

## Shared Narrative – Analysis on Finnish Socio-Educational Policy and National Broadcasting (YLE) Literacy during COVID-19 Variants 2021

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received: December 07, 2021

Accepted: January 21, 2022

Published: January 31, 2022

Volume: 10 Issue:1

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

Publication note: IJELS appreciates Dr. Jyrki Loima for accepting our invitation to contribute this Featured Article.

### ABSTRACT

This case study analyzed the Finnish National Broadcasting Company (YLE) literacy on socio-educational policies during the alpha and delta variant strategic turns 2021. The data comprised YLE releases, interdisciplinary global research, pandemic literacies, and statements of politicians/officials. Limitations occurred mainly in the data plenitude. Alpha variant caused socio-political responses maneuvered by politicians and officials. YLE supported without socially participating, competence-enhancing or motivating civic information. NPIs were linked to the political promises of national pandemic end during the summer. International pandemic studies were excluded from nationalized narrative, in which YLE strategically emphasized mutual experience, shared story, and approaching happy end. In August 2021, previously promised “liberation” was too close to change the narrative. Instead of delta mitigation, officials and politicians fortified the narrative towards the end. YLE conducted a closing story. Releases replaced international studies and responses with a small circle of domestic experts, who repeated the narrative they previously had manifested. No NPIs occurred, but remaining ones were lifted despite the rising incidence numbers. Conclusively, the lacking research in the YLE contributions indicated the absence of research literacy among politicians and reporters. Consequently, occurring sidetracks used modern nationalism rhetoric, supporting the main narrative. Children’s ‘absolute’ right was on-site schooling, regardless of safety research or practices developed abroad. In further studies, the post-pandemic status and goals of Finnish education need comparative reassessments other than a “trust”.

**Key words:** Socio-Educational Policy, National Narrative, Covid-19 Literacy, Strategy, Reliability

## INTRODUCTION

### Research Objectives, Importance, and Questions

The goal of this case study was to analyze, how the official National Broadcasting Company (YLE) contributed to socio-educational pandemic politics in Finland during the “variant” year 2021 strategic turning points. More specifically, the internet content and releases of National Broadcasting Company (YLE) were discussed in the light of global academic research, pandemic media-related literacy and ethics, political statements and, finally, in relation with YLE’s own strategic values, emphasizing ‘reliability’ (YLE, 2020).

The importance of the study arose, first, from desire for the ‘truth’, as well as transparent crisis management of governmental and regional administration (Bramble, 2020; Capron, 2007; Häyry, 2021; Petersen, et al., 2021; Petersen, 2021; Treenhalg, 2020), along with their reflections into YLE internet contents. Second, this was a new opening, since no country case studies had been conducted on socio-educational pandemic responses and a strategic, national media institution. According to a spring 2021 poll, even 72% of the

(15 years-) population had followed YLE internet contents weekly (Inkinen, 2021; Appendix A). Third, regardless of global pandemic (medical and social) characteristics, there occurred an international trend to ‘nationalize’ the pandemic as well as responses and, followingly, nationally shared information (BBC, 2021; CNN, 2021; Mörttinen, 2021; NHS England, 2021; Romsis, 2021; YLE 2021b). Finally, national – as well as – international trend of “not trusting” the citizens’ political or academic literacy ability emerged, but they were expected to “trust” politicians and media houses (Häyry, 2021; Mörttinen, 2021; Petersen et al., 2021; Petersen, 2021; locally, see Mäkitalo, n.d.).

Following *research question* (RQ) was addressed:

What was the main socio-educational contribution of YLE pandemic news?

### The Method, Data, Terminology and Related Literature

*Qualitative researchers do not claim that there are universal, static “Truths”, but rather that there are multiple, situated truths and perspectives.* (Patton, 2014, p. 5)

*Methodologically*, this was a qualitative study, which utilized multiple data sources (Patton, 1999; Patton, 2014). The main data comprised recent academic research and related YLE internet contents, in addition to governmental or regional statements on “turning point” policy maneuvers in January–November 2021. Moreover, another relevant data stream occurred in ethic and human rights’ pandemic literacy, while this paper left already obsolete policies out (Bramble, 2020; Flack et al., 2020; Loima, 2021; Treenhalg, 2021). Taken as a whole, triangulation as a qualitative research discussion method focused on circular interpretation of the various literate data sources from the RQ viewpoint. Updating research data were crucial to this qualitative approach (Carter et al., 2014; Patton, 1999; 2014), since it allowed also *a posteriori* triangulation, once essential new data emerged. Similarly to COVID-19 policies, the data were an updating circle of comprehension, interpretation, and their reflective reassessment, enabling also readers’ further investigations (Patton, 2014; Petersen et al., 2021; Treenhalg, 2021). However, while analyzing contemporary comprehension, later research data cannot anachronistically be presented to affect earlier, real-time interpretations (Frängsmyr, 2006).

