

Equity vs. Ethic Literacy – Socio-Educational Dilemma in the Case of Pandemic Finland, Autumn 2020

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ABSTRACT

This case study aimed to comprehend socio-educational policy in the light of pandemic ethic literacy in Finland. Consequently, methodologically the official, public, and ethic research data were triangulated to analyze the Ministry's understanding on educational equity in Finland. Discussion involved global pandemic ethic principles (transparency, participation, review and revisability). Hermeneutic methodology revealed imbalances. Ministry of Education and Culture failed regionally, as well as qualitatively, in its quantitative by-the-book policy. As the main finding, pandemic ethics were generally ignored by the Ministry. Ethic principles were not recognized – or were neglected. Furthermore, Ministry's decision-making was unconditional, instead of being participatory and revising. Lacking transparency was revealed in rhetoric of "several" children, or probable "likelihood", without argumentation. However, the policy could have been revisable with increasing evidence. Epistemic imbalances and hermeneutic injustice occurred regionally and qualitatively. Those involved all, both the vulnerable, and gifted pupils. Finally, the policy created inequity, adding ageist and racist elements in southern country. Moreover, the Ministry repeatedly acted against its vision. While Ministers, and responsible authorities, should update their "hidden" curriculum, regional policies and Covid-19 variants deserve further studies.

Key words: Pandemic Ethics, Socio-educational Policy, Basic Education, Equity, Hermeneutic Justice, Epistemic Injustice

INTRODUCTION

Aim, Importance and Research Question of the Study

The goal of this qualitative country case study was to comprehend the socio-educational equity in the light of global pandemic ethics on Ministry level. Finland was selected for two reasons. First, it had a successful Covid-19 first wave socio-educational response (Loima, 2020b). Second, regardless of successful mitigation in the spring 2020, country made a socio-educational U-turn during the summer 2020, following debated Swedish policies (Folh somyndigheten, 2020; Hyv rinen, 2020; Nieminen, 2020; Vogel, 2021b; cf. Bramble, 2020). Consequently, a must – as announced "equal right" – for basic education contact-teaching in autumn 2020 was declared by the Minister of Education, Ms. Andersson and the Finnish National Agency of Education (FNAE) in August 2020 (Andersson, 2020; Andersson n.d.; FNAE 2020a; Heinonen, n.d.). Furthermore, a similar socio-educational policy was reconfirmed in January 2021 by the State Council (VN) despite emerging, more contagious virus variants (VN, 2021; YLE, 2021; cf. You & al., 2020; Davies et al., 2021). A possibility for short-termed regional non-pharmacological interventions (NPIs), occurred and was

locally used (Andersson, n.d.; City of Vaasa, 2021a, 2021b; FNAE, 2020a; VN, 2021; cf. ECDC, 2020a). However, socio-political U-turn appeared to be an unbalanced dilemma in the light of internationally recognized ethic pandemic literacy, research and concerns (Bramble, 2020; Capron, 2007; Fricker, 2013; H yry, 2021; Price, 2012).

The importance of the study arose, first, from governance ethics behind the socio-educational U-turn. As has been contributed, Swedish pandemic attack rates and fatalities got out of control in the spring term 2020. They caused the data failure, high infection and mortality rates (see Appendix 1), and finally a political turnover. A new pandemic legislation was confirmed in January 2021 for Sweden, while the infection and fatality rates still grew (Claeson & Hanson, 2020; Loima, 2020b; Vlachos et al., 2021; Expressen, 2021; Megner Arn, 2021; Vogel, 2021a). Second, the importance was linked to an occurring socio-educational trend of hermeneutic injustice. This meant favoring 'equity' of physically healthier families during the accelerating Covid-19 spread from late July-August onwards in Finland (Andersson, n.d.; VN, 2021; ECDC, 2020a; 2020b; Liviero, 2020; Roms  et al., 2020; cf. Bramble, 2020; Capron, 2007; Davies et al., 2021; Fricker, 2007, 2013; Harris, 1987; You & al., 2020).

The socio-educational dilemma was formulated into a research question (RQ):

What kind of educational equity comprehension – and ethical principles – the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOE) presented in planning, instructing and deciding the 2020 pandemic autumn period policy?

The Data, Methodology, Terminology and Limitations of the Study

The triangulated data comprised 1) contemporary information and instructions released by health organizations, officials, government, ministries and educational authorities, 2) international research and literacy on pandemic ethics, Covid-19, social injustice vs. justice, decision-making and moral, education and NPIs, 3) media statements and news, and 4) public discussions of stakeholders and active citizens. The last source of data remained anonymous.

Qualitative hermeneutic approach was the methodological choice. It suited well to increased multiple dimensions and altering viewpoints, as well as *a posteriori* option to update the cumulative data growth during the discussion process (Downing, 2004; Patton, 2014; Peim, 2018; Price, 2015; Van Manen, 2006; Vogel, 2021b). Initially, this approach had enabled interdisciplinary analysis on Covid-19 country case comparisons of Sweden and Finland, spring 2020 (Loima, 2020b; cf. Price, 2015).

