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# *Education Policy and Alternative Pedagogies in Finland 1950-1995*

## *1. Introduction*

With the end of the Second World War in 1945, a new era of reconstruction was launched in Finland. Some 400 000 inhabitants of Karelia had been forced to leave their home and were relocated to various parts of Finland. The political field was anything but stable, with the tensions between right and left continuing for a good number of years after the war. Also, the reparations due to the Soviets further encumbered economic growth up until the 1950s.

Soon after the war, the agenda of educational policy got under way again, with a number of pedagogues all eager to plan the new school. Parliament now also took an active part in the discussion. The central issue was whether the existing parallel schoolsystem should be developed further, or should the country adopt the comprehensive system. Both political and economic factors contributed at the end of the forties to Parliament's deciding in favour of developing the existing system. This issue was raised again in the fifties, with several new parliamentary committees looking into the matter. In 1959, the school committee brought out a report in favour of the comprehensive system. Parliament made a decision in principle along the same lines in 1963. This marked the beginning of the schoolreform in Finland, which has been steadily going on up until the nineties (Kuikka 1991, 110). The plans for the development of an entirely new kind of school also brought forth various pedagogic solutions. This paper will analyse the

connection between international trends in alternative pedagogies and Finnish education policies from the 1950s to the 1990s.

## *2. Towards a Comprehensive System*

### 2.1. The First Steiner School 1955

In Finland, Steiner pedagogics is often connected with the tradition of Arts and Humanities. This is clearly manifest in the thinking of the Finnish philosopher J.V. Snellman (1806-81). Snellman was well versed in the ideas of G.W. Hegel, the German philosopher, and he not only strove to raise the Finnish national spirit but also remembered to emphasise the importance of the individual's human, independent and spiritual self-development. The first actual contact with Steiner pedagogics was made in the 1910s when Rudolf Steiner himself visited Finland on two occasions, first in 1912 and again in 1913 (Witters 1976). It went relatively unnoticed, however, since the fashions of the so-called new school, such as work-school pedagogy, were more to the fore (Lahdes 1961). Actually, it was only toward the end of the thirties, when Elena Zuccoli, a eurhythmics teacher, and Annie Hauser, a Steiner pedagogue, visited Finland, that the number of interested parties began to show a real increase. These two were teachers who saw Steiner pedagogics as a solution to the problems of the times. Again, the project ran to ground, however, with the oncoming World War interrupting all activity (Bruun 1976).

Any talk of a major school reform having somewhat subsided after 1948, the focus now shifted towards partial redevelopment. Governing principles for these minor reforms were eagerly sought after. According to Wilenius, this change became evident, for example, in the way psychology and pedagogics based on methodology derived from the natural sciences achieved a very central position. At the same time this meant that global as well as national crises in education were not

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susceptible to solution by purely pedagogical means. Both in the education of the child and of the adult emphasis should therefore be laid on a view of the individual that encompassed all the seminal dimensions that we possess, including our spiritual-psychic being; only by adopting this kind of comprehensive view could the groundwork be laid for an education that aimed towards greater humanity (Wilenius 1976).

Steiner pedagogics raised its head again in 1950 with the founding of the Steiner Pedagogics Society. Its tasks were pedagogic research and the arranging of public lectures and seminars. Also, it was to act as a co-ordinator for other Steiner schools in Finland and to keep in touch with the global Steiner school movement (Työryhmä 1976, 4). Contacts abroad were established when, at the turn of 1954-55, an international Steiner school exhibition was arranged in Helsinki, with the pedagogue Rudolf Grosse and the artist Gerhard Schnell as organisers. The exhibition drew a lot of contemporary attention. It was followed by several courses and pedagogic lectures (Bruun 1976). Earlier on, a relief association for a Rudolf Steiner school had been founded in Helsinki. As is apparent from its name, the association aimed at establishing a school of its own in the country. A petition on the matter was delivered to the Government in 1955 since, legislatively speaking, the permission to found a private school could only be granted by the Government (Laki 5th March, 1919).

