

Investigating the use of communities of practice to implement global education in Finnish basic education

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Abstract

This article investigates the possibilities of implementing global education in national education by means of an often referred-to social learning theory 'communities of practice'. The argumentation is supported by research conducted in Finnish comprehensive schools lower level (the first six years of education). The research findings suggest that at the moment in Finland, global education is perceived as a real challenge for practitioners. In conclusion, it is argued that the use of communities of practice as a basis to implement global education perspectives in basic education has good potential to succeed in developing national education policies and in finding best practices for global education.

Keywords: communities of practice; Finnish basic education; global education

Introduction

Finnish global education guidelines are published in the Ministry of Education and Culture's (MEC) Global Education (GE) 2010 Programme. The programme is an aftermath of a year-long Peer Review of the North South Centre (NSC) in Finland (Council of Europe, 2004) that is part of the European Peer Review Process, dedicated to increasing and improving global education in Council of Europe member states. The framework for the Peer Review process can be found in the Maastricht Declaration on Global Education document (Council of Europe, 2002) that emerged in a Europe-wide global education congress in Maastricht 2002. The methodology of global education of the NSC focuses on supporting active learning and encouraging reflection with active participation of learners and educators (Council of Europe, 2004). In the Peer Review on Finland, the NSC suggests that if there is to be access to equal global education for all, then a key requirement is that a strong global justice perspective must be integrated into the compulsory school curriculum at all levels (Council of Europe, 2004).

A national evaluation of the GE 2010 strategy has been completed by the MEC in 2011 (MEC, 2011). The evaluation focused on administrative sectors, research institutes, higher education institutions, organisations and associations, and religious communities who had been assigned responsibilities for the implementation of the programme. At the moment, no other academic research has been carried out on the GE 2010 Programme in compulsory school level (basic education) than the one discussed in this article. The national evaluation revealed that awareness and implementation of the GE 2010 have remained modest and uncoordinated, even though global education content is being widely taught (MEC, 2011:22-27). Similar findings were found in the research on basic education level. This article strives to add a new perspective to global education discussions by studying the possibilities of using a social learning theory, communities of practice, to develop Finnish basic education in terms of global education practices.

The article begins by examining current Finnish global education guidelines documented in GE 2010 Programme. This is followed by an examination of the theory of communities of practice and the central concepts of learning and knowledge within this approach, in the light of the GE 2010 Programme. Finally, the article discusses recent research on global education in Finnish basic education lower level (the first six years of education) and investigates integration of communities of practice with the current Finnish global education guidelines. As a summary, it is argued that the communities of practice approach has good potential to succeed in developing national education policies and in finding best practices for global education.

Before turning to the GE 2010 Programme, it is relevant to mention that in Finland, education responsibility is shared by the National Board of Education (NBE) and the MEC (before 2011 'Ministry of Education'). The NBE defines the aims and content for all education, including pre-primary, basic, and upper secondary education, through a core curriculum, and guidelines for higher education providers, including the framework and goals for teacher education. All the above NBE documents are binding documents for educational institutions in Finland. MEC, in turn, is in charge of education policy guidelines and for the evaluation and assessment of national basic education. Moreover, the Ministry provides separate national education projects and programmes that are regarded as recommendations for educational institutions.

Global Education 2010 Programme

In the GE 2010 document, global education is defined according to the NSC as: Global education means 'education that opens people's eyes to the realities of the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all' (Council of Europe, 2004). In the GE 2010 document, the Ministry of Education (2007:11) defines global education as activity which:

- guides towards individual and communal global responsibility;

- 'supports growth into a critical and media-critical citizen...'
- 'promotes national and international interaction, inter-cultural dialogue and learning from one another';
- 'helps to see the earth as an entity with limited resources...'
- 'increases knowledge and skills which help us understand the ever-globalising economy...'
- 'enhances initiative rising from an individual aspiration to work for a better world...'
- comprises the following sectors: 'human rights education, equality education, peace education, media education, intercultural understanding, questions relating to development and equity, and education for sustainable development.'

The GE 2010 Programme has an ambitious objective as it has been drafted to encompass the whole society: it aims 'to include the global education perspective in major education, research, cultural, sport and youth policy lines and in social policy lines' in Finland (Ministry of Education 2007:11). Moreover, the programme assumes that learning occurs in a social context; that people learn 'from one another', in 'interaction', and through 'dialogue'. Similarly, the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NCCBE) has been formulated 'on the basis of a conception of learning as an individual and communal process of building knowledge and skills', it highlights learning as 'situational', 'interactive cooperation' and 'participation in social activity', and recognises that 'learning results from the pupil's active and purposeful activity ...' (NBE, 2004:16).

Action, participation and environment are key words that many educational theorists and practitioners emphasize in their learning theories. In this article, an often referred-to social learning theory 'communities of practice' is used as the framework to study Finnish basic education in terms of global education practices.