*Terminologically*, COVID-19 was familiar. Non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) had also appeared globally, including masks, physical distancing, and other interventions to control the viral transmission (You et al., 2020). “*Variant year*” meant simply the timing of emerged Alpha, (Beta) and Delta COVID-19 variants (ECDC, 2021). *Incidences* mean here confirmed 14-day infection rates per 100,000 of population. Apart from previous terms, *turning points* occurred in Finnish pandemic policy revision times. First one included tightening restrictions for emerged Alpha variant, taking place in January– February 2021. Next hybrid strategy turn was in late August–early September with released restrictions, continuing as an unspecified “need” in October–November due to risen hospitalization and death rate numbers. Both turning times also included a political manifest about “the end of pandemic era and restrictions”, or even political “liberation of society” as PM Marin put it in early September 2021, regardless of increased incidences and hospitalization rates (Hara, 2021; Harjumaa, 2021; Frilander et al., 2021; Kajander, 2021; Karppi, 2021b; Ministry of Education and Culture (MOE), 2021a; 2021b; Mäkinen, 2021; Orjala, 2021; YLE, 2021b; YLE 2021c; BBC, 2021; cf. Gurdasani et al., 2021; Karppi, 2021a; Morton, 2021).

The YLE contents discussed here were mainly from internet sources, occurring mainly in Finnish. Several reporters had their input and, accordingly, were referred as authors. On the other hand, YLE’s English news were much more limited by content and frequency. Appearances notwithstanding, they were utilized, if available. Finally, holistic term *literacy* covered academic, socio-political, social, and media literacy fields or other verbal approaches in the given time frame. As it came to the official strategy of the YLE, the topic was discussed accordingly from social, behavioral, cultural and academic viewpoints (YLE, 2020).

*Limitations* of the study occurred, first, in the data. Rapidly updating news analysis had to focus into

socio-educational context to properly triangulate contents, supporting/challenging contributions, and timings. Readers’ verifying reference options were the second data limitation, which preferred written online information as the main YLE source. Video clips, and radio broadcasts, were mostly aborted from YLE websites after a certain time, and not unfortunately shown abroad, either. This, in turn, was a matter of the data transparency. Third, the data as whole shrank this study into a country case, while initial purpose was to make comparative research and include the UK, or some parts of the US. Consequently, comparative country studies will need further examination. Finally, the social media analysis was also limited to Ministers’ and officials’ (in charge) turning points input. In the national framework, a brief comparative analysis on *modern nationalism* rhetoric offered ideological perspective with post-Civil war Spanish flu years and their socio-educational change (1918–1921) (Ahonen, 2021; Linnanmäki, 2005; Loima, 2006).

*Related literature* on Nordic socio-educational policies comprised, first, a few reviewed studies (Loima, 2020; Loima, 2021). Swedish Corona Commission Report (2021), as well as studies on COVID-19 in compulsory schools were worth of noting, as it came to pandemic response guidelines. Swedish overall state and regional reactions had been too slow, underestimating and thus not adequate, estimated Corona Commission in late October. Moreover, administrative responsibilities and legislation had been, and remained, obscure (Regeringen, 2021). Swedish teachers without masks had 50% more infections, while their spouses also got more (Vlachos et al., 2021; Vogel, 2021; cf. Chernozhukov et al., 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2021; Loima, 2021; Ludvigsson, 2020; Regeringen, 2021; Romsö, 2021). Summarizing 59 randomized control studies (RCTs) and 73 intervention studies on health-promoting behavior and *self-determination theory* (SDT), Martela et al. (2021) provided academic communication check list for public pandemic crisis communication, using desired restrictions as objectives (Martela et al., 2021). Moreover, Nilsberth et al. (2021) studied teaching narratives in Swedish upper secondary schools, contributing teachers’ distant teaching as digital “substitutes of classroom interaction” (Nilsberth et al., 2021).