A priori hermeneutic data triangulation effected the study composition. Triangulated discussion continued through the whole study from the very beginning. No separate discussion chapter(s) were thus needed, albeit chapters' first-row titles were sectorized into hermeneutic "circles" after the introduction to engage readers (Downing, 2004; Van Manen, 2006). Followingly, references were constructed to offer more insights to on-going debate for interested readers, aiming to make the triangulation layers more insightful. As a visible result, alphabetical order exceptions in APA references came from 'compare for' (cf.) additions for deeper triangulation debate. Outside of the RQ, circles may naturally reach other hermeneutics.

Methodologically, the RQ was triangulated via internationally contributed pandemic ethics, human rights, epistemic justice and injustice, and related legislation (Bramble, 2020; Flicker, 2007; 2013; Kauppinen, 2018; United Nations (UN), 1948; WHO, 2017, n.d.). In addition, the international research apparatus was used to clarify the obscured "rights and equity" in pandemic circumstances during the predicaments towards under-aged population in August 2020 – January 2021 (Andersson, n.d.; FNAE, 2020a; VN, 2021; WHO, 2017, n.d.; cf. Bramble, 2020; Davies et al., 2021; Fricker, 2007; Häyry, 2021; UN, 1948, n.d.; You et al., 2020). Finally, the selected methodology included the observation of epistemic and hermeneutic injustice in pandemic socio-educational decision-making (Fricker, 2007, 2013; Harris, 1987; Patton, 2014; cf. Kauppinen, 2018; Liveriero, 2020; Price, 2012, 2015).

Terminologically, Finnish *basic education* meant here a year of compulsory pre-primary education and nine years of compulsory education for all children, who stay in Finland,

including asylum seekers with their additional/optional year of preliminary teaching (Basic Education Act (BEA), 1998; FNAE, 2018; Loima, 2020a). Furthermore, pupils' *equity* in this research meant equal, but also individually adjusted rights to participate – and thus get – free basic education. In addition, educational equity included individual (*enhanced* or *special needs*) support and learning arrangements when/if needed, which were written into the legislation (BEA, 1998; cf. Constitution of Finland, 1999; FNAE, 2018; Finnish Core curriculum, 2014; cf. Dede, 2010; Loima, 2020a). Apart from some international practices, enhanced and special-needs support aimed not to segregate, but to integrate learners into learning contexts and Finnish society (BEA, 1998; FNAE, 2014). Instead of more medical *social distancing*, this study applied *physical distancing* to mean the same NPI (WHO, 2017; cf. You et al., 2020). Aim was an adequate physical distance to prevent transmission. Apart from previous terms, *hermeneutic injustice* occurs, when a subject who already is hermeneutically marginalized (e.g., health risk, disability, poverty, immigration, intelligence, highly talented/skilled) is "thereby put into an unfair disadvantage" (Fricker, 2007, 2013; cf. Bramble, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Dede, 2010; Gardner, 1999; Gardner, 2000; Liveriero, 2020).

Limitations of this study were mainly administrative and statistical. First, there had not been adequate transparency in pandemic governmental decision-making structures or memoranda, neither in e-mails of the Prime Minister's Office (Mörttinen, 2021). Similar lack of documents took place in socio-educational sector (Andersson, n.d.; Ministry of Education (MOE), 2020a; cf. THL, n.d.; cf. Häyry, 2021). As was declared by the Office of Chancellor of Justice (OKV, 2020a) and reported by the Finnish Innovation Fund, the governance transparency and publicity were selectively restricted and decision-making roles got obscured, or mixed (cf. OKV, 2020b; Mörttinen, 2021). Consequently, concerned citizens have not been able to monitor preparative, public policy files carefully enough to comprehend various, crisscrossing – and changing – pandemic NPI 'recommendations' launched by "recommending" (without authority) or supervising (authorized) authorities and the Government in August 2020-January 2021.

Further limitations were the reliability and validity of the pandemic data, which were not regionally properly collected by responsible educational providers and health care units. Countrywide, the Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare (THL) kept records of exposures and ensured infections at schools with a delay of 2-4 weeks. Reliability of these official records was based on local tracking policy, which may – or may not – have tested all the exposures (THL, 2021c). Timelines were obscure, as well. Another reliability problem were the data criteria changes that THL made several times (THL, n.d.). In terms of the regional data transparency, the biggest educational provider Helsinki City alone had 29.1% of all registered corona infections by early January 2021 (Helsinki City, 2021; THL, 2021a, 2021b). Irrespective of this, the Helsinki school exposure, quarantine and infected student data reached only two weeks backwards in statistics, while the criteria of exposures were locally changed in late

November not to include pupils from the same classroom but only next chair peers (Helsinki City, 2020, 2021; cf. Sivonen, n.d.; Romsis et al., 2020). Consequently, a big drop in reported exposures was evident. No adequate testing took place (cf. ECDC, 2020a, 2020b). Meanwhile, the classroom size in most schools followed standards from 1970s, not allowing physical distancing recommendations in regular classrooms as instructed (Act 1112/1978). These shortages made Helsinki City statistics – as well as the whole country-wide data – incomparable, reducing the administration transparency and publicity, which were based on other relevant legislation (Act 621, 1999; cf. ECDC, 2020b; ECDC, 2020c; Kauppinen, 2018). To construct a more analytical hermeneutic frame, the data collections of (data) analyst individuals – and associations – were monitored to support official records without classifying the “good/bad” data (altistumiset.fi, n.d.; cf. Price, 2012, 2015; Vogel, 2021b). Further limitation was space. Regional educational policies with Covid-19 variants, including NPIs and masks, will need their own studies.