About learning and education within communities of practice

Since the early works of Lave and Wenger (1991), communities of practice theory has been widely studied and implemented to create learning communities, especially in the field of business organisations (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002). However, the theory has also been successfully used in other social learning settings. For example, Brandon and Charlton (2011) used the theory recently when developing teacher training in United Kingdom; and Lawthom (2011) used the framework within community psychology while studying possibilities of widening engagement and relationship between university and community members.

'Communities of practice' has many similarities with action research (or participatory action research) and with John Dewey's philosophy about knowledge and

learning. All of these highlight the importance of the relationship between the individual and the social (or the environment) and participation as a means to learn (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000; Greenwood and Levin, 2000; Biesta and Burbules, 2003). They all understand social and educational practices, as Kemmis and McTaggart chose to define (2000:596), 'as located in particular material social, and historical circumstances that produce (and reproduce) them – and in which it may be possible to transform them'.

However, I believe that communities of practice best considers the dynamic nature of a school community by highlighting that the interests, goals, and members of a community are subject to change, and thus the theory welcomes different levels of participation. Moreover, it respects the regular school rhythm as the base for community actions and does not focus on short-term results or goal creation but rather, it gives more value to the actual process of participation and long-term value creation and identity building (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002; Wenger, 2002; Wenger, 2000).

Even though different in many aspects, all communities of practice have the three following fundamental elements: *a domain*; *a community*; and *the practice* (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002). A domain is the community's *raison d'être* and a community is a group of people who are committed to the domain and interact regularly on issues important to the domain. They learn together and in the process, they develop a shared understanding of their domain. Practice, in turn, is a socially defined way of doing things in a certain domain; a set of common resources and variety of knowledge that create a basis for a community's action, communication, and accountability: 'A practice is sort of a mini-culture that binds the community together' (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002:39). Using communities of practice approach as a framework requires an understanding of the relationship between learning and the nature of knowledge, which will be studied next.

According to Wenger (2002), learning happens simultaneously in four dimensions: learning as doing, as belonging, as experience, and as becoming. Learning as doing means, through participation, gaining knowledge about how to use the shared resources, lessons learned, and best practices as a basis for action and communication. Learning as belonging refers to being part of the social configuration of the community; learning to know and to display the actions that are defined as worth pursuing and as competence in the community. Learning as experience refers to our (changing) ability, as both individual and collective members of the community, to experience our life and the world as meaningful. Learning as becoming relates to how learning through participation changes the community as well as each member of the community, and constructs new identities, 'personal histories of becoming', in the context of the community. (Wenger, 2002:4-6; Wenger, 2000). In brief, communities of practice knowledge resides in the communication and relationships of the members as well as in the resources and actions of the particular com-

munity. Knowing and the process of learning have both individual and social aspects.

Communities of practice recognises personal differences between community members in their commitment level and thus, different levels of participation. The members can roughly be divided into three groups: a core, an active, and a peripheral group. A core group is formed by members who actively participate in the community's action and communication, who take much of the leadership of the community and 'move the community along its learning agenda' (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002:56). An active group of people are those who are regularly present but participate only occasionally. Peripheral members are those who prefer mainly to watch the interaction of the core and the active members and who rarely participate in action or publicly contribute to discussions. The core group can be as small as 10-15 per cent and the active group as small as 15-20 per cent of the whole community; the rest can be the peripheral members (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002:55-58).

Before studying integration of communities of practice in Finnish basic education global education, there is a need to investigate the fundamental aspects of the theory presented above in the light of GE 2010 Programme.

Integrating communities of practice with the GE 2010 programme

The domain, global education, is already defined in the GE 2010 Programme presented above. In brief, the *raison d'être* for a community of practice from a global education point of view is to enhance justice, equity and human rights in the world through increasing knowledge and skills about global issues (human rights, equality, peace, media, intercultural understanding, development and equity, and sustainable development).

Even though it can easily be argued that a school, let alone one classroom, is not the core locus of learning, especially in today's global e-society, considering a community to be the whole of Finnish society, as articulated in the GE 2010 Programme, would be far too large an area to investigate in the scope of this article. Moreover, because of the main focus of this article and the requirements communities of practice sets for a community – shared focus of interest; regular, continuous interaction, etc. – it is more practical to limit the concept of community in this article to a school or even to a smaller unit, one particular class in the school.

Practice can, in this context, be considered as a purposeful activity that aims to guide, support and help students acquire resources (or competences) to enhance justice, equity and human rights in the world. Learning needs to be evaluated against the community's understanding of what knowledge is; how it can be gained or built; what kind of action is considered to validate its existence, amount and quality (Raivola, 2002:25). Wenger himself (2011) suggests that communities of

practice challenges schools to consider the three following dimensions when planning their educational practices:

- *Internal*: organisation of educational experiences that ‘ground school learning in practice through participation in communities around subject matters’.
- *External*: connecting the experiences to ‘actual practice through peripheral forms of participation in broader communities beyond the walls of the school’.
- *Lifetime of students*: promoting lifelong learning and focusing ‘on topics of continuing interest to students beyond the initial schooling period’.

