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## **Teachers' written school memories and the change to the comprehensive school system in the 1970s**

### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on teachers' written memories of Finland's comprehensive school reform in the 1970s and examines teachers' reminiscences of this major change, when elementary (primary) schools and lower secondary (grammar) schools were transformed into comprehensive schools, thereby guaranteeing nine-year basic education with a unified curriculum for all pupils. The teachers' written memories are part of the larger national collection of school memories arranged in 2013 by two academic societies. This study's focus lies in these teachers' highly sensitive, grassroots-level personal perspectives, which can provide new insights on the reform. The teachers' narratives comprised vivid and concrete memories in which they recalled the past nostalgically and in detail. In the reminiscences, the change in the education system was noted and even versatily analysed, but at the same time, the reform was viewed as merely one episode occurring during these teachers' individual life paths. Many of the writers intertwined the change in the school system with their personal life phases. The writers emphasised the reform's positive aspects and did not interpret contradictions as overwhelming, although some narratives included reminiscences in which the disputes from that period were crystallised. The collective narrative in the accounts transformed from uncertainty and contradictions at the beginning of the comprehensive school reform to favourableness and positive attitudes toward the new education system and the firm faith in education after the transition period.

**Keywords:** comprehensive school, school memories, written narratives, teachers, educational reform

## Introduction

Life narratives, life stories, (auto)biographies and personal accounts, as historical sources, have generated interest among scholars for some time. The shared interest lies in micro-level perspectives and how personal experiences can enhance understanding of the past and how personal narratives enrich interpretations and enable historians to deepen their analyses. These highly sensitive, grassroots-level personal perspectives can provide new insights, especially when examined in larger historical contexts or juxtaposed with macro-level viewpoints.<sup>1</sup> Influenced and inspired by this, what Alistair Thomson calls ‘narrative turn’<sup>2</sup>, a national collection of school memories was arranged in 2013 by two academic societies: the Finnish Literature Society and the Finnish Society for the History of Education. The purpose of this national collection – named *Minun koulumuistoni* (‘My School Memories’) – was to gather personal accounts in which the writers reminisce about their own school experiences. The collection was open to everyone who wanted to share their school memories, and the societies’ instructions<sup>3</sup> were broad, affording space for the writers’ personal interpretations, e.g., there

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1. E.g., Philip Gardner, “Oral History in Education: Teacher’s Memory and Teachers’ History,” *History of Education* 32, no. 2 (2003): 175–88; Ian Grosvenor, “Seen but Not Heard”: City Childhoods from the Past into the Present,” *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no.3 (2007): 405–29; Stephanie Spencer, “Reflections on the ‘Site of Struggle’: Girls’ Experience of Secondary Education in the Late 1950s,” *History of Education* 33, no. 4 (2004): 437–49; Ning de Coninck-Smith, “The Class of 1980: Methodological Reflections on Educational High School Narratives from Denmark in the 1970s and 1980s,” *Paedagogica Historica* 44, no. 6 (2008): 733–46; Jane Martin, “Thinking Education Histories Differently: Biographical Approaches to Class Politics and Women’s Movements in London, 1900s to 1960s,” *History of Education* 36, nos. 4–5 (2007): 515–33; Jane Martin, “Interpreting Biography in the History of Education: Past and Present,” *History of Education* 41, no. 1 (2012): 87–102; Patricia Milewski, “‘I Paid No Attention to It’: An Oral History of Curricular Change in the 1930s,” *Historical Studies in Education* 24, no. 1 (2012): 112–29; António Gomes Ferreira and Luis Mota, “Memories of Life Experiences in a Teacher Training Institution during the Revolution,” *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 5 (2013): 698–715; Kira Mahamud and María José Martínez Ruiz-Funes, “Reconstructing the Life Histories of Spanish Primary School Teachers: A Novel Approach for the Study of the Teaching Profession and School Culture,” *History of Education* 43, no. 6 (2014): 793–819; Kate Hoskins and Sue Smedley, “Life History Insights into the Early Childhood and Education Experiences of Froebel Trainee Teachers 1952–1967,” *History of Education* 45, no. 2 (2016): 206–24; Brendan Walsh, “‘I Never Heard the Word Methodology’: Personal Accounts of Teacher Training in Ireland 1943–1980,” *History of Education* 46, no. 3 (2017): 366–83.
  2. Alistair Thomson, “Life Stories and Historical Analysis,” in *Research Methods for History*, eds. Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 101–2.
  3. The instructions included a long list of questions, but the writers were given the freedom to choose which topics and issues to emphasise and they were not obligated to answer the questions. Thus, the collection can be characterised as more initiated by the narrators than by the academic societies and researchers who arranged the collection. (See e.g. Stanley, “Introduction: Documents of Life and Critical Humanism in a Narrative and Biographical Frame,” in *Documents of Life Revisited: Narrative and Biographical Methodology for a 21st Century Critical Humanism*, ed. Liz Stanley (Farnham: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 4–6; Thomson, “Life Stories and Historical Analysis,” 105.)