There were four major points put forward by the association in the petition. Schools that followed Steiner pedagogics had been in existence for over 35 years, and the results were favourable. Over the past decades, such schools had been founded in other Nordic countries; surely it was time for Finland to have one of its own as well? A good number of parents had already expressed positive interest in the school, which meant a sufficient number of students would be guaranteed. Also, there was already a sufficient number of teachers in Finland well-versed in Rudolf Steiner pedagogics (OPM KD 269/285-1955).

The petition was forwarded to the Board of Education, who required greater detail in the argumentation. The Board of Education

returned the petition to the Government. The association supplied the Government with literature on Steiner pedagogics written by Finnish, German and Swedish authors. Before making any decision, the Ministry of Education asked for three expert opinions. The Board of Education supported the petition. The Helsinki municipal inspector of elementary schools, on the other hand, had a few requests. The curriculum of this future school should adhere to that of the city's elementary schools. Thus the curriculum should include one foreign language and religious instruction. Otherwise, the inspector was in favour of the new school, since it would ease the pressures on elementary schools by providing seats for more pupils. The third opinion was given by the school affairs council, an advisory body comprised of representatives from the political parties. With due attention paid to these opinions, the Ministry of Education decided to licence the new school, but only as far as a private elementary school was concerned; the petition for the adjoining secondary school was overruled. The decision was made on September 9th, 1955. According to the accepted agenda, the school was to give pupils an education according to the pedagogic methods of Rudolf Steiner (OPMKD 268/285-1955. KA). The Minister of Education at the time was Mrs. Kerttu Saalasti of the Agrarian party.

News of a positive ruling had apparently reached the petitioners well in advance, since the Steiner school opened its doors already on September 1st, 1955. Gradually, the school was extended to a twelve-grade comprehensive. Its first teachers had been trained abroad.

The Rudolf Steiner school in Helsinki differed in many ways from other schools. Contrary to the existing parallel school system in Finland, the Steiner school was a comprehensive. With elementary schools a part of the municipal school system, and secondary schools funded either by the state or privately, the Steiner school combined these two forms also from a legislative standpoint. However, essentially it remained a private institute of learning. Whereas it was customary to have separate schools for Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers,

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the Steiner school had both a Finnish speaking and a Swedish speaking section. The very first year, there were two first classes of elementary school, one giving tuition in Finnish and the other in Swedish (Työryhmä 1976,4). The administration stressed all-round participation and shared responsibility. Instead of having a principal, many important issues were decided among the staff, while economy and finance were left to a board of governors (Työryhmä 1976). When, in 1955, the existing Education Act required seven years of compulsory attendance, the Steiner school aimed to provide a full twelve years of schooling. The thirteenth form was designed to prep students for the matriculation examinations, which were consistent with those of state-run secondary schools (Työryhmä 1976).

Apart from schoolwork, the Steiner philosophy was reflected also in nursing pedagogics: the Sylvia Home, a boarding school for handicapped children and youth, was founded in Hyvinkää in 1956. In 1970, it was transferred to Lahti, becoming a family-unit teaching and work home.

From the standpoint of education politics, the first Steiner school appeared in Finland at an interesting point in time. The so-called large age groups (those born just after the war) were coming of school age, which meant an enormous growth both in the number of schools and pupil places. At the same time, plans were under way for a major school reform, based on the comprehensive school model (Mietintö 1959). The transition from a parallel school system to the comprehensive would not be easy, as became apparent from the debate carried in the daily and weekly press. Private schools, especially, were most conducted about their future status (see Teperi 1995, 241).

## *2.2. Politics or Pedagogics?*

The early sixties saw a heightened general interest in school reform. This also reflected the distinct change in Finnish education policy.