Considering the focus of this article – the possibilities for further development of global education in Finnish basic education with the help of communities of practice – the above discussion raises the following questions regarding the practice: What kinds of internal educational practices in the field of global education best enhance learning? Do all practices result in learning – even though as much as 75 per cent of the members might only participate by watching? (in an average class of 25 students in Finland, this would mean that in addition to the teacher, only five or six students would actively participate). Moreover, with regards to external practices, we should consider how widely the principles of the GE 2010 Programme are accepted and valued by broader communities. How frequent does the interaction need to be in order to hold the idea of a community? Is the shared domain enough to create common resources to keep the members of the wider community committed? Taking into account the lifetime of students by focusing beyond the initial schooling period, also poses questions: How can we predict what are the topics of continuing interest to current students? How can we know if the learned practice continues beyond schooling? (and if it does not carry on, can any learning be considered to have happened in the first place?). These questions will be used as a framework when studying the findings of the research on global education practices in Finnish comprehensive schools, which I will turn to next.

Research on global education in Finnish basic education

The research on global education started as a pragmatic and thematic evaluation study (Jakku-Sihvonen, 2002; Jakku-Sihvonen and Heinonen, 2001) with the main objective to find practical solutions for the implementation of the GE 2010 Programme in national basic education. Communities of practice was chosen as a theoretical framework at the final stage of the research, when the research findings had revealed that commitment to teaching global education in basic education was poor, and all respondents had reported encountering similar difficulties in its implementation. The difficulties reported were mainly related to the complexity of the concept of global education and to the lack of knowledge and resources that pre-

vented teachers from creating purposeful classroom activities to give space for interaction and social learning. The above will be discussed in more detail in what follows.

There are three goals set for the research: to study and compare the value basis and goals defined for national basic education and global education, to assess the implementation of the GE 2010 Programme in Finnish comprehensive schools, and to investigate the possibilities for further development of global education in Finland. This article concentrates on the last goal: the two previous ones are discussed in Pudas (2009).

The research was conducted as a longitudinal study in a four-phase process: (1) Preliminary survey in the spring 2008, (2) Point-of-departure survey in the autumn 2008, (3) Intermediate survey in the autumn 2009, and (4) Final survey in the autumn 2010. The phases are presented in Table 1 and discussed in what follows.

Research method: Questionnaires

The study was conducted with the help of research questionnaires. The questionnaires consisted of multiple choice and open questions that allowed respondents to add individual comments. When respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a given statement or frequency or importance of

Table 1. The phases, respondents, and objectives of the research on global education in Finnish comprehensive schools lower level.

PHASE	RESPONDENTS	OBJECTIVE
1. Preliminary survey Spring 2008	Lower level comprehensive school principals (N=164) and teachers (N=31) (Total N=195 schools)	To investigate the situation of global education and the implementation of the GE 2010 Programme in Finnish comprehensive schools and to find schools for the research.
2. Point of departure Autumn 2008	Fourth grade pupils (N=274) and teachers (N=15)	To investigate the school and classroom activities from the global education perspective and the implementation of the GE 2010 Programme.
3. Intermediate Autumn 2009	Fifth grade teachers (N=8)	To investigate the implementation of global education perspectives in teaching; evaluating the current situation, resources, materials, and activities from a global education perspective.
4. Final Autumn 2010	Sixth grade pupils (N=61) and teachers (N=5)	To evaluate the success of the GE 2010 Programme. To evaluate the curricula, the resources, materials, and methods used in schools and classrooms from a global education perspective.

an activity, a Likert-type scale was used. Students were also given a neutral option 'I am not sure' or 'I don't know'. The Preliminary survey questionnaires were sent out with the help of an internet-based programme and in later phases of the study, questionnaires were sent as hard copies by mail directly to the participating schools.

All questions intended for the school principals or teachers were related either directly to the GE 2010 Programme or to the practices of a school, of a class or of a teacher from a global education perspective. Students' questions were either related to pupils' interests, hobbies, or attitudes and activities concerning school work or to selected concepts connected to global education (such as human rights, immigrants, peace, equality, fairness, and recycling).

Respondents

The Preliminary survey internet-based questionnaires were sent out in March 2008. The schools' email addresses were obtained with the help of each of the municipalities' chief officers responsible for education. It is somewhat difficult to calculate the exact number of emails sent to the schools and, consequently, the percentage of the answers obtained, because some chief officers chose not to forward the emails, and some email addresses were not up-to-date. However, it could be concluded that the percentage of answers was not very high: in Finland, there were 2953 basic education institutions using Finnish as the language of instruction in 2008 (Statistics Finland, 2008) and the questionnaires were completed by 164 schools (most often by the principal) and by 31 teachers. However, as the ultimate aim was to collect qualitative information, the low number of answers need not be considered a weakness. Based on the emails sent by some of the chief officers, one of the reasons for the low participation might be that the request was submerged under the overflow of emails and research requests that schools generally receive in Finland.