Previous Studies, Related Literature and Country Case Background

Pandemic socio-educational ethics have not been researched in Finland, neither in the EU. European Scientific Ethics Group (EGE) had no research papers (EGE, 2020). In communication ethics, Häyry (2021) has discussed pandemic communication from ethic perspective and truthfulness. He summarized that governments cannot tell the health utilitarian truth during the pandemic crisis (Häyry, 2021). Pihlström (2021) contributed on obscuring social ethics and increased focus on egocentrism, while others may suffer (Pihlström, 2021). Excluding ethics, peer-reviewed pandemic socio-educational policy papers were limited into a comparative study of Sweden and Finland (Loima, 2020b). Approaching the data design ethics, Sweden’s schools’ transmission risks for teachers and guardians were studied by February 2021 with a broader data design than mere ICU admission or mortality rates. Nearly half a million cases revealed that mask-free teaching doubled the risk of teachers, and added 29% risk for spouses, while parents/guardians of non-masked or non-quarantined schools had 17% higher risk (Vlachos et al., 2021; cf. Vogel, 2021a). Earlier Swedish report had concluded on the children’s/teachers’ ICU admission data, leaving household transmissions and outbreaks out. Subsequently, an editorial debate on the data took place in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (Ludvigsson et al., 2021; Vogel, 2021b).

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom, education policy and NPIs were discussed in a more traditional way of social inequity and citizens’ future expectations (e.g., Breslin, 2021; Briggs et al., 2020; cf. Liveriero, 2020). In the US, researchers already approached the pandemic ‘new normal’ pedagogy, new learning dimensions and assessment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Adding a view more, moral decision-making was also applied to monitor the essence and hermeneutics of socio-educational policy (Price, 2012, 2015).

In the practical socio-educational follow-up, Finnish Education Evaluation Center (FINEEC) presented slides

from the school data from the spring and autumn 2020. Conclusions on student welfare services revealed shortage on availability during the distance teaching period March-May 2020. Learning in basic education had been successful enough (n=1,792 basic education students, 400 teachers/guidance counselors, 114 principals, FINNEEC, 2020; cf. Loima, 2020b). Deeper comparisons or minority issues from pandemic ethical viewpoints were not documented (FINEEC, 2020; cf. Linnanmäki, 2006). The Ministry of Education collected questionnaire data from 58,000 basic education students about remote teaching period, and autumn 2020 (MOE, 2020b) without respect to ethics. Most of the pupils (66%) had experienced remote teaching as a positive experience, 90% had their own device, and 94% own working space. More than half told that no additional support was needed, while 26% told they needed less. Remaining 21% expressed increasing needs of more support (MOE, 2020b).

Regarding pandemic ethics, academically agreed *pandemic response ethics* have internationally underlined ethical concerns in post-SARS-1 (2003-4) collaboration as following: 1) equitable access (to health care), 2) ethics of public health actions (surveillance and information of outbreaks and controlling acts), 3) obligations of health care workers and those of the society towards them, and 4) inter-governmental obligations among countries (Capron, 2007; cf. Bramble, 2020; WHO, n.d.). Consequently, pandemic responses have further *ethic principles*. This study took two combinations, which were related to Finnish socio-educational policy and legislation: *transparency and participation*, as well as *review and revisability*. First, it is not enough to be transparent, but stakeholders (citizens) ought to be involved in the formulation and adaptation of processes. Those concerned everyone in pandemics. The more their involvement was enabled, the better the response. Second, ethical *review and revisability* meant that “*stakeholders have a way to appeal policies after they have been adopted*” (Capron, 2007; cf. Liveriero, 2020). Moreover, the whole processes should enable policies to be reconsidered and revised according to experiences (Capron, 2007; cf. Kauppinen, 2018). On the other hand, this meant that also pandemic causal decision-making and argumentation should be participatory and revised along with gaining evidence (Capron, 2007; Price, 2012; cf. Vogel, 2021a, 2021b). With respect to all the previous, Kauppinen’s contribution on practical reasoning theories added an interesting angle for those pandemic policy decisions, which were based on ‘by-the-book’ rules and logic (THL, 2021c; Kauppinen, 2018; Liveriero, 2020; Price, 2012).

This pair of pre-Covid-19 pandemic era ethic principles were discussed also in the light of recent Covid-19-related analyses. To start with, Australian Bramble addressed a pre- vs. post-pandemic ethical dilemma in relation to the human rights of future generations with their opportunities to enjoy a full emotional happiness. He formulated followingly:

“*Could our young and healthy people truly enjoy eating out again, going back to the movies, the gym, big sporting events, knowing that as a consequence [...]*”

many other people will become severely ill and die?” (Bramble, 2020, p. 18).