were no restrictions regarding the time period or school on which the reflections were based. The whole corpus<sup>4</sup> comprises the school memories of 404 people, encompassing more than 4,700 pages and including the reminiscences of various agents: former pupils, teachers, principals and other school staff members<sup>5</sup>. The collected school memories mostly were written narratives in which the writers remembered their past in a school context.<sup>6</sup>

The sources on which this study relies are part of this national collection, and the interest lies in teachers' written accounts. The paper focuses on teachers' memories of the Finnish education system's reform in the 1970s, when elementary (primary) schools and lower secondary (grammar) schools were transformed into comprehensive schools to guarantee nine-year basic education with a unified curriculum for all pupils. From teachers' micro-level perspectives, this reform became part of their occupational and life paths. The interest lies in their personal reminiscences who were working as elementary, grammar or civic-school teachers<sup>7</sup> during that period of transformation. The study discusses how teachers recalled and described the major reform in their school-reminiscence narratives. The inside, grassroots-level perspectives of the actors who worked at schools during the reform period can enhance understanding of these past events and the process of change in everyday school contexts.

### **Written school memories as historical sources**

The national 'My School Memories' collection included written reminiscence narratives from 23 writers who had worked as comprehensive school teachers during that time and wrote in 2013 about the reform and the period of transformation. Of them, 12 had worked in elementary schools before the reform, 10 as subject teachers in grammar schools and one in a civic school.

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4. The corpus has been archived at the Archive of Finnish Literature Society (SKS KRA). The archive sign for the collection is SKS KRA Koulu 2013. In addition, the archive has numbered each page of the collection consecutively. The sign and given page numbers are used in this research when referring to the excerpts from a certain page (or pages) of the collection. The references also include information about where teachers had worked before the introduction of comprehensive schools and the pseudonyms given for reminiscence writers by the author of this article.

5. The collection and the collection process are introduced more thoroughly in Pauli Arola's article (Pauli Arola, "Vuosisadan koulumuistot keruukohteena [The School Memories of the Century as a Target of Collection]," in *Koulumuistot – kokemuksiä koulusta, tutkimusta muistelusta [School Memories – Experiences of the School, Study on Remembering]*, ed. Janne Sääntti (Helsinki: Suomen kasvatuksen ja koulutuksen historian seura, 2015), 1–15).

6. Included in the collection were some transcripts of interviews with former school officials and one PowerPoint presentation with pictures and captions done by a former school principal. These are not included in the sources of this study.

7. Civic schools were a part of elementary schools and consisted of classes subsequent to first six years of elementary school. Another translation is continuation schools for elementary school leavers.

In addition, two teachers had worked as principals. Twenty were women, and three were men. Appendix Table 1 provides a summary of basic information on the writers: year of birth, the year when their teaching career began, teaching post before the reform and the number of pages in each narrative. Instead of the writers' real names, pseudonyms are used in this Appendix table.

These kinds of personal memories offer fruitful, concrete and sensitive views into the past, while also not being easy to analyse, as many are based on complex and manifold sources. Alistair Thomson notes that no historical source provides direct, unmediated and uncomplicated access to the past; thus, every source is a constructed and selective representation of an experience.<sup>8</sup> Unlike oral sources (e.g., interviews), the essential features of written reminiscences are privacy during the reminiscence process and the absence of face-to-face interactions and interactive guidance.<sup>9</sup> Jyrki Pöysä argues that the absence of extraneous questions, as well as the lack of discussion and feedback, may enhance the self-direction of the text and the associative connections of themes. The writing process is an intimate situation that allows the writer to choose the time and place to undertake the reminiscence. The possibility of rereading the text, as well as correcting and altering the interpretation, allows for controlling the expression of one's own thoughts and consciously maintaining self-image.<sup>10</sup> Philip Gardner uses the concept of life narratives and argues that myriad life events and experiences are weighted, refined and ordered to construct an ongoing narrative account through which they might be understood as meaningful and coherent.<sup>11</sup> The opportunity to read and reread the text also can encourage self-reflection and lengthen the writing process. Remembering is highly personal and thereby subjective.<sup>12</sup> When remembering, people construct their past and present and evaluate themselves with regard to them.<sup>13</sup> On one hand, the characteristic feature of remembering is subjectivity, with the emphasis on the narrator's own relation to her or his life