In the Preliminary survey, 23 fourth grades from different parts of the country volunteered for the study and the Point-of departure survey questionnaires were sent out to those schools in July-August 2008. The aim was to follow the same group of students and their teachers during three consecutive school years, till they finish their basic education lower level.

In this research, as is usual in the field of education, the respondents were chosen on a voluntary basis. However, it seems that not all schools and classes that volunteered to participate were truly committed, as only 15 classes out of 23 from 10 different schools returned the questionnaires. During the research period, the number of participating classes declined even further and from the initial 15 classes, only five classes answered and returned all questionnaires. The schools gave the following reasons for their cancellation, which support the postulation that the main problem was commitment: the Preliminary survey was filled in by a principal who volunteered for the study but the respective teacher did not consider participation important; a teacher who volunteered was no longer working with the

relevant grade level or had finished his or her work in the respective school and no other teacher wanted to take over the task; an increasing number of students who needed special education support occupied the teacher's time more than expected; or global education was simply perceived as a supplementary task for a teacher because it was not part of the National core curriculum for basic education (NCCBE), which is the only legally binding document for the schools, the national framework, on the basis of which all municipalities and schools are obliged to formulate their curriculum. One plausible problem related to commitment could also be purely attitudinal reasons: a possible biased attitude towards the issues related to and the importance given to global education. For example attitudinal reasons have been seen as much more important than any concrete reasons (excluding money and resources) for hindering the implementation of sustainable development in education in Finland (Rajakorpi and Salmio, 2001:160). In the Preliminary survey (as an answer to the question 'How important do you consider global education in your school context?') only two teachers (N=31) considered it to be 'very important' in their respective schools.

The findings regarding the school and class practice are grouped according to the following themes that arose from the answers collected: (1) The position of global education, (2) Global education training, (3) Global education teaching resources and materials, (4) School and class activities, and (5) Evaluation of global education. In what follows, when necessary, the number of respondents who participated in the survey or answered a particular question is given (N). It is important to note that all questionnaires were formulated, and also answers given, in Finnish. Therefore, in what follows, all examples are the researcher's translation from the original.

Main findings of the research

Position of global education

In line with the national evaluation discussed in the introduction, awareness and implementation of the GE 2010 have remained modest and uncoordinated in basic education institutions participating in this research. The answers of the Preliminary survey indicate that even though more than half of the respondents were aware of the programme, none of the schools had an existing global education action programme and none of the schools were drafting or even planning to draft one in the near future. Only 21 schools (N=195) had a team or a person responsible for the school's global education. One reason for the poor commitment reported is that currently the NCCBE does not include the concept of global education. When evaluating the concept as defined in the GE 2010 Programme, the respondents found that global education was very hard to conceive and thus, cannot easily be translated into action.

In this research, both the teachers and the principals saw the best practice for global education to be 'taught in regular school subjects when it can easily be integrated'

Table 2. Evaluation by Finnish basic education principals and teachers of the best practices for teaching global education, as defined in Global Education 2010 Programme in basic education institutions.

Global education should be taught...	Principals (N=163)	Teachers (N=29)	Total (N=192)
As a separate subject	4	1	5
In regular school subjects when it can easily be integrated	117	21	138
Organising theme days	101	20	121
Integrated in all school subjects	53	11	64
Integrated in all school activities	62	13	75
Part of optional extra-curricular activities	16	0	16
Other	Organising visits, field trips, concerts, arts, or sports events		

and organised separate ‘theme days’. The goals of ‘including global education in all school activities’, promoted by the MEC and suggested by education theories, and of ‘integrated global education in all school subjects’ were supported by less than half of the respondents. All answers are collected in Table 2 above.

The reasons the respondents give for not fully or even partially implementing global education suggest that the problems of commitment could be eliminated by clarifying the concept and by making global education part of NCCBE. The above will be studied later in this article.

Global education training

With regard to education and training received in the field of global education, it seems that there is a lot of room for improvement in Finland today. In the Preliminary survey, when asked about the training received in the area of global education, only eight principals (N=164) indicated that they had participated in training during the past 10 years. The training they had received varied from only one hour to two months. In the Intermediate survey (N=8), only one teacher had participated in global education training. The respective teacher had graduated in 2007 from a class teacher education programme that included a 15 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) course on Multicultural Studies.

From a ‘communities of practice’ perspective, global education training would be crucial. Successful communities of practice, as Wenger points out (2000:231) ‘depend on internal leadership, and enabling the leaders to play their role is a way to help the community develop.’ For example in Hampshire, England, the schools

that were most successful in fully implementing the children's rights education Rights, Respect and Responsibility (RRR) were those led by a head teacher who had received training in RRR and got support in delivering the programme, and was fully committed to the domain (Covell, Howe, and McNeil, 2010).