Apart from Nordic socio-educational lenses, extended literacy review of country/global responses and (learning and healthcare) challenges highlighted various recent contributions (Anttiroiko, 2021; Bland et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2020; Campbell, 2020; Crawford, 2020; CDC, 2021; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Flack et al., 2020a; 2020b; Jansen et al., 2020; Lavonen et al., 2021; Maestrales et al., 2021; Petersen et al. 2021; Treenhalg, 2021). Australian and New Zealand pedagogies emphasized flexible blended learning, targeted on-site student invitations, diverse needs and, e.g., social and material support in low-income regions (Brown et al., 2020; Crawford, 2020; Flack, 2020b; Jansen et al., 2020; cf. Breslin, 2021; Chenowith, 2014). Interesting comparative studies on public information and trust were completed in Denmark, as well, constructing a national framework of applied information and how-to-dos (Petersen et al., 2021; cf. Hobsbawm, 2012). Another, pre-variant era discussion on Finnish and Australian 2020 educational information

suggested that COVID-19 postponed global educational equity development, finding Finnish “trust” noteworthy (Sahlberg, 2021). However, pandemic equity – as well as trust – in the mentioned paper remained unspecified (cf. Brown et al., 2020; Fricker, 2007; Jansen et al., 2020; Martela et al., 2021; Petersen et al., 2021). Regarding Swedish pandemic response analysis, open “trust” didn’t work (Regeringen, 2021). A cohesive survey on Finnish teachers’ stress in COVID-19 era was published in July 2021, pointing positive and negative elements. As the consequent data finding it revealed that special needs pupils had received adequate support during distance teaching period in the spring 2020 (Pöysä et al., 2021; cf. Loima, 2020).

In the United States, initial suggestions for educational equity were material: meals and technology (Campbell, 2020). Further-on, solution-centered pedagogy and policy were fast (Bland et al., 2021; CDC, 2021; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2021). Exemplary learning strategies were pre-planned instead of being reactive. To name a single, Tulsa public schools opened a Virtual Academy for 33, 0000 learners, launching data-driven learning strategies for stakeholders already for the next year (Bland et al., 2021). On the other hand, a comparative study on U.S. and Finnish high school students’ distant learning revealed that previously effective “hands-in” science projects didn’t work optimally as remote (Maestrales et al., 2021). In Finnish early response 2020, the swift for remote learning had succeeded due to ready digital skills. Other skills like resilience were needed, as well (Lavonen et al., 2021). While ‘equity’ was mentioned again, it remained terminologically obscure (cf. Flack et al., 2020b; Fricker, 2007; Loima, 2021; Petersen, 2021; Regeringen, 2021).

In line with medical progress, the spring 2020 school closure effects in Finland had also been studied, and published, before the variants. Main finding was that school and daycare facilities closures reduced all respiratory pathogens, although COVID-19 took longer than other viral cases (Haapanen et al., 2021; cf. CDC, 2021; Chernozhukov et al., 2021; Jansen et al., 2020; Lam-Hine et al., 2021; Risso, 2021). Furthermore, social distancing study from the spring 2020 gave “strong suggestion” of its efficiency in slowing down respiratory viral diseases, as well as pediatric hospitalizations (Kuitunen et al., 2020; Kuitunen et al., 2021; cf. CDC, 2021; Lam-Hine et al., 2021; Risso, 2021; Viner et al., 2020; Vlachos, 2021). While focusing to schools and pupils’ social well-being with a very good reason, mentioned educational contributions had left pandemic health factors on pupils and families unnoticed (Lavonen et al., 2021; Maestrales et al. 2021; Sahlberg, 2021; cf. Bland et al., 2021; Bramble, 2020; Breslin, 2021; Chernozhukov et al., 2021; Jansen et al., 2020; Loima, 2021; Martela et al., 2021). Subsequently, pandemic absences, as well as their relatedness in teaching combination responses, were not included. Conclusively, studies that aborted health-related differences, special needs, and tailored support were faster to contribute. Unfortunately, those turned the strive for ‘equity’ towards quantitative meanings (like the number of received lessons/study years/tests) instead of enabling, individually qualitative equity. Mainly the latter guaranteed socio-educational

equity, making pupils “equal” based on their individual needs assessment (Bramble, 2020; Flack et al., 2020; Fricker, 2007; Jansen et al., 2020; Liveriero, 2020; Loima, 2021).

On Finnish socio-political field, a ‘handbook of child impact assessment for legislators’ was published in Finnish in August 2021 (Iivonen et al., 2021). Transparency, participation and review were mentioned without pandemic ethics (Iivonen et al., 2021; cf. Bramble, 2020; Capron, 2007; Loima, 2021; Regeringen, 2021; Treenhalg, 2021). The Ombudsman for Children’s Rights (OCR) published annual report in early 2021. It didn’t utilize any developed connections with autonomy-related motivation, relatedness, or competence (OCR, 2021b; Martela et al., 2021; cf. Capron, 2007). Moreover, Ombudsman launched open reminders about the children’s rights (OCR, 2021c; 2021d). Soon afterwards, YLE summarized the “post-pandemic lessons” as a conclusive story in September- October 2021 despite the rising incidence, hospitalization and death rates caused by delta variant (Hyytinen, 2021; Mäenpää, 2021; Mäkinen, 2021; THL, 2021c; cf. Anttiroiko, 2021; Bramble, 2021; Breslin, 2021; Loima, 2021; Martela, 2021; Petersen, 2021; YLE, 2021e).