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8. Alistair Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis," 101–2.

9. Jyrki Pöysä, "Kilpakirjoitukset muistitietotutkimuksessa [Competition Writings in Oral History Research]," in *Muistitietotutkimus [Oral History Research]*, eds. Outi Fingerroos, Riina Haanpää, Anne Heimo and Ulla-Maija Peltonen (Helsinki: SKS, 2006), 221–44. See also Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis," 101–17.

10. Pöysä, "Kilpakirjoitukset muistitietotutkimuksessa [Competition Writings in Oral History Research]," 229–30.

11. Gardner, "Oral History in Education," 177.

12. Pöysä, "Kilpakirjoitukset muistitietotutkimuksessa [Competition Writings in Oral History Research]," 229–30.

13. Pat Sikes and Ivor Goodson, "What You Got When You've Got a Life Story?" in *The Routledge International Handbook on Narrative and Life History*, eds. Ivor Goodson, Ari Antikainen, Pat Sikes and Molly Andrews (London: Routledge, 2017), 60–71. See e.g. Gardner, "Oral History in Education"; Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis," 101–17.

experience.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, as Brendan Walsh notes, remembering is influenced by collective narratives<sup>15</sup>. The conventional ways of presenting narratives and shared and interpreted experiences affect, shape and form the narratives that individual people provide.<sup>16</sup>

The corpus also included the reminiscences of another nine comprehensive school teachers who had worked during that period, but since these teachers did not remember the reform and the early days of comprehensive schools, their narratives were omitted from this study. The fact that major change in the education system was not part of their memories underlines the notion of how personal reminiscences function. As previously discussed, episodes that have personal significance are more likely to become long-term memories.<sup>17</sup> These nine comprehensive school teachers wanted to share and emphasise events other than school reform. As Sikes and Goodson point out, life storytellers tell their stories in particular ways, for particular purposes, guided by their understanding of the particular situations they are discussing. At the same time, the storytellers are aware of the impression they want to present.<sup>18</sup>

### **Analysing teachers' written narratives**

The analysis process continued by more closely examining the narrations' features in written memories, e.g., lengths, shapes, forms and language used. The teachers' school memories varied in length, from a few pages to nearly a hundred pages (Appendix Table 1). The sources included narratives that resembled short life stories or autobiographies, in which a writer might begin a narrative by telling about her or his childhood memories and carrying the reader through life phases to which school memories were attached. Other narratives comprised shorter fragments that highlighted school memories that the writers wanted to share. Common to all narratives in the corpus were the different temporal levels, i.e., the writers remembering their past in the present.<sup>19</sup> Goodson notes that with life narratives, one should understand the

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14. Gardner, "Oral History in Education"; see also Ivor Goodson, "The Story of Life History," in *The Routledge International Handbook on Narrative and Life History*, eds. Ivor Goodson, Ari Antikainen, Pat Sikes and Molly Andrews (London: Routledge, 2017), 23–33; Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis".

14. Walsh, "I Never Heard the Word Methodology'."

15. Sikes and Goodson, "What You Got When You've Got a Life Story?" 60–71. See e.g. Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis."

17. Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis," 103.

18. Sikes and Goodson, "What You Got When You've Got a Life Story?" 60–71. See e.g. Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis".