Whereas earlier the planning had fallen for the most part on school officials and staff, politicians now began to take an increasing part in the discussion and sought to move matters ahead. This was particularly obvious in 1963, the year Parliament solved one of the basic problems in the reform by passing a resolution that the Government be obliged to prepare the school reform to fit the principles of the comprehensive school model. In 1968, Parliament redefined and particularised the guidelines for the reform, passing a bill on the governing principles of the school system (Laki 1968). It stated that the school system should be based on a municipal body that includes the comprehensive school, the senior secondary school, vocational institutions, and kindergartens, as well as infant schools. Elementary and secondary schools were to be merged within the municipal school system. The status of private schools remained mostly undefined; instead, plans were made for various substitute schools.

The Act of 1968 also left open the status of the Steiner school, whether it was to be integrated into the municipal system, or remain an independent private institution. This became a problem within education policy, the resolution to which was sought both at national and local level. An interesting element was added to the situation by the fact that in 1968 a pre-school class was established in the Helsinki Steiner school. Two years later, a Rudolf Steiner school began operating also in Lahti, boosted by the local relief association. That same year, 1970, the Ministry of Education appointed a committee to look into the position of the Steiner school in the light of the new school statutes.

In 1971, a Steiner school was founded also in Tampere. Both the Lahti and Tampere schools were in operation without a licence from the Government until 1977. The relief associations behind these two schools made their own education policy decisions. The Steiner tradition and its nursing-pedagogic model were in evidence in the Marjatta School founded in Helsinki in 1971, a special day-school for handicapped children. In 1974, a village community for handicapped adults, known as the Tapola Community, was founded in Orimattila,

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near Lahti (Työryhmä 1976).

The position of Steiner schools remained unresolved as late as the mid-seventies. To bring the matter to a solution, the Ministry of Education appointed in 1975 a special wide-ranging committee, reached a conclusion in May, 1976. The committee found in its report that there existed in Finland three Steiner schools, only one of which had the proper licence granted by the Government. However, the committee suggests in its proposal that the continuing operation of Rudolf Steiner schools would be useful to the school reform proper, as well as expedient and substantiated from the point of view of pedagogic development in the country (Työryhmä 1976, 29). In the question of whether Finland needed more than just one Steiner school, the committee were anything but unanimous. Although admittedly, the proposed bill did include the principle that, apart from the Rudolf Steiner school in Helsinki, there could be, at the very most, only two other Steiner schools in operation in Finland. The proposal stated that should the founding of more than one Steiner school prove necessary to the nation's educational interests, the Government may grant an indigenous registered association a licence to found a Steiner school. At the same time, it required that the local municipality partake in supporting the school's operation (Työryhmä 1976, 37). The committee's proposal obviously reflects the education politics of the seventies. The changeover to the comprehensive school system had begun from the municipalities of northernmost Finland in 1972; with the transitional stage now at full speed, the committee did not care to make other than absolutely necessary exceptions. The seventies' economy crisis is evident in the restriction on the number of Steiner schools. The national economy was not developing as expected, and the founding of new schools required considerable financial expenditure.

The proposal of 1976 was submitted to the Government, who began on the basis of it to draw up a bill for a law on Steiner schools. The Government made no changes to the contents of the bill. In Parliament, the proposal went first to the Committee for Education and

Culture Several experts were heard, from the schools administration, the church, and also the Steiner school itself. The Committee arrived at a favourable conclusion, commenting, among other things, that the development of the school system could benefit from the stimulus given by the Steiner school. The Committee were not unanimous, though: Mr. Erkki Korhonen, a Parliament representative for the Christian League, expressed his dissent for the record, stressing that the possibility should be reserved for founding also Christian schools. On the other hand, he saw as important the fact that the parents of children about to enter the Steiner school should be provided with information on the anthroposophical world view behind the school. This comment resulted in a brief, but principled debate. Mr. Korhonen repeated his views, receiving support from a fellow representative of the same party. Mr. Kalevi Kivistö, of the Finnish People's Democratic League (the socialist party), and also the Minister of Education at the time, thought the law necessary. The bill received support also from the right. Representative Sipiläinen referred to a statement made by the secretary general of the (Lutheran) Church's Educational Centre, according to which the religious instruction in Steiner schools was in accordance with the curricula accepted in the country. The bill was passed by 154 votes to 10 (Valtiopäivät 1976, Valtiopäivät 1977).