Instead of starting a long process of redrafting the whole national curriculum, which would take several years before it would be ready to be implemented at grass roots level, global education responsibility could be targeted at municipalities and head teachers (principals). Training school principals might be a practical option also in Finland, where municipalities are given significant liberties in communal decision-making, including in the education sector. Moreover, the decentralisation of leadership has placed the principal of the school in a crucial role: it is the obligation of the principal to oversee both administration and teaching of the school.

Teaching resources and materials

In answer to an open question 'What do you consider as your main challenges in implementing global education?' the respondents mostly reported the lack of resources. This was associated not only with the lack of knowledge and experience in the field but also with the lack of concrete material (mainly referring to ready-made material that could easily be obtained or printed text books) that could be used to enhance learning. Even though the national evaluation report concluded that global education material is abundant and publicly available on the internet, it also recognised that it is not widely used in schools and classrooms (MEC, 2011:51-52). In this research, many of the respondents reported a lack of adequate information technology (IT), especially concerning the quantity and access to the school computers and to the internet, which could partially explain the above.

In general, text books and teacher resource books were seen as clear and helpful guidebooks for all the subjects they were used for. This finding is not surprising as already previous research has shown that most Finnish basic education institutions use printed school books as main resources in teaching (Korkeakoski, 2001). The above is particularly interesting in a country where the NBE made a decision to discontinue inspecting school books in 1992. The act has given more responsibility, and also much more liberty, to school book editors and writers. The topics covered and the perspectives taken – and especially those topics not covered, and the perspectives not taken – in the books would be an important and interesting issue to investigate. Especially when, interestingly, the subjects where school books are most widely in use, at least in this research, are also the focus subjects (mathematics, science, and literacy) in PISA studies where Finland has performed extremely well in past years. (For PISA results, see Centre of Education Assessment, 2006.)

School and class activities

In line with the communities of practice, the NCCBE and the GE 2010 Programme both emphasise action as a means to build knowledge, skills and understanding in the domain. There is, however, a fundamental difference in how the above documents perceive the process. Even though the GE 2010 document recognises global education as ‘a social practice’ (Council of Europe, 2008:17), it suggests the direction should be ‘from knowledge and consciousness to action’ (Council of Europe, 2008: 30) which seems to be somewhat in contrast to the fundamental idea of the communities of practice. The GE 2010 document is, however, a political document that does not support its views and content with any particular theory, but should be taken rather as a framework for organising the school activities.

In the Point-of departure survey, the teachers evaluated how often their teaching includes a) knowledge, b) skills and c) interaction based activities in each global education sector. The answers were grouped as follows: semester-wise or yearly = seldom (S), monthly or weekly = occasionally (O), and daily = regularly (R). The grouping was based on teachers’ evaluations and on examples the teachers gave for each sector. ‘S’ best corresponds with separate theme days, ‘O’ means bringing the matter up during a specific subject lessons and ‘R’ relates to ‘implementing global education in all school activities’. The answers are grouped in Table 3 and discussed below.

Based on the answers of respondents, the activities were divided into the five following themes: (1) activities inside the school (internal), (2) activities in the school’s surroundings (internal/external), (3) cross-border activities (external), (4) participa-

Table 3. Finnish comprehensive school grade 4 teachers’ (N=15) evaluation of how much they concentrate on giving knowledge, developing skills and including interaction-based activities in their teaching related to the Global Education 2010 Programme sectors (S=seldom, O=occasionally, R=regularly).

Sector	Human rights			Equality and equity			Peace			Media			Cross-cultural understanding			Development and fairness			Sustainable development		
Evaluation	Action	Skills	Knowledge	Action	Skills	Knowledge	Action	Skills	Knowledge	Action	Skills	Knowledge	Action	Skills	Knowledge	Action	Skills	Knowledge	Action	Skills	Knowledge
S	6	6	6	5	3	2	6	6	6	3	2	1	7	7	6	7	6	5	6	5	5
O	7	6	8	5	7	7	7	7	7	11	12	12	7	7	8	6	6	6	5	8	9
R	2	1	3	4	5	5	2	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	2	4	2	1

tion in the activities of international organisations and/or other organisations (external) and (5) other school or class projects including internet-based activities (external). Most activities mentioned were internal; organised by the school, in the school. Some activities can be considered as internal/external because even though they happened in the school surroundings, they included outside professionals such as people from local fire department, police, and city library. Occasional activities beyond the walls of the school included visits to other comprehensive schools or to local enterprises. External cross-border activities were mainly regular correspondence with sister school students and European Union (EU) projects such as Comenius (also mainly correspondence), eTwinning (an internet-based European online school community programme: [i](#) and [edu2.0](#) (virtual school portal)²).

In line with communities of practice, the focus area in this research is regular action, or regular interaction. At this point, it is relevant to point out that in Finland all basic education teachers and principals are required to have a university Master's degree in education, which is one reason the teachers are given great liberty in organising their teaching, including choosing teaching resources and methods. As seen in Table 3, teachers estimated their teaching activities to include action within global education sectors most often as 'occasionally' or even 'seldom'. 'Seldom' answers included such action-based activities as school-wide recycling days and participation in Finnish Red Cross's Operation Hunger Day and UN Day.