## TURNING POINT LITERACIES - POLITICS AND YLE CONTRIBUTIONS

### Alpha – February “Closure” Manifest 2021

Since late December 2020, the alpha variant had spread into 50 countries (Callagher, 2020; PHE, 2021). In January, the National Institute of Health and Welfare (THL) informed about increased incidences and their forecasted trend. No new NPIs were presented, but masks were recommended also for pupils older than 12 years, following the WHO policy (THL, 2021a; 2021b). Quite the same time, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Care (STM) published an updated hybrid strategy, which emphasized regional authorities’ role in national response. Interestingly, YLE wrote in detail about the strategic update four days before it was published by Ministry (STM, 2021a; YLE, 2021a). Political reliability of authorities in a new situation seemed to have launched needs for preliminary, non-public sharing between the Ministry and YLE. Consequently, prepared media release was politically selective. As Häyry had (2021) stated, authorities “cannot” easily tell the whole utilitarian truth in the middle of crisis (Häyry, 2021; Petersen, 2021; cf. Martela et al., 2021). However, to engage citizens’ motivated participation to restrictions, and to gain trust on crisis management, politicians ought to have communicated openly. In addition, backing the strategy with latest research and clear goals would have stabilized selected policies (Martela et al., 2021; Petersen, 2021; Petersen et al., 2021; THL, 2021a; 2021b; cf. Häyry, 2021; Regeringen, 2021). This was not the case in late January.

YLE news had reported growing incidences, adding that “no restrictions will be released but further negotiated”. The Government continued NPI discussions, prioritizing restrictions for grown up population instead of children. As mentioned previously, the latter had masked close-contact



teaching (THL, 2021a; YLE 2021a). Socio-politically, the NPI trend in January-February 2021 was still to “prioritize children’s rights”, as Ministry of Education (MOE) had already stated in August 2020 (Andersson, n.d.; Loima, 2021; YLE, 2021a; 2021b). Consequently, YLE news setting confirmed the government’s political narrative on “children’s rights priority” and emphasized particularly their compulsory (close contact) schooling in buildings as the main right during the negotiations. YLE seemed to have been informed about the outcomes beforehand, while negotiating Ministers themselves *ad hoc* described their situation challenging and uncertain. Simultaneously in January, the news unmentioned the possible risks of spreading incidences and their consequent effects on families (Andersson, n.d.; Harjumaa et al., 2021; Kuitunen et al., 2020; YLE 2021a; 2021b; cf. Bramble, 2020; Chernozhukov et al., 2021; Hobsbawm, 2012; Jansen et al., 2020; Loima, 2021; Martela et al., 2021; Petersen et al., 2021). Strategies notwithstanding, the manifested priority of children’s rights seemed to mean practical, focused efforts to keep the school infrastructure open.

Ethically speaking, the Constitutional right for schooling (Section 16) was prioritized by politicians and YLE. It was elevated beyond other, previously listed legit rights of having equal treatment and safe environment. This was done without ethic, participatory, or any public discussions (Constitution of Finland, 1999; Andersson, n.d.; cf. Capron, 2007; Flack et al., 2020b; Häyry, 2021; Jansen et al., 2020; Liveriero, 2020; Loima, 2021; Martela et al., 2021; OCR, 2021a; 2021b; Petersen, 2021). A national narrative had been created and repeated since August 2020 onwards, relying on children’s safe on-site schooling rights. Other rights received less attention in YLE literacy, as well.

Mentioned strive for children’s rights was intentionally correct from any ethic standpoint (Capron, 2007; Fricker, 2007; Jansen et al., 2020; Liveriero, 2021). However, strengthening qualitative adjustments for individually needed socio-educational equity of pupils were not emphasized in central or regional measurements, but buildings were. Special needs had been missing from the studies and YLE settings, as well (Lavonen et al., 2021; Maestrales et al. 2021; Sahlberg, 2021; YLE, 2021b; cf. Bland et al., 2021; Bramble, 2020; Jansen et al., 2020; Lam-Hine et al., 2021; Liveriero, 2020; Loima, 2021; Martela et al., 2021; Risso et al., 2021). This, in turn, led to a visionary obscurity in regional equity implementation of pupils. As stated previously in detail, the regions had different percentages of special needs school children, altering epidemic speed and situation with confirmed incidences, but similar compulsory close-contact schooling and weekly lessons duties for all (Loima, 2021; cf. Bland et al., 2021). Consequently, this framework excluded the real equality balance from altering learning events. As a result, genuine need-based rights for Finnish children in January-February 2021 were not qualitatively fulfilled. Finally, the Ombudsman for Children’s Rights had similar emphasis on schooling – as a “straight” right – in her announcement in the beginning of March 2021 (OCR, 2021a; cf. OCR, 2021d; THL, 2021a; THL, 2021b). In addition, the pandemic command chain from leading politicians, responsible regional officials, media, and utilized