19. See e.g. Stanley, "Introduction: Documents of Life and Critical Humanism in a Narrative and Biographical Frame," 6–7; Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis," 109–10.

difference between life as lived, life as experienced and life as told.<sup>20</sup> Like Goodson's life stories, the written narratives are lives interpreted and made textual by the storytellers, representing only a partial, selective commentary on lived experiences.<sup>21</sup> When read and analysed by a researcher, the narratives again are interpreted, and the narrations are placed into a larger historical context.<sup>22</sup> The written memories used in this study resembled narrated stories whose characteristic features were diachrony and retrospection.<sup>23</sup>

The space devoted to narrating the change in the education system varied from writer to writer, from a few sentences to multiple pages (Appendix Table 1). Teachers might highlight some incidents or describe past school events in detail and analytically. In the reminiscences, the change in the education system was noted and even versatily analysed, but at the same time, the reform was viewed as only one episode in the teacher's personal life path. The writers intertwined their personal life phases and the change in school system. According to Sikes and Goodson, when telling a story, one attempts to make sense of one's life and give it meaning<sup>24</sup>; thus, personal narratives are both personal and research data. One writer commented on her work as a teacher:

*I loved my work. When we had a small family, plenty of time and energy were left for school work. ... I am grateful for my life's work among the children and the youth, as well as these senior years filled with culture.*<sup>25</sup>

The oldest of the reminiscence writers was born in 1923 and the youngest in 1950. Daniel Schacter reminds us how common it is that memories include so-called normal errors of memory and that the older the narrators are, the more mistakes and transient memories their reminiscences usually contain.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Alistair Thomson notes that every time we revisit or remember events, we reconnect to the recorded memory in new ways and make new sense

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20. Ivor Goodson, "Studying Teachers' Lives. Problems and Possibilities," in *Studying Teachers' Lives*, ed. Ivor Goodson (London: Routledge, 1992), 234–49.

21. See also Goodson, "The Story of Life History," 23–33.

22. Ibid.

23. Kirsti Salmi-Niklander, "Tapahtuma, kokemus, kerronta [Event, Experience, Narration]" in *Muistitietotutkimus [Oral History Research]*, eds. Outi Fingerroos, Riina Haanpää, Anne Heimo and Ulla-Maija Peltonen (Helsinki: SKS, 2006), 199–220.

24. Sikes and Goodson, "What You Got When You've Got a Life Story?" 60–71. See also Stanley, "Introduction: Documents of Life and Critical Humanism in a Narrative and Biographical Frame"; Ken Plummer, "A Manifesto for Social Stories," in *Documents of Life Revisited: Narrative and Biographical Methodology for a 21st Century Critical Humanism*, ed. Liz Stanley (Farnham: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 209–19.

25. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 1468, Tuula, elementary school teacher.

26. Daniel Schacter, *Muistin seitsemän syntiä. Miten aivot muistavat ja unohtavat [The Seven Sins of Memory. How the Mind Forgets and Remembers]* (Helsinki: Terra Cognita, 2002), 23–4, 100–29.

of the past.<sup>27</sup> Schacter also points out that ‘what we were depends upon what we are now’.<sup>28</sup> Remembering is always bound to time and place,<sup>29</sup> as well as the storyteller’s personal perspectives, as one of the reminiscence writers explained:

*Now when I have retired, the meetings with old friends and school friends have increased. Again and again, we have noticed that there are many memories because everybody has one’s own, which the other one does not necessarily recall at all.*<sup>30</sup>

Teachers’ collected school reminiscences contained narratives in which the past was described in detail and with emotion. For example, one writer narrated nice occasions during her school years with a nostalgic tone: ‘We went on a study and cultural trip as far away as Naples. We made excursions to Pyhänturi... Those were the days!’<sup>31</sup> Another teacher’s narration included a joke told in the early days of comprehensive schools, when they were ridiculed in public debates:

*It must have caused laughs when a newspaper published a [funny] photo of a sign where pedestrians were instructed so that they knew where to go. That poor fellow who had painted the sign and had misspelled the word “centre”! Someone had added a mocking text underneath it: “The first sign painters graduated from the comprehensive school have entered working life”.*<sup>32</sup>

In the autobiographies she has studied, Anni Vilkkko notes how the ways of telling a story made it possible for her to discern female storytellers’ characteristics, e.g., in the utilisation of personal pronouns.<sup>33</sup> Like Vilkkko’s narrators, the reminiscence writers in the present study wrote in the first person or used plurals or the passive form. When using the plural ‘we’, concerning a particular school context, the reminiscence writers’ storytelling included characteristics of institutional narration.<sup>34</sup> Elina Makkonen uses the concept of the

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27. Thomson, “Life Stories and Historical Analysis,” 103.