The fate of the Steiner school was by no means the only educational issue Parliament had to deal with, since the Finno-Russian school (founded 1965) and the Helsinki Franco-Finnish school (also founded 1965), both operating in Helsinki, applied in 1976 for a special status in the new school system. Parliament accepted both schools as state-funded institutions. Also, similarly to the Steiner school, the Jewish school and the German and English schools in Helsinki were granted the status of private institutions (Valtioneuvoston pöytäkirjat 1st December 1988, 22nd December 1977. Laki 412/1976. Laki 33/1977. Arajärvi-Aalto-Seppälä 1993, 304-309).



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### *3. A Turn in Education Policy: from Conformity to Diversity*

#### 3.1. The New Education System from 1972 onwards

The transition to the comprehensive school system in Finland lasted from 1972 to 1978. The basis of the new system was a municipal school body to which all the different schools would be articulated. The former secondary schools became history: some of the pupils switched over to the comprehensive and some - that is, the three upper forms (age groups 15 to 17) - to the 3-year senior secondary school. Private schools were obliged to decide among themselves whether to join the municipal system or to remain as so-called substitute schools, the latter being, economically speaking, the worse alternative. Only a few schools were granted a special status to continue operating along the old lines, as seen above. Although the new school system had raised high hopes, it also gave cause for criticism. Professor Reijo Wilenius, known as a spokesman for Steiner pedagogics, published in 1975 a volume called *Kasvatuksen ehdot* ("The Prerequisites of Education"). According to his views, the reform should have been initiated from the school class, the teacher and the pupils - that is, from the bottom up - in order to bring forth creativity and initiative, whereas now it had been carried out from the opposite end, from the central administration to the schools, which inevitably would lead to the downfall of the entire reform (Wilenius 1975).

At the turn of the eighties there appeared signs that the guidelines of the school reform would need re-evaluation. One feature of this was a changeover from centralised administration to a wider delegation of duties, by shifting the decision making closer to the centre of action, that is into the municipal school system. The task remaining to the schools administration should lie increasingly in the guidance and support of the actual schoolwork, rather than in normative administration duties. This viewpoint won great support in Parliament. The school

legislation was amended in 1983, so that municipalities were to have greater independence in making decisions about how to develop their own schools. Another issue just as significant were the new curricula. The Board of Education would continue to give the guidelines for curricula, but the municipalities and individual schools could now devise local curricula with more freedom than before. Both municipal officials and teachers were most favourably impressed with this reform. Liberalism in education policy continued at the turn of the next decade, the nineties. For it was then that Parliament alleviated the restrictions on founding new schools. This decision received, again, both praise and criticism. The critics regarded it as the coup de grace to the seventies' system of comprehensive schools. The praise stemmed from a more pedagogic view - a shift from conformity to greater diversity.

### 3.2. The Development of Steiner Schools

The supporters of Steiner schools were not happy with the three-school limit in the 1977 Act and wanted the law changed. The initiative was taken by the Steiner Pedagogics Society in May 1981. As a result, the Ministry of Education appointed in September that year a committee to evaluate the results achieved by and indeed the need for the Steiner school. By June 1982 the committee concluded in its proposal that the number of Steiner schools in Finland should remain at three, thus causing no need to amend the 1977 Act. The proposal had not been reached unanimously (Työryhmä 1982), but it led to no changes in the law.

The representatives of Steiner pedagogics strove to air their views in diverse ways. In 1980, the Snellman College for Spiritual Growth was launched in Helsinki. Later on, its tasks came to include, among other things, the basic and further training of teachers. In 1985 was founded the Union of Steiner Education. Its goals too were to make Steiner pedagogics better known; in particular, how every teacher could apply the method in their work in the comprehensive school

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(Steinerkasvatus-lehti 1/1985; Hiltunen 1990, 46).