research (Juutinen et al., 2021) was too narrow to consider, how to benefit from advanced solutions in other countries. No participatory, relatedness, identity-supporting, or competence-enhancing public discussion took place in statements or YLE literacy (Bland et al., 2021; Chernozhukov et al., 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2021; Flack et al., 2020a; 2020b; Jansen et al., 2020; Martela et al., 2021; Petersen et al., 2021; THL, 2021b; YLE, 2021b; cf., Kuitunen et al., 2020; Regeringen, 2021).

Official single-mindedness notwithstanding, the Government ordered three weeks of ‘closure status’ in late February as a “final pandemic sprint” into gradually vaccinating and opening Finland. It shared the country to mitigation categories and ordered consequent restrictions (YLE 2021b; 2021c; cf. Regeringen, 2021). Bars and restaurants were closed, or restricted, in March 2021, while pupils older than 12 years were moved to distant teaching, and their hobbies in public places discontinued. THL representative, Mr. Salminen told in YLE news that “British variant” had spread rapidly, especially in southern country, and its’ restaurants (Harjumaa et al., 2021; YLE, 2021b; YLE, 2021c; cf. Häyry, 2020; Kuitunen et al., 2021; Liveriero, 2020; Bland et al., 2021; Flack et al., 2020b; Petersen et al., 2021).

Prime Minister Marin described policy as “proactive” in YLE release. She promised children’s restrictions to be removed on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2021, having previously questioned the “responsible behavior” of capital area municipalities in pandemics. In YLE Summary, Minister of Science and Culture Saarikko told that closure status aimed for “summer, during which the living would be normal”. (YLE, 2021c; cf. OCR, 2021a; Petersen et al., 2021). The editorial comments of YLE included a rhetoric question: would three weeks be enough? (Harjumaa et al., 2021; YLE, 2021b; 2021c). Another mediated view was presented by a human rights professor in a YLE interview: the Prime Minister’s office seemed to desire more (social) power than it had (Hämäläinen, 2021; cf. Liveriero, 2020). In terms of common, motivated response for NPI restrictions, the public – especially worried parents – could again have gained more from autonomy-supporting and competence-fostering communication, analytically modeled situation update, and relevant scientific facts from peer-reviewed school spread studies in Finland, as well as abroad (Capron, 2007; Chernozhukov et al., 2021; CDC, 2021; Häyry, 2021; Kuitunen et al., 2020; 2021; Martela et al., 2021; Petersen, 2021; Regeringen, 2021; Vlachos et al., 2021). Rather than promoting equality, the government information package was disintegrative in terms of socio-educational pedagogical continua (Andersson, n.d.; cf. Martela et al., 2021; Petersen et al., 2021). It left “unsuitable” research-based argumentation completely unmentioned. Yet it fitted to main narrative of absolute, and as such untouchable, rights.

*What was the main contribution of YLE?* No Government, THL, neither YLE demonstrated any sound arguments from recent studies on social distancing effects at schools, or nation-wide data on children’s NPIs’ effects in the country. Related studies were reviewed, accepted and available by late February 2021, and so was the Swedish one (Chernozhukov et al., 2021; Kuitunen et al., 2020; Kuitunen et al., 2021;

Vlachos et al., 2021). Conclusively, the key actors quite clearly by-passed their own manifested strategies as the ‘competence-promoting’ Government, ‘reliable’ YLE, and ‘high-quality research’ institute THL (Government Program (GovP), 2019; THL 2019; YLE, 2020). Their single-mindedness appeared more in the ignorance of peer-reviewed research during turbulent times, when argument-based information would have been needed more than *ad hoc* political opinions (Bramble, 2020; Bland et al., 2021; Jansen et al., 2020; Kuitunen et al., 2021; Martela et al., 2021; Petersen et al., 2021; Risso, 2021).