Considering the possible “yes”, the author concluded that something was ethically wrong in education. A “yes” would indicate that younger (as well as any) generation had lost some of the most sensitive moral and ethical senses the humans had (Bramble, 2020; cf. Harris, 1987). From this viewpoint of ethical and moral decision-making, Bramble seemed to prioritize early reasoning, pandemic causality and responsiveness, since there was no full-covering evidence available, neither time to collect the ‘randomized controlled trial’ (RCT) data (Bramble, 2020; Price, 2012; cf. Kauppinen, 2018). Moreover, Bramble’s ethical approach did not see citizens, or under-aged children as helpless objects of (democratic) decision-making but elevated them to participatory, conscious subjects (Bramble, 2020; Liveriero, 2020).

In the national follow-up of equity and children, the Ministry of Social and Health Services of Finland (STM) published reports on children’s well-being. Initial estimations (June 2020) indicated that children should not be treated homogeneously, but the mostly vulnerable ones should be found and, subsequently, supported (STM, 2020a; cf. Harris, 1987). Final report in January 2021 proposed a) systematic (here also ‘causal’) child-teenager-family observation chains, b) hearing and targeted support practices, c) accurate data collection and more support for most vulnerable children, d) separate budgeting for post-crisis activities to promote their rights (STM, 2021). While children’s rights were emphasized, the observation data and reports relied on “likelihood” in learning inequity with no other references than probability (possible causality) of that (STM 2020, 2021; cf. Bramble, 2020; Liveriero, 2020; Price, 2012). There were other data available but sectorized state administration did not collaborate enough for systematical reviews, as SITRA report stated (Loima, 2020b; MOE, 2020b; Mörntinen, 2021; STM, 2020; 2021; cf. Gestrin-Hagner, 2021). Accordingly, the other data were not utilized.

Bramble also took Sweden, and ‘herd immunity’ into an ethic example. He stated that ‘herd’ policy would make Swedes harder and increase disability for future happiness. During pandemics, citizens may lose sensitive human values that enable compassion and, consequently, resourceful happiness. In brief, hardening decisions about (others’) rights to live would make emotionally harder citizens (Bramble, 2020; Häyry, 2021; Kauppinen, 2018; cf. Ludvigsson et al., 2021; Price, 2012; Vogel, 2021b). Already in 1980s, Harris concluded that the Quality Adjusted Life Year (QALY) was a “fatally flawed setting” for priorities in sharing limited health resources. ‘QALYfying’ had ageist, racist, sexist, and (double) jeopardy characteristics, misleading public opinion and resources from the basic human value of any life itself (Harris, 1987; cf. Kauppinen, 2018; Liveriero, 2020; Ludvigsson et al., 2021).

Mid-conclusively, herd immunity policy, as well as lockdowns and restrictions, seemed to occur as crucial ethical

turning points to discuss, leading easily further to an increasing, essential epistemic inequality in socio-educational decision-making (Fricker, 2007, 2013; Häyry, 2021; Liveriero, 2020; cf. Kauppinen, 2018; Ludvigsson et al., 2021; Price, 2012; Vlachos et al., 2021). Additionally, another kind of hermeneutic imbalance, and inequity, may occur in society, when individual rights are assessed – and governed – as absolute and permanent ones, regardless of the pandemic concerns of ‘greatest good’ for all (Capron, 2007; Fricker, 2007, 2013; Liveriero, 2020; cf. Häyry, 2021; Harris, 1987; Ludvigsson et al., 2021). Constructive critics on Bramble’s book stated that in an early phase (August 2020) when it was published, there were no adequate data to support the trends he suggested (Lykkesov, 2020). In addition, OECD, UNICEF and WHO had published reports on education and children (OECD, 2020). On the other hand, Danish Lykkesov wrote her critics relying on OECD report from June (OECD, 2020), which was based on even earlier views. Later pandemic circumstances, and development, seemed to favor Bramble’s ethics. By January 2021, Swedish and Danish pandemic situations by-passed rapidly these earlier conclusions, as well as their sources. The epidemic policy outcomes in Denmark and/or Sweden, including the tender social injustice in decision-making, had not yet been as obvious in October 2020 compared with January 2021 (Lykkesov, 2020; Bramble, 2020; ECDC, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Fricker, 2007, 2013; Vestergren et al., 2021; Vlachos et al., 2021; Vogel, 2021a; cf. CDC, 2021; Kauppinen, 2018; Price, 2012; The Local, 2021; Copenhagen Post, 2021). Same trend took place in the other EU countries.

Meanwhile, the Finnish rising Covid-19 infection numbers, as well their speed, only slowed down during the school holidays in October and December 2020 – and in the very first holiday week of January 2020 (THL, 2021; YLE, 2021). As it came to NPI recommendations, like physical distancing, masks and hand hygiene, they seemed not to be enough to ‘flatten the curve’ without further closures along with emerging virus variants, which spread rapidly by late January to mid-February (THL, 2021; YLE, 2021; cf. CDC, 2021; Gestrin-Hagner, 2021; Kissler et al., 2020; Ronsi et al., 2020; Vlachos et al., 2021). In addition to more contagious variants, the rare data updates with changed exposure criteria did not help the capital area risk group families on daily planning, or physical distancing, in necessary activities. Adults, children, as well as elderly ones had similar behavioral disadvantages due to the inadequate data for any evidence-based, or even casual, daily routine plans. In sum, all the capital area population faced hermeneutic inequity compared to other inhabited regions due to the lacking data updates and missing “hot spot” exposure alert information (Fricker, 2007; cf. altistumiset.fi, n.d.; Harris, 1987; Häyry, 2021; Liveriero, 2020; Price, 2012, 2015). With no respect to developing pandemic situation, capital area authorities seemed to have an obsession to repeat the same news of children week after another (Helsinki City, 2020; Vapaavuori, n.d.)