The 1985 reform of school legislation, which was aimed mainly at the development of education and tuition within the schools, had its effect also on Steiner pedagogics. On September 20th 1984, the Ministry of Education had appointed a committee to investigate the possibilities of adopting educational, teaching and special tuition techniques based on Steiner pedagogics in the municipal school system (Työryhmä 1985). The committee's conclusions were at a very general level. According to the majority of the committee, a municipal 'Steiner school', that is one governed along the lines of actual Steiner schools, was out of the question since it would deviate too much from the existing school legislation and the principles of municipal decision-making - especially as there was no political resolution given on the issue. However, the founding of a trial school was deemed possible. The committee concluded that Steiner pedagogics as such was suitable for adoption in the main areas of education and tuition (Muistio 1985). The report was not unanimous, which only proves that official education policy sided with the comprehensive system, and all, if any, pedagogic reforms were to be carried out within its boundaries. At this stage, no political goodwill was shown to Steiner schools operating separately from the system.

The proposal on special tuition by the aforementioned committee did, however, go forward, since in 1986 Parliament passed a law to consolidate the position of special schools following the Steiner method. This applied to the Marjatta School of Helsinki and the Sylvia Home in Lahti. Both institutions offer medico-pedagogical education and special tuition based on Steiner pedagogics to handicapped children, of whom compulsory education is required for eleven years (Laki 932/1986).

In practice, Steiner pedagogics gained ground from day-care centres to new special schools. By the early nineties, there were in operation fifteen schools, of which 12 had no official licence. The number of nurseries amounted to twenty (Hiltunen 1990, 18- 21).

The development of Steiner schools gave rise to criticism as well. In 1990, Justice Court of Appeal the hon. Paavo Hiltunen published a book entitled "What Does Steiner Really Say?". Hiltunen's personal convictions are close to denominational religiousness. His view was that the religious instruction in Steiner schools did not follow the same principles as the tuition given in the comprehensive school; that it did not adhere to the Bible but, rather, to the anthroposophical ideology. Further, that the Steiner schools were exclusive to the point where members of the staff were selected only from those educated in Steiner schools themselves. Also, the schools could not be monitored in the way comprehensive schools could; and that the Steiner school kept parents in the dark to an extent. Apart from the schools' curriculum, the criticism was also aimed at its administration (Hiltunen 1990). Steiner schools had also been subjected to criticism earlier for the same reasons. Similar views were further presented in the summer of 1995 in newspapers during a campaign for founding a Steiner school in Joensuu. Hiltunen also criticised the Lutheran church, since one of its representatives had influenced the parliamentary Committee for Education and Culture's attitude in favour of the Steiner school. As most parents of Steiner school pupils are members of the state church, Hiltunen claimed this constituted aiding and abetting in the anthroposophization of the country (Hiltunen 1990, 241).

Steiner pedagogics and schools have been among the most popular research subjects of doctoral theses written in this field in the 1980s. Simo Skinnari investigated the Steiner-pedagogical view of the individual and its practical applications in the first four classes (Skinnari 1988). Eija Syrjäläinen studied the tuition given in Steiner schools from the perspective of an ethnographic paradigm (Syrjäläinen 1990). Scheinin's thesis was on the self-image of pupils in comprehensive and Steiner schools (Scheinin 1990).

Turunen's research analyzed the philosophic principles underlying the Steiner method (Turunen 1990). However, the aim of these studies was not to compare or contrast Steiner schools with others, and

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therefore no new aspects were contributed to the ongoing ideological debate.

Still, the fact remains that the number of Steiner schools in the country has caught the public's eye. On the other hand, more liberal winds in educational politics have somewhat toned down the debate. Unfortunately, neither those pupils who have been through the Steiner school system nor their parents have contributed anything new to the discussion. The silence can also partly be attributed to the fact that representatives of alternative pedagogies, such as those speaking for the Steiner, Montessori or Freinet methods, have extended their mutual co-operation and arranged training events and seminars.