Strategically, the reliability of YLE appeared more to be a trustworthy national narrative teller (cf., Gr., *mythologos*). Widely used national media further nationalized pandemics, putting reviewed research aside in favor of political unity, “fortified nationality”, and “shared (mutual) experience” in line with its official strategy (YLE, 2020; cf. Ahonen, 2021; Häyry, 2020; Loima, 2021; Petersen et al., 2021). In conclusion, YLE clearly followed the strategy it had, supporting the appropriate, selected political response and promoting shared experiences. However, neither the Government, nor general public, benefitted about neglected research regarding recent political promises for summer. Analyzing everything – backed by research – would probably have reinforced the gradually reducing credibility of Prime Minister and THL, as well (Mäntysalo, 2021; Petersen et al., 2021; Romsis, 2021; Stenroos, 2021; THL, 2021b). Consequently, sound argumentation for suggested community restrictions would have gained more comprehension, promoted mutual togetherness and, very likely limited the spring spread (Chernozhukov et al., 2021; Martela et al., 2021). Nonetheless, national narrative already seemed to look for an approaching happy end.

### Delta – Opening September-October “Liberation” 2021

In early August, YLE summarized pandemic restrictions and related regional situation. Simultaneously, it also contributed that schools and universities were to start in close-contact teaching with previous NPIs (Karppi, 2021). MOE gave recommendations 5 days later. Close-contact teaching was the main method, but regions could swift to remote as a last resort (MOE, 2021a). Interestingly enough, a private estimation on schools’ close contact teaching safety was given by Fimlab Co., which analyzed COVID tests. Fimlab told that June-July test results on younger people “supported the view that close contact teaching was safe” (Fimlab, n.d.). The test data timeframe that was picked from national schools’ summer holidays (Fimlab, n.d.; cf. CDC, 2021; Chernozhukov et al., 2021; MOE 2021a). The sidetrack gained some distracting attention, having no other argumentation than on-going holiday statistics. It supported the narrative, since it prioritized buildings. It didn’t matter that those were empty.

Regarding socio-educational policy, OCR changed her previous absolute close-contact policy and reminded about WHO school safety instructions in early August. OCR requested protection, and vaccines, for children (OCR, 2021c; cf. Lam-Hine, 2021). However, the ‘official’ trend – as further continuing mainstream narrative – forecasted nationalized pandemic to be over during the autumn school period.

THL director, Mr. Salminen, convinced that pandemic worries should be over “soon” and normal lifestyle restored (Uusitalo et al., 2021). At the same time, government had a strategy update. PM Marin told in early September about the opening country. It was “time to live”, explore, and meet people. Apart from this, she asked in October the – evidently opposing – “boomers to cool down” in social media. While interviewing the PM on these activities, YLE reporters gave a lot of publicity to her personal opinions on COVID, as well as to her expressed willingness to shake the “institutions” via social media (Mäntysalo, 2021; Orjala, 2021; YLE, 2021f). On the other hand, as the head of the State Council, Prime Minister was politically regarded as an institution (Constitution of Finland, 1999). Publicly unmasked Prime Minister was broadcasted – and internationally noted – as a refreshing, healthy icon of a recovering and opening country. YLE supported this positive image and omen, thus underlining the shared national experience with good news. Less attention was paid to the situation in educational institutions, schools or rising numbers of children’s infections in October-November 2021. Local mask recommendations had gradually returned to schools in late October- early November, but THL still explained on YLE websites that children got infected by parents (Blom, 2021; Juutinen et al., 2021; Ojanperä, 2021, Piirainen, 2021, 2021; cf. Bagheri et al., 2021; CDC, 2021; Chernozhukov et al., 2021; Haapanen et al., 2021; Kuitunen et al., 2021; Lam-Hine et al., 2021).

*The main contribution of YLE news in August-November 2021 seemed to be to maintain the nationally constructed pandemic narrative. YLE supported selected policies, promises, and beliefs on the happy end of ‘liberation’.* Previously, along with the opening trend in September-October, THL had urged to get school children unmasked after autumn mid-term holidays via YLE (Heikkonen et al., 2021; Juutinen et al., 2021; Piirainen, 2021; cf. Bagheri et al., 2021; Chernozhukov et al., 2021; Kuitunen et al., 2021). Despite the local mask recommendations or school building closures, THL had continuously explained that children got mainly exposed and infected by parents, and school buildings officially have been “low risk” zones (Juutinen et al., 2021; cf. Haapanen et al., 2021; Kuitunen et al., 2021; Meuris et al., 2021). This still was the case on the week 46, when 28 percent of all emerged infections were found among children under 12 years. YLE again reported the THL message: to protect children, adult population needed to get more vaccinated, even when 80% of them were already twice vaccinated. Minister of Education also repeated the message of vaccinating parents for child protection. International, peer-reviewed research on school buildings, transmissions and NPI mitigation were not taken into consideration, let alone contributed. In line with previous, YLE also left a THL research from school closure effects in March-April 2020 unmentioned (Andersson, n.d.; Blom, 2021; Juutinen et al., 2021; Ojanperä, 2021; cf. Bagheri et al., 2021; CDC, 2021; Chernozhukov et al., 2021; Kuitunen et al., 2021; Lam-Hine et al., 2021; Martela et al., 2021; Meuris et al., 2021; Risso et al., 2021; Vlachos et al., 2021). International research concerning NPIs and school transmissions did not fit to nationalized socio-political narrative, which already had