Moreover, respondents were asked to evaluate which of the above action-based activities they considered successful and what, in their opinion, made this activity a successful one. All activities the respondents described as 'successful' were related to activities in which students actively took part. Students were reported to be 'really motivated' and 'enthusiastic about' such activities as weekly class discussions on topics related to global education sectors; environmental and recycling activities organised in collaboration with the surrounding community; collaboration projects with another class in a foreign school (eTwinning) that three classes participated in; receiving visitors and making different topic-related visits outside the school; and communicating (mostly writing email letters) with the students in their respective sister schools. The above examples can all be considered as class activities (rather than all-school activities) and they could be found in the teachers' as well as in the respective students' answers.

In the research, the most positive experiences were seen to be gained through activities where students were interacting as part of a community, which strongly supports the theoretical background and is in line with findings in other education research. For example, the RRR initiative discussed earlier shows the importance and power of a community and a practice: when elementary school-aged children's education about their rights happened in a rights-respecting classroom and school, they showed 'an adult-like understanding' of the nature of rights as an entitlement

to fair treatment and a responsibility to respect the rights of others (Covell, Howe, and McNeill, 2000). The RRR findings also demonstrated increasing improvements in children's behaviours and attitudes over a three-year period. Moreover, research into pupils' social concerns (Deuchar, 2008), conducted during a primary school final year in Scotland, revealed that while students were actively participating in investigating their immediate environment, they had a growing awareness of social and environmental issues and were genuinely concerned about their community. Although focusing on local issues, the pupils also demonstrated a very strong ability to establish links between these issues and more global concerns about sustainability.

The teachers' focus on knowledge and skills in Finland can at least partially be explained by the fact that in all school subjects, the criteria for final evaluation after the nine-year basic education schooling highlight knowledge and skills, and place much less focus on aspects such as understanding or perception (Suutarinen, 2000: 45). When the final evaluation reflects the skills and knowledge gained throughout the basic education, this might entice teachers to move the focus away from areas that are important goals of global education but more difficult to measure. However, if skills and knowledge are not linked to practice, learning as understood within communities of practice (experiencing the world and our engagement with it as meaningful) has no basis to realise and the skills and knowledge will not be linked to the aims of global education.

Evaluation of global education

According to the GE 2010 Programme, the best way to evaluate global education is to evaluate 'the social effectiveness of the programme' through which the content and methods of global education could be developed (Ministry of Education, 2007). From the state's point of view, it is natural that a national education programme is evaluated in terms of its cost and effectiveness. However, from a communities of practice point of view, an important question needs to be answered before making any final evaluation: Who has the power to decide what kind of activities will guide, support and help students acquire resources to enhance greater justice and equity and human rights in the world? Who has ownership of the knowledge? (Raivola, 2002; Berlak, 2000; Greene, 2000). As discussed earlier, from the communities of practice perspective, learning needs to be evaluated against the community's understanding of what knowledge is: it is not mainly about what kind of content and methods are included and excluded in the programme but about 'whose subjective perspective' is made 'objective' (Greene, 2000:983). The main aim of the current research is to find practical solutions for the implementation of the GE 2010 Programme. However, unless we accept that the community has ownership of the knowledge, we treat education as the acquisition of externally determined know-

ledge, skills, values, and practices ('to as many pupils as possible') and the different aspects of the programme itself remain unquestioned (Young, 1998:26).

When global education is defined as a process, it is also important to evaluate the teaching and learning processes related to and resources used for global education. The pre-described goals can actually be measured only in the distant future – provided that the relevant evaluation procedures or measuring tools are established. Moreover, when evaluating the social effectiveness of the GE 2010 Programme, a causal relationship between 'the outcome' and 'the process' needs to be established (Raivola, 2002). By neglecting the evaluation of the process itself, there could be a danger that some (or many) unpredicted factors that affect the outcome of the process could be overlooked. By focusing on the end of the process, the emphasis is actually on what global education is for, rather than on any notion of global education having some kind of value for its own sake (Kelly, 1989:175). As for example Kelly (1989:189) reminds us, we should evaluate the value aspect of a curriculum by asking 'whether the purposes of the activity are the right purposes', 'whether the experience offered to pupils is of educational value', and 'whether the curriculum is good in itself rather than merely being 'delivered' effectively.'

I argue that most if not all concerns related to the current state of global education could be addressed by evaluating global education against the three fundamental elements: the domain, the community, and the practice. Only through evaluating these elements can we comfortably suggest whether the education process has a base for learning: in order for learning to happen in all four dimensions (doing, belonging, experiencing, and becoming), all elements need to be present in the process. The prerequisite for any community, and thus for any potential learning, is the shared domain which seems to be the main problem in Finnish basic education schools today. The respondents seemed to perceive the current problem rather well. In the Preliminary survey, the respondents considered the most important evaluation areas to be the following: (1) The school curriculum, (2) The teaching resources, and (3) The teaching methods. These areas will be studied in what follows.