### 3.3. From playschool to comprehensive school - the Montessori-method

The Montessori method has been known in Finland since the 1910s. Oskari Mantere introduced Montessori's scientific pedagogy in a journal in 1914 (Mantere 1914). The method was also studied in the 1920s, and a Finnish group participated in a conference in Helsingör, Denmark, where Maria Montessori gave a speech. Her activities and philosophy were also studied in pedagogical books (Bruhn 1953, 1968).

In the 1970s, the Montessori method awakened new interest. One of the promoters was Christel Björkstén, a psychologist who applied the Montessori method in a children's hospital by, for example, equipping one of the classrooms according to the method. He gave a lecture on the Montessori method in a teachers' conference in 1979.

Influence was also stimulated by parents. Some of them had tried to organise education based on the Montessori method in Espoo since 1976. This resulted in the establishment of the Montessori Association in 1979. Five teachers who had attended the Montessori teaching course held a meeting in July 1979 and decided to organise the

Montessori Association in Finland. According to the rules, the aim of the Association is to promote the consideration and implementation of children's rights in society regardless of race, religion, or political views. The Association is politically and ideologically independent. It aims at disseminating information on the physical, psychological, and social development of the child (Suomen Montessoriyhdistyksen säännöt 1979). At first, the main task was to found Montessori playschools: in 1983 there were seven Montessori playschools, and by 1995 their number had increased to thirty. The first Montessori classes in comprehensive schools were founded in Espoo in 1984, in Helsinki in 1985, and in Vantaa in 1987: they are all situated in the capital area.

At first, the number of members was relatively small, in 1983 there were 22 members in the Association. Local Montessori associations were also founded in order to improve the organising of local activities; by 1987 there were five local associations. In 1987 these were organised into the Montessori Union of Finland, which was a significant event for the promotion of the Montessori method. Another significant event took place in 1985, when the Finnish Montessori Association was admitted as a member to AMI (Association Montessori Internationale).

The Montessori Association received financial support from the Ministry of Education from the 1980s until 1995, so it was obviously regarded as an important social organisation. The association's opinion was often asked on some central educational matters. One of these was the matter of the so-called alternative schools in 1988: the Finnish Montessori Association considered it unnecessary to found separate schools, since the Montessori method could well be applied within the comprehensive school. According to the Association, a separate school unit does not advance the open and constructive exchange of ideas between different teaching methods, but is more inclined to have a negative influence by, for example, developing a different sort of pupil body from the norm in ordinary comprehensive schools. The Association also aroused interest by stating that a school supported by a private

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association does not promote the democratisation of the school system either, which the Association considers to be very important (Suomen Montessori-liiton lausunto 29.9.1988).

The best result can be achieved, according to the Montessori Union, by founding specialised classes, like Montessori classes, within the comprehensive school. They can stimulate the development process of the whole school system with, for instance, the streaming of pupils, comprehensive education, and illustrative teaching. The Association gives special emphasis on the pedagogical freedom of the teachers and on the consideration of parents' opinions in educational planning. Local authorities should provide parents with the possibility to choose between alternative schools (*ibidem* lausunto 29.9.1988).

In 1988, the Montessori classes suggested by the Montessori Union were founded in the lower stage of several comprehensive schools mainly in southern Finland. The towns of Vantaa, Hyvinkää, Lohja and Riihimäki joined Helsinki positive attitude towards these experimental classes (Montessori-lehti 1995). In Vantaa and Tampere, there are plans for founding Montessori classes for the whole six-year lower stage of the comprehensive school. From the educational point of view, the Montessori method has developed the internal didactic activities in the comprehensive school by founding Montessori classes in different parts of Finland.