28. Schacter, *Muistin seitsemän syntiä*, 156.

29. Thomson, “Life Stories and Historical Analysis”; Janne Säntti, “Muistin ja menneisyyden välisestä suhteesta [On the Relationship Between Memory and the Past],” in *Esseitä historiallis-yhteiskunnallisesta kasvatuksesta [Essays About Historical-Social Education]*, eds. Jan Löfström, Jukka Rantala and Jari Salminen (Helsinki: Historiallis-yhteiskuntatiedollisen kasvatuksen tutkimus- ja kehittämiskeskus, 2004), 169–86.

30. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0230, Sofia, grammar school teacher.

31. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 1468, Tuula, elementary school teacher.

32. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0044, Auli, elementary school teacher.

33. Anni Vilkkko, *Omaelämäkerta kohtaamispaikkana. Naisen elämän kerronta ja luenta [Autobiographies as Meeting Points: Narrations and Readings of Women's Lives]* (Helsinki: SKS, 1997), 84–5.

34. For more about institutional and personal narration see Elina Makkonen, “Instituution suullinen historia [Oral History of an Institution],” in *Muistitietotutkimus [Oral History Research]*, eds. Outi Fingerroos, Riina Haanpää, Anne Heimo and Ulla-Maija Peltonen (Helsinki: SKS, 2006), 245–70.



remembered community, referring to the entity shared and remembered by a group of people.<sup>35</sup> Like Makkonen's interviewees, the reminiscence writers sometimes referred to a larger entity – their schools or other teachers – from their own perspectives, and their narrations included various remembered communities, depending on the writers' own teaching posts. The following are examples of narrations:

*For many years, we Latin teachers had to fight for pupils either with new languages or – as I, myself, had to fight – with the teaching of mathematics. In our society [i.e., the Society of Latin teachers], we tried to support this fight by publishing always new and ever-more-tempting versions of the subject: “Might I choose Latin?”<sup>36</sup>*

*We primary teachers had a lot of cooperation, and I gratefully remember my lovely fellow workers.<sup>37</sup>*

*My next school was School X. ... We [teachers] organised school trips, parties among our own classes in which parents participated, and parents' evenings.<sup>38</sup>*

The writers' serious attitudes toward the process of remembering and the collection of reminiscences were visible in the narrations. The corpus included memories in which the writer specifically described her or his aims with the narration and explicitly brought up the ethical principles of the writer and the sincerity of the recollections:

*In my narrative, I have tried to describe the past events honestly without offending anybody. I have tried to take into account the life situation and the physical and mental environments of the respective time period.<sup>39</sup>*

Reflections on one's own actions and thoughts were common in the narratives, and the writings even included self-evaluations of how well the narrators had succeeded in their teaching work and what kind of teachers they felt they had been:

*In reality, in the education work, I always felt an inferiority complex. I never felt myself as a good teacher. I did not have the skills and characteristics of a good teacher. I was just hard-working and reasonably pellucid.<sup>40</sup>*

Although the language used in the reminiscence narratives varied, depending on the writer, all writings resembled literary language more than spoken language. The texts also

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35. Ibid.

36. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0121, Tessa, grammar school teacher.

37. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 1333, Paula, elementary school teacher.

38. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 1394, Vieno, elementary school teacher.

39. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0241, Heini, grammar school teacher.

40. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2941, Nelli, elementary school teacher.

differed in terms of how analytical they were or how well they followed grammar rules. The writers could emphasise their message by using words or phrases that are more common in spoken language than in literary language. Thomson notes that biographical writings are influenced by an imagined reader.<sup>41</sup> When translating the excerpts<sup>42</sup> into English, the purpose was to maintain the original nuances of the language and preserve the reminiscence writers' intended meanings.

After elaborating on the characteristics of the written narratives and memories, and after analysing the narrations' features, e.g., lengths, shapes, forms and language used, the analysis process turned to the contents of the teachers' school memories. The focus of the content analyses was to identify and analyse the concrete issues and subjects about the school reform that each writer brought up in his or her narrative. As Thomson notes, when it comes to a sample of life stories, a researcher can, with a careful reading, identify patterns and themes related to research subjects.<sup>43</sup> The sensitive and close reading of sources is one of the main guidelines that researchers must bear in mind when analysing personal accounts. During the analysis process, the researcher must try to capture the meaning of the writer's narration. Gardner argues that there is a distinction between recollection and repetition: Recollection leads a researcher to a real and explicable past, while repetition seeks to interpret the documents for meanings they may be held to convey.<sup>44</sup> The emphasis of this paper's analysis was not only the written subjects, but also the detailed descriptions that writers provided. At the same time, during the analysis process, the narratives were placed in the historical context of the school-reform period and juxtaposed with macro-level events.<sup>45</sup> All issues and detailed descriptions from the school-reform period described by teachers in their written narratives were analysed, and they constituted four major subjects. In what follows, those four subjects and the results of the analysis process are examined more closely. First, the implementation of comprehensive schools in general is discussed, i.e., how the reminiscence writers described this period of change and the intersection of the old and new systems during the transition. This section begins with a brief explanation of the establishment of Finnish comprehensive schools, as provided in previous studies. Second, the accounts of teaching staff and the positioning of