EQUITY AND ETHICS IN SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL PANDEMIC RESPONSE OF FINLAND, AUGUST 2020- JANUARY 2021

What was the Equity and Ethical Comprehension of the Ministry?

Ethics in decision-making and regional frame. The socio-educational pre-decision from Minister Andersson for the autumn 2020 school year was unconditional close-contact teaching, without an opportunity to proactively switch into remote arrangements, as was mentioned (Andersson, n.d.; FNAE, 2020a; MOE, 2020a). In brief, no pandemic ethic principles were included into that. Instead of being a democratic, ethically participatory, pandemic response guideline, it turned underaged children and their families into ‘powerless’ objects of questionably dictating democracy (Capron, 2007; Fricker, 2013; Häyry, 2021; Liveriero, 2020; cf. Vlachos et al., 2021). Opposite of spoken rhetoric, emphasis on children’s rights via their collective obligations – simultaneously underlining their role as objects – was an act of hermeneutic injustice. Furthermore, it also labeled their guardians, obscuring further the epistemic justice of population in various age groups (Bramble, 2020; Flicker, 2007; Harris, 1987; Liveriero, 2020).

As a regional NPI, a temporary distant teaching period could be designed in severe pandemic occasions, once the local education provider had consulted their pandemic medical authorities with mutual agreement, emphasized Minister (Andersson, n.d.; City of Vaasa, 2021a, 2021b; FNAE, 2020a; VN, 2021; cf. ECDC, 2020a; UN (b), n.d.). Minister’s rhetoric message for the autumn period 2020 was “joyful and safe learning” (Andersson, n.d.; FNAE, 2020a; MOE, 2020a). Bramble (2020), as well as Pihlström (2021), considered increasing obscurity in main issues (‘life and health’) and underlining pseudo-important details (‘hobbies and pleasure’) as serious signs of egocentric ethic imbalances and ignorance in a society (Bramble, 2020; Pihlström, 2021; cf. Vapaavuori, n.d.).

Specifically speaking, Minister’s decision-making was not based on casual pandemic reasoning, neither on academic evidence of safe schools nor areas, let alone proven inequity (MOE, 2020b; cf. STM, 2020, 2021). Ignoring argumentation, it further obscured the equity of education by ordering the same amount of participatory contact-teaching countrywide (Andersson, n.d.; Bramble, 2020; Capron, 2007; Häyry, 2020; MOE, 2020a, 2020b; cf. Fricker, 2007, 2013; Kauppinen, 2018; Price, 2012; Rogerson, 2021; Vogel, 2021a). In sum, the Ministry preferred normal life standards of participatory, compulsory education on a community level – without granting individual educational equity in pandemic circumstances (BEA, 1998; Capron, 2007). Notwithstanding Swedish report from 2020 with the data of only severe symptomized pupils (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020), there was a single Finnish preprint (late July 2020), which discussed school transmissions, including two incidents. The single pupil data was presented as an evidence of “limited transmission from children to adults” (Dub et al., 2020; cf. Vlachos et al., 2021). Apart from spoken

educational ‘equity’, occurred countrywide numbers of infected cases and risk group locations were regionally not similarly spread, showing regional and local imbalances (see Appendix 2) (altistumiset.fi, n.d.; MOE, 2020a; Bramble, 2020; Liveriero, 2020; cf. Fricker, 2007, 2013; MOE, 2020b; Price, 2012).

Qualitatively flawed ethics. In terms of equity, this quantitative by-the-book ‘equal model’ of Ministry failed both regionally and qualitatively. It increased children’s qualitative inequity in curricular sense, in addition to epistemic and pandemic imbalances. In addition, it also ignored the needs of gifted pupils, putting them into an externally compelled position of hermeneutic injustice as present – ethically non-necessary – objects of randomly emerging quarantines along with regional pandemic peaks. The gifted ones had a successful distant learning period and experiences from the spring, and their presence was provenly not a precondition for learning (FINEEC, 2020; MOE, 2020b; Loima, 2019; cf. Bramble, 2020; Fricker, 2013; Häyry, 2021; Liveriero, 2020; Finnish National Core Curriculum, 2014; Price, 2015; Rogerson, 2021).

Visionary contrast, qualitative, ageist and racist dilemma. From the viewpoint of sustainable ethical and moral decision-making, the Ministry itself produced contradictory data already in December from the good mainstream experiences of remote teaching spring 2020, as FINEEC also did simultaneously (FINEEC, 2020; MOE, 2020b; Liveriero, 2020; cf. MOE, 2020c). Conclusively, nationally framed (quantitative) decision-making process as described above, disabled transparency and active participation. The same happened to analytic reviews and revisability of stakeholders due to prior unconditional decision of *status quo* (Bramble, 2020; Capron, 2007; Kauppinen, 2018; Pihlström, 2021). Instead of equal governance, the Ministry reduced the curricular rights of individualized learning paths for pupils by favoring a community response, possibly even aiming to imaginary safe school and children’s immunity (BEA, 1998; Bramble, 2020; Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020; cf. CDC, 2021; Häyry, 2020; Liveriero, 2020; Vlachos et al., 2021; Vogel, 2021b; WHO, n.d.). Regarding the pandemic response, “compulsory” contact teaching with “recommended” NPIs gradually reduced overall commitment to proper response among citizens, as well (altistumiset.fi, n.d.; Helsingin Sanomat, 2020; cf. Häyry, 2021; Price, 2012; Teachers NN1-NN11, n.d.; Romsa et al., 2020; Vapaavuori, n.d.; Vlachos et al., 2021; Vogel, 2021b).