a reachable end (Chernozhukov et al., 2021; Meuris et al., 2021; Piirainen, 2021; cf. Hobsbawm, 2012; Linnanmäki, 2005). Similar attitudes had been recognized among medical personnel during the Spanish flu years 1918-21. Many medical practitioners had taken a passive role, regarding the pandemic spread unstoppable (Linnanmäki, 2005).

Apart from national narrative, an interesting November finding were the ECDC school transmission websites. Those had remained non-updated since early September (ECDC, 2021b; cf. Meuris et al., 2021). On the other hand, WHO repeatedly urged to vaccinate children for Christmas to protect elderly, but this was not told in national news by YLE (Boffey, 2021; YLE 2021g; cf. Häyry, 2021; Lam-Hine et al., 2021; Martela et al., 2021; Meuris et al., 2021; Vlachos et al., 2021). Quite the opposite, YLE stated that previous vaccines may also protect from the worse variant diseases (YLE, 2021g). Swedish National Agency of Health (FHM) updated in September their vaccination and, later-on, testing policy for schools and pupils. However, these socio-educational policy turns didn't appear in YLE releases (FHM, 2021; Piirainen, 2021; YLE, 2021e; 2021g). Neither THL, nor YLE referred to international trend of hastily vaccinating younger population. THL experts rather, when interviewed by YLE, emphasized the need to study the topic in national scale and by own experts. Furthermore, no competence-supporting or autonomy-enhancing information, participation and/or motivating NPI "ownership" on worsening pandemic incidences, or hospitalizations, were offered by YLE (YLE 2021d; 2021e; 2021g; cf. Bagheri et al., 2021; Chernozhukov et al., 2021; Martela et al., 2021; Meuris et al., 2021; Petersen, 2021; Petersen et al., 2021). Abstract 'inequity' was repeatedly presented in headlines instead of rapid pedagogical development, which had occurred abroad for more than a year (Bland et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2020; Campbell, 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2020; 2021; Loima, 2021; cf. Juutinen et al., 2021; THL, 2021d).

In conclusion, delta variant had no other pandemic response than vaccines in Finnish politics, or in the YLE setting. Nationally broadcasted 2021 autumn narrative chapter was trending towards a happy end with a passive acceptance, citing the THL slogan of "closely following pandemics". In this sense, it was similar with pandemic passiveness in 1918-21. Accordingly, citizens were seen as subjects. They were to read, believe and accept the evident to come (Orjala, 2021; Piirainen, 2021; YLE, 2021g; Hobsbawm, 2012; cf. Linnanmäki, 2005; Loima, 2006). However, there would have been time, space and use for participating, reviewing and competence-enhancing literate support. Furthermore, that could have re-united population more than deepening pro- and antivaccine opinion frontiers did. International innovations and studies notwithstanding, YLE literacy trend had returned to those years of passive acceptance in 1918-21. On these two pandemic occasions, country that strived with *laissez-faire* pandemics, made a compulsory education reform to 'improve' and fortify future understanding of schooling and "self" as a nation. In both times, it was driven by Central and Left-wing parliamentarians. While educational reforms were genuinely needed, they ought to be backed by broad academic research on short-termed and long-lasting effects,

in addition to academic futurologist models (Ahonen, 2021; Hobsbawm, 2012; cf. Loima, 2006).

Finally, pupils represented highest age cohorts hit by COVID infection during the autumn 2021 (THL, 2021d). The Spanish flu also had been mainly children's disease. It had infected 30% of the whole population, but 40-50% of pupils (Linnanmäki, 2005; THL, 2021d). Similarly with 1920s, delta narrative in 2021 urged not to "panic" (i.e., respond) proactively, hence virus would spread regardless of efforts. Recommended NPIs during delta, as well as local school closures were late, been politically defined as "last resorts". Ethically, there were no indicators of pandemic ethic awareness or actively participating politics (Bramble, 2020; Capron, 2007; Loima, 2021; Martela et al., 2021; Petersen, 2021). As such, postponed NPIs were no more effective, resembling those of the 1920s (Jaskari et al., 2021; Mäenpää, 2021; Linnanmäki, 2005; Piirainen, 2021; Ojanperä, 2021; cf. Hobsbawm, 2012).