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41. Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis," 107.

42. Some of the excerpts have been shortened by leaving out some sentences which were not relevant to understanding the meanings of the reminiscence writers. The omitted sentences are marked with three dots. Some words have been added to a few excerpts to improve the clarity and meaning of the sentences. The extra words appear in square brackets.

43. Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis," 114.

44. Gardner, "Oral History in Education," 186–8.

45. Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis," 114.

schools in the new comprehensive school system are addressed. Third, the memories of how teachers themselves were educated about the new school system are examined. Finally, before providing the summary and conclusions, teachers' reminiscences concerning their everyday work at schools, including difficulties and successes, during implementation of the new comprehensive school system, e.g., the challenges they faced with heterogeneous pupil groups and classes, are discussed.

### **The beginning of comprehensive schools: an intersection of old and new**

The idea of a comprehensive school system had been discussed in Finland for decades prior to the passing of the act that established comprehensive schools in 1968.<sup>46</sup> Mainly, the political right wing had been against the reform, fearing they would compromise the quality of education and defending the idea of educating the elite separately. Political consensus was not easy to reach because social equality and education as a human right, which were values behind the comprehensive-school proposal, were traditional socialist arguments. In the mid-1960s, the Centre, a former agrarian party, began supporting the reform in the name of regional equality, and the right wing, adopting the premise of human capital, began supporting the idea of a comprehensive school system. The result of these long and complex negotiations was the almost unanimous passage of the legislation, which guaranteed nine years of education for all youths. The new education system was among the universal public services provided by the welfare state, and the education policy emphasised social justice and equality.<sup>47</sup> According to

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46. Besides Finland, the idea of the comprehensive school was discussed in several other European countries during the 1960s and 1970s. See e.g., Bregt Henkens, "The Rise and Decline of Comprehensive Education: Key Factors in the History of Reformed Secondary Education in Belgium, 1969–1989," *Paedagogica Historica* 40, no. 1–2 (2004): 193–209; Erik Wallin, "The Comprehensive School – the Swedish Case," *European Journal of Education* 26, no. 2 (1991): 143–54; Hilda T.A. Amsing and Nelleke Bakker, "Comprehensive Education: Lost in the Mi(d)st of a Debate. Dutch Politicians on Equal Opportunity in Secondary Schooling (1965–1979)," *History of Education* 43, no. 5 (2014): 657–75; Marie Clarke, "Educational Reform in the 1960s: The Introduction of Comprehensive Schools in the Republic of Ireland," *History of Education* 39, no. 3 (2010): 383–99; Gary McCulloch, "The History of Secondary Education in History of Education," *History of Education* 41, no. 1 (2012): 25–39; Gary McCulloch, "British Labour Party Education Policy and Comprehensive Education: From Learning to Live to Circular 10/65," *History of Education* 45, no. 2 (2016): 225–45.

47. Sirkka Ahonen, "Changing Conceptions of Equality in Education – A Look at the Basic School in Finland during the 1900s," in *Koulutuksen yhteiskunnallinen ymmärrys [Social Perspectives on Education]*, eds. Joel Kivirauma, Arto Jauhiainen, Piia Seppänen and Tuuli Kaunisto (Jyväskylä: FERA, 2012), 260–275; Sirkka Ahonen, "Yleissivistävä koulutus hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa [General Education in the Affluent Society]," in *Tiedon ja osaamisen Suomi [Knowledge and Know-How in Finland]*, eds. Pauli Kettunen and Hannu Simola (Helsinki: SKS, 2012), 144–75.

