The same situation was with the average annual salary of upper secondary school teachers in Finland.

Conclusions. So it is possible to make a conclusion that Finnish school educational success is inseparably connected with the Finnish world outlook peculiarities, the Protestant religion in general and the Protestant work ethic in particular. Finnish national features such as modesty and egalitarianism make up the ground for the successful work at school for every child. The tradition of respect to education as the condition of life success in general and deep respect to teachers in the Finnish society also explains the reasons of high position of Finnish educational system. Finnish practical attitude to every aspect of life led to competence approach to studying i.e. everything taught at school can be used by pupils at their everyday life.

Literature:

1. Are you a Finn? [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <http://www.helsinki.fi/~jolaakso/finntest.html>
2. *Equity in Education. Country Analytical Report for Finland* : OECD Papers. – 2004.
3. *Evaluating the Protestant Work Ethic: What the Bible Says about Money* [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: Suite101.com <http://www.suite101.com/content/evaluating-the-protestant-work-ethic-a58828#ixzz1QjSHqex4>
4. *Finland - language, culture, customs and etiquette*. – [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/finland-country-profile.html>
5. *Finland continues to perform well in PISA survey!* – [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <http://www.finlandunesco.org/public/default.aspx?contentid=105584&nodeid>
6. Heikkila Markku. *Major Trends and Movements in Finnish Church History* [Електронний ресурс] / Markku Heikkila. – Режим доступу : <http://evl.fi/EVLen.nsf/Documents/387C25968DB39D27C225730F001F364C?openDocuments>
7. Kansanen Pertti. *Teacher Education in Finland: Current Models and New Developments* [Електронний ресурс] / Pertti Kansanen. – Режим доступу : <http://www.helsinki.fi/~pkansane/Cepes.pdf>
8. Korpela S. *The Finnish school – a source of skills and well-being* / [Електронний ресурс] / Salla Korpela. – Режим доступу: virtual finland. fi./ netcomm.
9. Kuusela J. *Thematic approaches to equality and equity in basic education* [Електронний ресурс] / J. Kuusela // *Finnish National Board of Education Assessment of learning results – 2006. – #6.* – Режим доступу: http://www.oph.fi/..._in_basic_education.pdf.
10. Jakku-Sihvonen R., Kuusela J. *Evaluation of the Equal Opportunities in the Finnish Comprehensive Schools 1998–2001* [Електронний ресурс] / R. Jakku-Sihvonen, J. Kuusela // *Evaluation – 2002. – #11.* – Р. 52. – Режим доступу : http://www.eucn.org/.../positive_1005.html
11. Maes B. *What makes education in Finland that good? 10 reform principles behind the success* [Електронний ресурс] / Bert Maes. – Режим доступу : <http://bertmaes.wordpress.com/2010/02/24/why-is-education-in-finland-that-good-10-reform-principles...>
12. Niemi H., Jakku-Sihvonen R. *Reseach-based teacher education* / R. Jakku-Sihvonen, H. Niemi. – Turku, Finland: Finnish Educational Research Association. – 2006. – Р. 31–50.
13. *Number of pupils transferred to special education unchanged, small increase in part-time special education* [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу : http://tilastokeskus.fi/til/erop/2010/erop_2010_2011-06-09_tie_001_en.html

14. *Pelo J. Literacy in Finland* [Электронный ресурс] / June Pelo. – Режим доступу : http://www.sydaby.eget.net/swe/jp_lit.html
15. *Tuovinen Y. Teacher Professionalism – Viewpoints On Best Practice, the Case of Finland / Yuhani E. Tuovinen* // AARE 2008 conference. – Paper Code: TUO081146. – Brisbane. – Australia. – December 2008. – 5 p.
16. *The Reading Literacy Study* [Электронный ресурс]. – Режим доступу : http://www.iea.nl/reading_literacy.html