Delta notwithstanding, a new omicron variant emerged in late November (ECDC, 2021c). It captured the national preventative planning, as well as media attention (Boffey, 2021; Blom et al., 2021; ECDC, 2021c; YLE, 2021g). Regardless of its spread to new record incidences, the delta variant had had no socio-educational, political pandemic response in Finland, neither in YLE contributions.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Variant alpha had clear socio-political and socio-educational responses in the spring 2021. They were maneuvered by Government politicians, THL and YLE. However, responses didn't utilize motivating, competence-enhancing or supporting public messages for citizens. Respectively, restrictions and early political promises were attached to an approaching, national happy end narrative of pandemics in the summer 2021 – being fortified by YLE literacy. Either accidentally, or purposefully, international pandemic research on education development, NPIs at schools and transmissions were left out of nationalized tale, emphasizing strategically the national, mutual experience, shared story, and promised closing. Systematic ignorance of research indicated this to have been purposeful.

In August 2021, the promised "liberation" was already too close to change the narrative that had started in August 2020. Instead of controlling activities, crucial officials and politicians decided to proceed and fortify the narrative towards the promised end. YLE followed the strategy, replacing international studies and advanced responses – like WHO statements and urges – with a circle of national interviews. YLE recycled same persons, who repeated one after another national and exceptional "fate" in the narrative that stakeholders had manifested. Moreover, they confirmed, and explained the narrative extraordinarily well for a national framework of NPIs – or the lack of them.

The absence of research in political maneuvers and YLE rhetoric could be seen as an absence of deeper education literacy, as well. First, the lack of research literacy skills of politicians and reporters reflected their disbelief in the Finnish community research literacy. Second, their lack



of pandemic comprehension led to various detailed small stories that supported the main socio-educational narrative. Children's "absolute" right was to get on-site, close contact education regardless of global pedagogical innovations and safe schooling development. Striving for children's rights seemed to be more attached to school buildings than to pedagogical continua.

As further suggestions, comparative studies on global omicron policies would offer useful tools to analyze the end-games of learning environment development. Pandemic has already changed institutional education pedagogies globally, especially in some parts of Australia and ASEAN economic area countries. The future post-pandemic status, as well as social goals and orientation of Finnish education will need a further comparative reassessment. Unspecified "trust" would not serve anymore.

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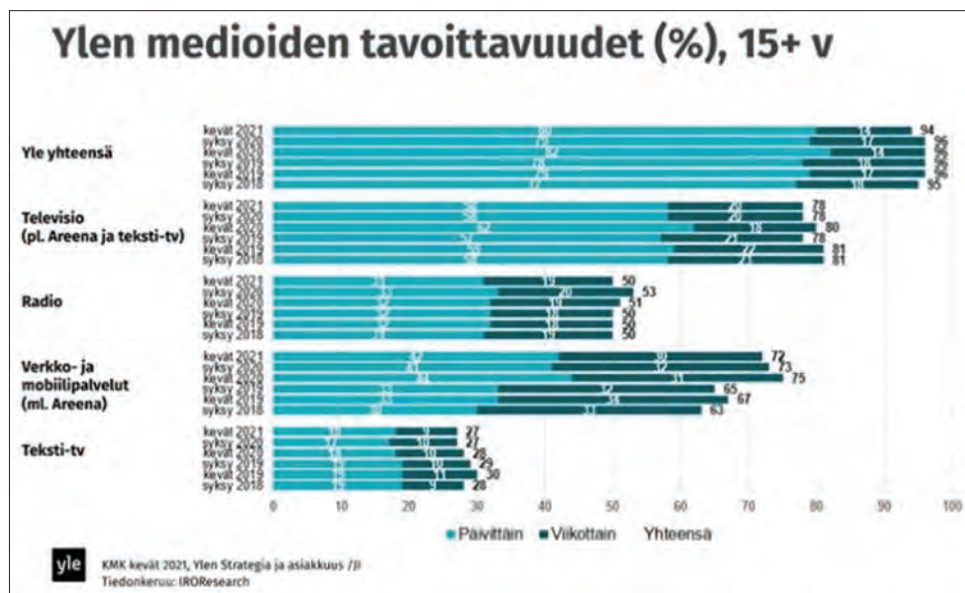


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### APPENDIX A



Finnish National Broadcasting Company (YLE) Channel, Imago and Service Survey, March-April, 2021. [YLE Media coverage and users’ profile. First group: total users. Second: TV. Third, Radio. Fourth, internet and mobile services, including digital YLE Arena clips. Last rows, Text TV.] Source: Inkinen, (2021), <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2021/06/08/janna-inkinen-median-ja-koronavuoden-kuherruskuukausi-on-ohi> (2021, October 27)