#### 3.4. National and international co-operation - the Freinet method

On December 14th 1985, an association was organised by a group of teachers interested in the Freinet method, its essential aim being advance the application of the Freinet method in education and to support and develop educational activities. At the time the association was called 'Elämän koulu - Livets skola ry' ('The School of Life'). The Association operates both in Finnish and Swedish. The Freinet method was already known in Finland through the New Education Fellowship

co-operation organisation where Celestin Freinet worked along with Laurin Zilliacus from Finland. Later, Laurin Zilliacus founded a school in Helsinki that was named after him, and the school traditions are still upheld (Elämän koulu - Livets skola ry:n toimintakertomukset 1986-92). The number of members in the Association in the first year of activity was 113, which was quite notable.

The Association rapidly made international contacts: in 1986, it became a member of FIMEM (Federation Internationale des Mouvements d'Ecole Moderne), a federation founded in 1957, and of RIDEF (Rencontres Internationales des Educateurs Freinet). In 1990, Ridef held a seminar in Finland with over two hundred participants from twenty countries. The seminar comprised theoretical lectures as well as practical activities.

Another international activity in Finland was the Fourth European Forum for Educational Freedom in 1991. It was a co-operation seminar organised by the Finnish Freinet Association together with the Montessori Association, the Steiner Association, the Centre of Continuing Training in Vantaa, and the University of Jyväskylä. There were nearly two hundred researchers from fourteen countries at the seminar, which operated under the theme 'Educational Freedom and the State'. The seminar was held during the political crisis in Europe that broke down both political and cultural barriers, and this explained the great number of participants from Central Europe. The seminar issued a resolution and referred to the European Community decisions on 'educational freedom in the European community' of 1984 and 1988 (Elämän koulu - Livets skola ry tk. 1991). The seminar inspired the Finnish participants to found the Finnish Forum for Educational Freedom in November 1991.

The main function of the Freinet Association in Finland has been to familiarise different professional groups, mainly teachers and educational administrators, with the applications of the Freinet method. Therefore it also publishes the periodical 'Elämän koulu - Livets skola', which studies the scientific as well as the didactic grounds of the method, and some other Freinet productions. The Association also organises



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several training events, seminars and study circles, which are not only restricted to the Freinet method, the Zilliacus and Montessori methods also being discussed. (ibidem tk. 1990-94) Since the very beginning, in 1986 the Association has received financial support from the Ministry of Education, which indicates its social and educational significance. In 1996, support practice is changing, however, which is bound to affect the Association's activities.

In 1995, the Association changed its name to the Freinet Pedagogic Association of Finland. It has often expressed its opinion on educational questions and outlined the internal development of the school based on the open interpretation of the Freinet method, where the importance of the mental development of both teacher and pupil is strongly emphasised. As educational legislation was relaxed in Finland in the early 1990s, it became easier to get licence to found schools; in the Freinet Association the foundation of Freinet schools was also discussed. In reality, the applications of the Freinet method have taken place in the work of individual teachers in different parts of Finland. Among these teachers have been both primary and secondary teachers who have conveyed their experience on Freinet applications in national training events, as well as in international teacher seminars.

### 3.5. The approval of different schools

Discussion on the development of the comprehensive school system continued throughout the 1980s. There were many reasons for this. As stated above, the alternative methods had become better known. The economically positive 1980s suggested that the reforms would soon be carried out. There was optimism in the air. There was pressure for reform of both educational policy and legislation.

The reforms in school legislation were started in 1988 by the Ministry of Education. The aim was to outline more flexible legislation for the development of the school system. In 1990, the Government introduced a bill on the matter to Parliament. (Hallituksen esitys 1990. Valtioapäivien asiakirjat 1990) The Parliamentary Committee for



*From the year 1985 all Finnish schools can emphasize some of the schoolsubjects. Above photographed schoolclass emphasizes sport.*

Education and Culture approached the matter both in principle and from a practical perspective.

The Committee's approach to the principle is conveyed in its report of November 1990, where the general outlines for Finnish educational policy in the 1990s are laid down. The Committee is in favour of pedagogic experiments and alternatives, like the Freinet and Montessori methods, provided that the experiments take place within the comprehensive school system. The Committee also aims at the coherence of the educational structure; the alternative teaching methods should be applied according to the class, subject, and school. In the

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Committee's opinion, local authorities should found such alternative schools which pupils could attend without any limitations imposed by different school districts (Sivistysvaliokunnan mietintö n:o 10, Valtiopäivät 1990).