A school curriculum that includes global education principles could help create the currently missing domain, and thus facilitate the creation of a community (the class and the whole school) and enhance the commitment of the community to the issues of global education. Currently, the Finnish NCCBE includes some pre-specified content, goals and cross-curricular themes related to global education, such as cultural identity and internationalism; media skills and communication; participative citizenship and entrepreneurship; and responsibility for the environment, well-being, and a sustainable future (NBE, 2004:36-41). Moreover, the underlying values defined for national basic education include such things as human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability, and the endorsement of multiculturalism (NBE, 2004). The above is nothing extraordinary

in a 21st century educational document, but, based on the findings presented above, it is clearly not enough to facilitate the commitment to global education principles. For example Louhimaa (2005:221) argues that according to her research findings, including environmental education in the objectives of basic education in 1980s-1990s was more like a formality that resulted from external pressures, such as public discussions about environmental protection and cultural values. How, then, could the national curriculum be developed in order not to include global education as another formality that results from external pressure?

An evaluation that includes the value aspect can be done for example with the help of multicultural education dimensions suggested by Lynch (1989:xviii). Although Lynch originally divided the dimension into three, I would suggest taking 'economic' as a separate dimension, as this division would allow us to better include the GE 2010 Programme perspective in the examination. The four dimensions are as follows:

- (1) Cultural commonalities dimensions: the curriculum includes areas such as tolerance, understanding and intercultural competences, cultural diversity and interdependence, human values, rights, duties and responsibilities.
- (2) Social commonalities dimensions: the curriculum includes such areas as human justice and equality, responsible citizenship and consumerism, fairness at local, national and international levels, and constitutional democracy.
- (3) Economic commonalities: the curriculum includes such areas as economic responsibility, economic-environmental interdependence and interaction.
- (4) Environmental commonalities: the curriculum includes such areas as human-human, and human-ecosystem interdependence, pollution, conservation of human, animal and biosphere species.

Teaching resources are expected to support the school curriculum and are directly linked to the four dimensions of learning. Thus, they should be evaluated against them: appropriate resources create a basis for a community's action and facilitate participation in practice. Moreover, it is important to define to what extent the global education principles will be included in the school curriculum; how much emphasis the school will place on internal, external, and lifetime of students dimensions.

As the lifetime of students focuses beyond the national schooling period, the schools and the teachers can only assume what might be the possible topics of continuing interest to the students currently going through their first six years of education. We cannot, however, base an evaluation process on assumptions and on 'trial and error'. In order for all members to have equal access to resources after adding an external dimension possibly means access to an appropriate quality and quantity of IT equipment, with appropriate knowledge and skills. Moreover, it

would be worth considering publishing teacher resource books in the field, provided that the topics and perspectives they include could be evaluated beforehand from global education perspective.

What are the teaching methods that best encourage participation, and thus enhance learning of the varied issues related to global education? Even though accepting that it is not necessary for all members to participate equally, it would not be wise to choose methods that only 5-6 students find motivating and encouraging enough to result at least in increased active participation. Even though the respondents of the research presented in this article encountered difficulties in the area of commitment to the domain and creation of the community, many of them had, nonetheless, managed to create separate positive learning experiences with their classes. All successful experiences were related to actions in which the students actively took part (either internal or external). Moreover, as discussed above, the successful RRR project, for example, was connected with children's daily lives and current realities. From a communities of practice point of view, organisation of educational experiences (school and class activities) is crucial, as experiences have potential to both sustain and challenge prevailing views of knowledge. Learning should be evaluated against knowledge that is 'accomplished in the collaborative work of teachers and pupils' (Young, 1998:27-28).

Starting communities of practice to develop global education

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002:196-203) suggest the following steps to be used to start a successful community of practice: Preparing, Launching, Expanding, Consolidating, and Transforming. Even though the suggestion is made for and implemented by the experts in the business environment, the same steps can easily be used in other educational environments.

The research discussed in this article already partially serves as a preparation phase: the aim is to lay foundations for the community of practice by assessing the current conditions and identifying possible areas where the domain is uncoordinated. This, it is suggested, could be done either by analysing existing competencies and processes currently in use, or by interviewing practitioners (in this case; principals, teachers, and students) to gain their insights into the subject, their knowledge of and their level of commitment to the domain. Some findings and suggestions for action planning have already been discussed in this article.

The aim of the second phase is to find the potential members to form a community and to make sure there is enough willingness and support from the school to commit to the domain. Especially in terms of financial support, training, and resources, the concept of community should naturally also include the municipalities, the MEC, and the NBE. A launch is not necessarily limited to a small number of pilot

classes; several communities could, or, as Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) suggest, should be launched simultaneously.