Instead of including, or ensuring, ethical review and revisability options, Minister’s categorical policy promoted regional, and ageist epistemic injustice: risk group families, or any other guardians had no sustainable proactive choices for compulsory close-contact teaching (Häyry, 2020; Liveriero, 2020; Price, 2012, 2015). Ageist and racist injustice will need to be pointed out as well, since capital area immigrant families were reported to be more heavily hit by pandemic (Pitkänen, 2020; cf. Harris, 1987; Liveriero, 2020; Pihlström, 2021). Putting aside their specific needs for pandemic information, comprehension and adjustment, the Ministry included all preliminary pupils to contact teaching. Respectfully, the Ministry acted against its’ visionary

promise of “knowledge-based guarantees”, emphasizing by-the-book policy outcomes despite of previously mentioned epistemic, regional, curricular and hermeneutic imbalances it tended to add (Bramble, 2012; Capron, 2007; Fricker, 2013; Liveriero, 2020; MOE, 2020c; Price, 2012, 2015). In fact, the first positive remote learning and teaching signals, which were based on a large national inquiry, were already revealed in May 2020 by media and University of Turku, but ignored only three months later (Liiten, 2020; Loima, 2020b; MOE, 2020b).

General inequity of ‘vulnerable’ pupils. The second main reason for the compulsory close-contact teaching had been the “several most vulnerable pupils” (Andersson, n.d.; FNAE, 2020a; MOE, 2020a; Vapaavuori, n.d.). In terms of socio-educational pandemic ethics, hermeneutic justice and epistemic injustice, it was essential to ask: what was ‘several’? Basic education pupil cohorts of the country, including only 9-year basic education, had some 560,000 pupils, when early childhood education or preliminary classes were not included. The mentioned numbers from 2019 were updated to official statistics (STAT) on January 3rd, 2020. The annual pupil data collection had been dated to mid-September to cover the consequent education budget year planning (STAT, 2020c; Niinimäki, n.d.). Apart from these numbers, 426, 000 upper secondary school and vocational education students were also originally included to close contact teaching (STAT, 2020c). In sum, this million – practically all of them – had a family, or guardian(s). In a utilitarian health and risk comparison, more than a million Finns belonged to a Covid-19 risk group, as well (see Appendix 2) (Capron, 2007; Harris, 1987; Häyry, 2021; Vlachos et al., 2021). In capital area alone, this meant more than 200,000 risk group people (see Appendix 2) (Capron, 2007; Fricker, 2007; Harris, 1987; Häyry, 2021; Liveriero, 2020).

Further review on the age cohorts (see Table 1.) indicated that the most vulnerable pupils in most cases had individual support decisions already made by educational organizers (Figure 1., below). This was based on the Act, in which the individual right for early support was emphasized (BEA, 1998). As shown in Figure 1, the special support decisions had included about 7-10% of whole cohort, while enhanced support (mostly arranged in the same class) had been a growing trend to deal with different learning obstacles. As the data revealed, 7-21% of the basic education cohorts were the ‘most vulnerable’ ones. In Ministry’s decision-making this minority was comprehended and turned into a compulsory close-contact mainstream of pupils, regardless of pedagogic ‘new normal’ research, digital ethics education, artificial intelligence (AI) applications and related news from abroad or from the domestic educational development field – not to mention teachers in social media. Opposing voices to “new normal” modernization came from “hidden” (socio-educational) curriculum agenda of Ministry, FNAE, and local authorities and guardians (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Dede, 2010; Gardner, 1999; Gordon, 2006; Rogerson, 2021; Sanoma Pro, n.d.; STAT, 2020a; Teachers NN1-11; cf. Andersson, n.d.; FNAE, 2021; MOE, 2020a; Vapaavuori, n.d.).

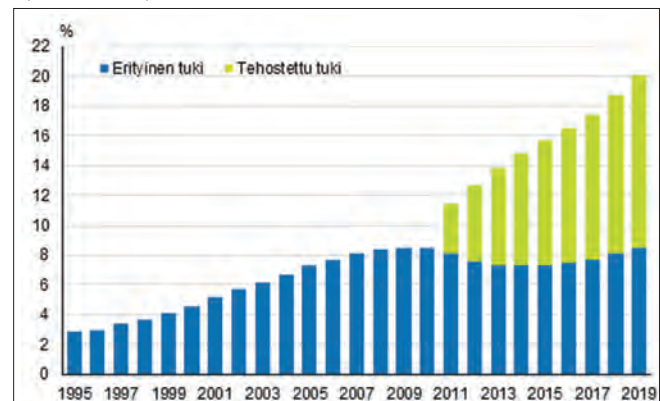
Table 1. Basic education and secondary education students in Finland

Sector of education	Students	Qualifications attained
Basic comprehensive school education, compulsory education school	560 503	56 701
Basic education of adults	5 013	997
Upper secondary general school education	103 440	30 873
Vocational education	322 296	79 588

Source: STAT (2020c)

“Upper secondary general school” meant upper secondary school, or High School (US). Upper secondary and vocational education together were called “Secondary Education”.