The Committee's practical approach on the reform of educational legislation on private schools was outlined in December 1990. The Committee consulted a number of experts and representatives from different alternative schools. In its bill the Committee aimed at increasing the opportunities to found private schools as well as enhancing their role as part of the municipal school system. These schools would receive the same rights to give school reports as other municipal comprehensive schools and upper secondary schools. The licence would still be granted by the Government, but the school could follow its own curriculum, which would have to be accepted by the Government in connection with the granting of the licence. The curriculum has to be based on an internationally acknowledged educational system. The school to be founded has to benefit the development of educational activities in Finland (Sivistysvaliokunnan mietintö n:o 10, Valtiopäivien asiakirjat 1990).

The report by the Committee of Education and Culture was not unanimous. Parliamentary representative Esko Almgren from the Finnish Christian League expressed a dissenting opinion, in which he analysed the status of private schools. He stated that there are other private schools in Finland besides the Steiner schools. The German School (Deutsche Schule) is the oldest foreign-language private school in Finland and has operated since 1881. The English School was founded in 1945. There also are Christian schools in Finland. The Finnish Adventist Church has run a private school for 25 years; the upper stage of the comprehensive school and the secondary upper school are subsidised by the state, but the lower stage is not. The Christian School of Helsinki was founded in 1987 and broadened out into a lower stage of comprehensive school in 1992. Almgren noted that the Orthodox Church also paid attention to the fact that Christian

schools were not considered when drafting the new law; the status and rights of confessional churches should also be acknowledged in this matter. Almgren suggested some changes to the bill, in which the pedagogic dissimilarity and the religious or ethical characteristics of the curriculum would be taken into consideration. The new law should also allow the licensing of other schools besides the Steiner schools (*ibidem*).

Parliament had a long discussion on the bill in the Committee for Education and Culture. The left favoured the comprehensive school structure, whereas the centre and right-wing parties wanted to relax the educational legislation. Unanimity was not achieved, however. Parliamentary representative Almgren's motion for changes was seconded only by his own party members, and therefore the Committee motion was approved as the basis of the final act (*Valtiopäivät* 1990). The law came into effect in 1991.

### *What were the consequences?*

The new law was considered a positive reform to pedagogic methods and it actually helped realise a number of plans. More Steiner schools were founded, and by 1995 there were 18 of them. The Montessori method was more widely applied in new comprehensive school classes and lower stages of the comprehensive school. The number of Montessori playschools increased to 27. The Freinet method was applied in primary as well as in secondary teaching. The Christian school received its official licence in Helsinki in 1995.

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## *Summary*

In this article I have described the development of reformist pedagogy in Finnish educational politics in the years 1950 - 1990. By reformist pedagogy I mean the Steiner Montessori and Freinet methods. Most of them were previously known in Finland, and they became influential again in the 1950s as the Finnish school system started to be reorganised. Since the 1860s, there had been the parallel school system in Finland, and now a comprehensive school system became the objective. This entailed the reform of many matters, including legislation, organisations, curriculum, and teacher training.

The role of reformist pedagogy is very interesting in this process, and can be divided according to three different points of view, the first of which is political. The left wing emphasised the uniformity of the school system and did not want new, different schools in Finland. The left wing formed the majority in Parliament in the 1960s, and therefore demanded that the licences for prospective new schools be granted by the Parliament. This was the case with Steiner schools. According to the second point of view, the new pedagogic methods may be applied, but only within the comprehensive school system. This is how the Montessori and Freinet methods were introduced to the Finnish comprehensive schools. According to the third point of view, the comprehensive school system cannot be the only one, but other sorts of schools are also needed. Parents and teachers interested in the Steiner method organised an association in 1955 and in the same year the association was granted a licence from the Council of State to found a school of their own. The number of Steiner schools had increased to 15 by the beginning of the 1990s.

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