As soon as the communities of practice are in operation, it is time to expand the community by integrating multiple communities of practice, as well as possible individual practitioners and external partners throughout the field. After expansion, it is time to consolidate the communities of practice by making sure the overall function of smaller communities of practice, such as separate classes, are integrated with other functions at school, and by aligning the school curriculum to support them.

In this model, it would only be in the last phase that the practice would be transformed into national global education policies and included into NCCBE. In order to avoid including global education as another formality in education policies, and to support the transformation and social action approach, we could, with the help of communities of practice, focus 'on practices in a concrete and specific way' and help make 'those practices accessible for reflection, discussion, and reconstruction as products of past circumstances that are capable of being modified in and for present and future circumstances' (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000:596).

Conclusion

This article discussed recent research on global education in Finnish basic education lower level (first six years of education) and the investigation of integration of communities of practice with the current Finnish global education guidelines and practices. The current guidelines and practices were examined under the following five themes: (1) The position of global education, (2) Global education teaching resources and materials, (3) Global education training, (4) School and class activities, and (5) Evaluation of global education. As a summary, it was argued that the 'communities of practice' approach has a lot of potential to help develop Finnish global education practices and policies.

Even though half the respondents were aware of the GE 2010 Programme, the arguments presented in this article suggest that one of the main hindrances in implementing global education guidelines in Finnish basic education is a poor commitment to the domain. Even though published by the MEC, global education (as defined in the GE 2010 Programme) is not part of NCCBE and was not implemented in any official school curriculum participating in the research; and thus was not perceived as part of the teachers' regular workload.

The poor level of commitment was also related to the lack of appropriate resources: as global education was not part of the school curriculum, the target schools were not resourced to create practice related to global education. The respondents expressed their deficiency regarding knowledge and experience in the field, and very few of them had received any training related to global education. Without adequate

resources, the community was evidently not able to create meaningful experiences to bind the members of the community together.

Current activities related to global education at participating schools were mostly related to individual skills development and knowledge building, and only in some cases included action to give space for interaction. It can be argued that the skills and knowledge the teachers mainly focused on are not the real aims of global education, but merely tools to achieve the aim – that is, in the end, to enhance justice, equity and human rights in the world. Interestingly, the respondents seemed to recognise the above problem when they suggested the evaluation of global education should be done, not by evaluating the skills and knowledge they currently teach, but by evaluating the school curriculum, the teaching resources and teaching methods used at school from a global education perspective.

As discussed in the article, even though bound by the NCCBE, decentralisation expects the municipalities and schools to draft their own curricula and allows them to choose the perspective they want to take when planning their school practices and policies. The school principals especially are in a crucial role in implementing any educational activities in their schools. However, at the moment, it seems that not many of them have the knowledge and experience in global education as defined by the MEC. It would be natural to expect the respective municipality to be in charge of providing appropriate training for the school administration on global issues. When the national objective is to include the global education perspective in major education policy lines, the financial and professional support should come from the MEC which, by law, is already responsible for separate educational programmes in Finland.

For the global education development process, the article considered following the steps suggested by Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) and starting global education by creating communities of practice, only at the end transforming the best practices into the NCCBE. Taking communities of practice as a framework ensures that the policies would reflect current society and that the practice would focus on the learning process at the present time, and not so much on goals in the distant future. In order for the programme to be successful, however, there needs to be unity between the defined competence areas of the programme and the context in which the process takes place. When learning is evaluated against the community's understanding about knowledge, it is important that the administration as well as teachers and principals (the internal leadership) have a clear understanding not only of the programme but also of the changing economic, political, and cultural contexts within which education takes place. Only then will the desired learning have the potential to take place.

Although the context of the research discussed in this article is Finland, the findings have wider relevance. As discussed in this article, 'communities of practice' has

already been successfully used as a framework in other development projects, including in the education sector.

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Notes

1 This can be accessed on www.etwinning.net

2 This can be accessed www.edu20.org.

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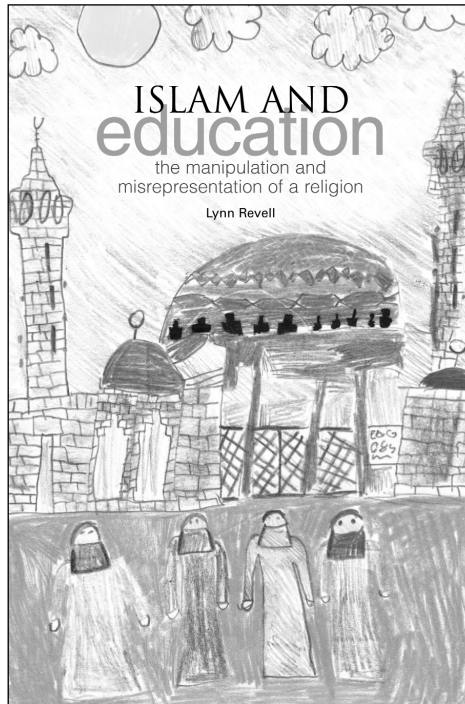
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