Figure 1. Percentages of pupils who had enhanced or special support decision per cohort in basic education (1995-2019)



Source: STAT (2020a)

Blue shade indicates special support, while green presents enhanced support decision

As a clear trend, there was an obvious consensus to support the most vulnerable pupils, but transparent and participatory socio-educational discussion was excluded and rejected, placing the worried guardians and chronically weaker pupils into an epistemic injustice (Bramble, 2020; Capron, 2007; Fricker, 2007; Liveriero, 2020; Price, 2012). Furthermore, ethic revisability and review were not to be discussed (Andersson, n.d.; Saramo, n.d.; cf. Häyry, 2021). Another hermeneutic injustice took place, when the Ministry, or FNAE, did not pay any attention to talented pupils’ needs, as was mentioned above. Their role was a compulsory close-contact teaching, instead of promoting their remote work and communication skills, which were simultaneously emphasized in pandemic working life of adult family members (cf. Bramble, 2020; Capron, 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Dede, 2010; Fricker, 2007; Loima, 2020a; Finnish National Core Curriculum, 2014; Rogerson, 2021). Quite simply, the most vulnerable ones could have enjoyed more the recommended, full physical distances, allocated teachers’ and assistants’ time and attention, if gifted pupils could have utilized part-time, or shifted, distance-teaching and practiced virtual skills with proper

plans. Blended learning was already globally familiar (e.g., Crawford, 2017; Finnish National Core Curriculum, 2014; cf. Gardner, 2000; Gordon, 2006). Pre-planned distant learning had worked well enough but was downshifted into a quarantine ‘first aid’ only three months later (FINNEEC, 2020; MOE, 2020b).

On the other hand, the Ministry was also worried about the school absenteeism in pandemic era. Previously launched study on school absenteeism without Covid-19 remote teaching effects was published in April 2020. Questionnaires for absenteeism were collected in 7-30, January, 2020 (Määttä et al., 2020). Spring term 2020 closing data told that constantly absent 4,000 upper graders had mostly been the same already before remote teaching period (FNAE, 2020b; cf. MOE, 2020d). In terms of individual (enhanced and special) support and pupils’ subjective right for such, smaller classroom pupil numbers, and more targeted pedagogical support could have benefited them, too, allowing the gifted – and/or bullied – ones to go further in tailored skills development (BEA, 1998; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Finnish National Core Curriculum, 2014; Gordon, 2006; Grolnick et al., 1999).

Ethics and regionally altering support of vulnerable pupils. Further problematic standpoint in Ministry’s policy was the general vs. regional socio-educational comprehension of vulnerable pupils. As Figure 1 showed, the percentage of intensified support pupils had been growing, while special support had remained on the same level as 2010, comprising 7- 8% of all. The data were published in June 2020, and covered the situation accurately, since most educational providers updated the decisions annually due to budget cycles. Regionally, special support decisions were made to 4-13% of the pupils. Lowest special education numbers occurred in Western Finland, while Southeastern cost educational providers had the most, up to 13% (STAT, 2020a, 2020b). In practical school life, special support was organized in separate special education groups for 34% of special support students. In fact, this meant 2% of the entire basic education cohort. Consequently, 44% of special education support students shared mixed groups: part-time in special education groups and the rest of lessons in general basic education classes. The remaining 23% of them stayed in “ordinary” classes, sharing extra lessons given by teachers, a school assistant, co-teaching (several teachers) arrangements, or specific tasks (STAT, 2020b). Considering the whole country basic education cohort, for example Helsinki City had a total of 6,069 special support students. Evident socio-educational consequence of Ministry’s quantitatively emphasized interpretation on equity was regional ethical, epistemic and hermeneutic inequity of the supported pupils in their close-contact teaching groups. According to special education decision percentages, the hardest “hit” was taken by South(eastern) country pupils. (Bramble, 2020; Fricker, 2007, 2013; Harris, 1987; Häyry, 2021; Kauppinen, 2018; Liveriero, 2020; STAT, 2020c). Less transparent, ethically participatory, or revisability elements were found in this socio-political by-the-book decision-making (Capron, 2007).

Instead of intensifying the individual support, compulsory

close-contact management seemed to serve the opposite in regional frame, as well. Due to bigger numbers of present pupils in southern country, there was less space for recommended NPIs, and effective individual support. Peer-learning or co-teaching were not favorable due to physical distance recommendations. Consequently, the intensified and special-need support pupils in the capital pandemic “hot spot” schools were in the most weakened, unequal position of the whole cohort, and country. The hermeneutic inequity faced them in learning and support, but also in their less safety learning environment with outnumbered exposures and quarantines (Helsinki City, 2021; cf. altistumiset.fi, n.d.; Bramble, 2020; Fricker, 2007; Häyry, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This case study triangulated the data on the Ministry’s socio-educational equity and pandemic ethic literacy in Finland, 2020. Methodological hermeneutic circle revealed dilemma, imbalances, but also confusing, structured obscurities. Those could have been avoided, if there had been an open, participatory, democratically constructed dialogue on ethic principles, relying on experiences from the successful Spring 2020.

First, and foremost, the pandemic ethics were ignored in Ministry’s general socio-educational policy. Being so, the nature of pandemic ethic principles was not recognized – or was neglected. Furthermore, Ministry’s decision-making was unconditional, instead of being participatory and revising. Lacking transparency was revealed in Ministry’s rhetoric of “several” children without evidence, specification, studies, or non-admitted probability of “likelihood”. A few of these were reported only afterwards. The favorable socio-political ethic concerns could have been revisable along with increasing international evidence. These participatory acts alone could have improved overall pandemic response, as well.

Epistemic imbalances and hermeneutic injustice took place regionally and qualitatively. Those involved families and pupils, especially the ‘vulnerable’ pupils, as well as gifted ones. Quantitative “by-the-rulebook” equity increased the inequity, adding epidemic, ageist and racist unequal elements to the pupils’ lives especially in the capital area in south. In other regions, the numbers of enhanced, or special, support children were smaller. Subsequently, this gave more space to observe, follow NPI recommendations and revise. Finally, the Ministry repeatedly acted against its own vision.

Regarding the future socio-educational policy, the main suggestion based on this study is a mental, comprehensive update on “hidden curriculum” of decision-makers, politicians, media, and some guardians. While exceptional circumstances offered a challenge, they may also enhance future working life skills development. Remote work already took giant leaps towards permanent arrangements during 2020-21 pandemics. In terms of hermeneutic justice, an option for proper blended learning would have promoted equity – and sustainable ethics. Finally, the general Nordic socio-educational policy with emerged Covid-19 variants, as well as regional policies and NPIs, will need their own studies.

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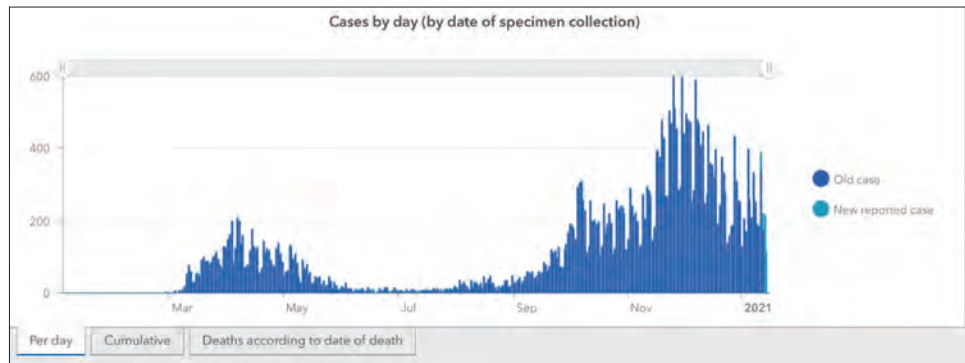
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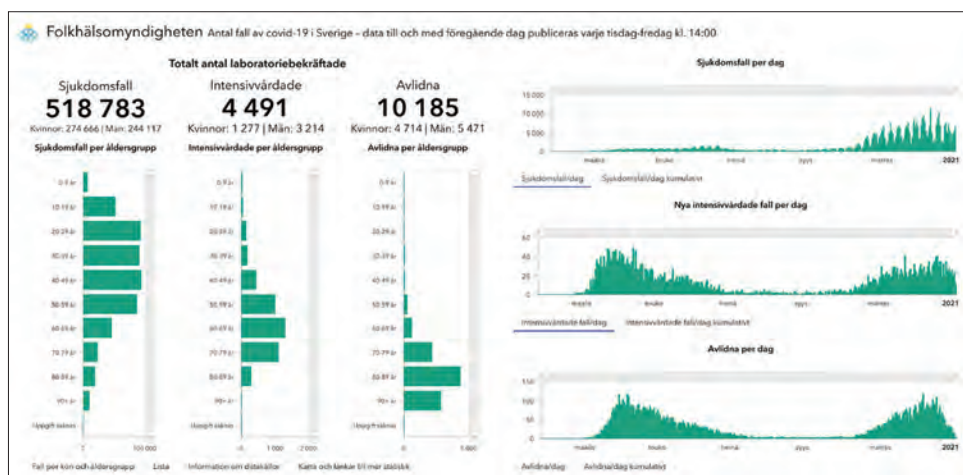
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APPENDIX 1

A) Confirmed Corona cases in Finland (2021, January 14). Source: THL (2021, Jan 14).



B) Official Swedish Covid-19 numbers in January, 2021.
 Source: Folkhälsomyndigheten (2021, 14 January).



APPENDIX 2

Risk groups and age cohorts (18-69) of serious Covid-19 diseases in Finland by regional hospital care units. Orange map: due to sicknesses. Purple map: due to age or sicknesses.

Source: Machine Learning STN Impro project, 2020; THL, 2020, in *Talouselämä*, (2020).