Sirkka Ahonen, consensus prevailed concerning the developmental course in Finland, and social justice was one of the most agreed-upon goals.<sup>48</sup> The reform began in 1972 and was carried out gradually, expanding from the north to the south of the country.<sup>49</sup>

Before the reform, the first level of the Finnish education system was based on a so-called two-tier system comprising elementary (primary) and lower secondary (grammar) schools. At age 11, after four years of elementary school, children would either continue with elementary (primary) school (two more years, then two to three years of civic school) or move on, after passing the entrance exam, to grammar school. The path from elementary education to civic school entailed vocational training, whereas grammar school, which provided the foundation for upper secondary school (senior high school), was more academically oriented.<sup>50</sup> At the beginning of the 1970s, nearly 60% of youths attended grammar schools.<sup>51</sup> Amid growing criticism of the segregated system during the 1960s, the reform of education system was carried out to guarantee equal educational opportunities for all children.<sup>52</sup>

The comprehensive-school act divided Finland into fixed catchment areas in which schools would recruit pupils without any entrance exams or requirements. The initial comprehensive schools that began operating in 1972 were located in the north and northeast areas of Finland, with the aim of promoting regional equality. Many of the municipalities in these areas were small, and all municipalities received financial support from the state to maintain the required equipment and teaching resources.<sup>53</sup>

In the present study's analysed data, the former teachers who reflected on the beginning years of the comprehensive school system stressed that it was a period of great change and the starting point of a new era in the education system. The accounts included descriptions of the proceeding of the change, as well as notions that equality concerns elicited the reform. In the narrations, the earlier political disagreements of the 1960s were left completely without notions or writer only commented in short:

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48. Sirkka Ahonen, "From an Industrial to a Post-industrial Society: Changing Conceptions of Equality in Education," *Educational Review* 54, no. 2 (2002): 173–81.

49. Ahonen, "Changing Conceptions of Equality in Education," 260–75.

50. Ibid.

51. Osmo Kivinen, *Koulutuksen järjestelmäkehitys. Peruskoulutus ja valtiollinen kouludoktriini Suomessa 1800- ja 1900-luvuilla [The Systematisation of Education. Basic Education and the State School Doctrine in Finland in the 19th and 20th Centuries]* (Turku: Turun yliopisto, 1988), 295.

52. Ahonen, "Changing Conceptions of Equality in Education," 260–75; Pauli Kettunen, Marja Jalava, Hannu Simola and Janne Varjo, "Tasa-arvon ihanteesta erinomaisuuden eetokseen [From the Ideal of Equality to the Ethos of Excellence]," in *Tiedon ja osaamisen Suomi [Knowledge and Know-How in Finland]*, eds. Pauli Kettunen and Hannu Simola (Helsinki: SKS, 2012), 25–62.

53. Ahonen, "Yleissivistävä koulutus hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa," 144–75.

*A very big change happened when politicians decided to move [from the two-tier school system] to the comprehensive school.<sup>54</sup>*

*At the turn of the 1960s and in the 1970s, the big reform of the school system was going on. It was started in the north of Finland. To this municipality, the reform had not reached yet, but wild rumours travelled before it.<sup>55</sup>*

*The biggest change during my career was naturally the comprehensive school.<sup>56</sup>*

*The major social change happened when the old elementary and grammar school [system] became the nine-years-long comprehensive school.<sup>57</sup>*

*The political “Indian wrestling” concerning the school reform had been partly destructive. Finally, a decision was made, and the two-tier system was changed to the comprehensive school. This was a big step for the children of the remote districts and poor families. The financial situation of the family did not affect education, for the whole cohort of pupils was given equal opportunities to proceed in their studies.<sup>58</sup>*

*I started my teaching career in 1968 in the era of the old, good grammar school. The major national school reform was carried out during the 1970s. The principle of equal opportunities for all was in the background of this change.<sup>59</sup>*

The temporal distance of the reminiscence process elicited broad perspectives for writers and in the accounts, the change in the education system was evaluated in light of the whole history of the comprehensive school system. The writers underlined the positive goals and achievements of comprehensive schools, and their narratives provided the mentions of increased financial support for municipalities and schools. The tone of the accounts was affirmative, like this one:

*It is certain that in the beginning, the comprehensive school gathered from different social classes, geographically from everywhere, even from remote districts, all theoretically talented, and in any case, all Finnish children, with their own features and talents, into the lap of the civilising school, in general and equally. It was a marvellous achievement.<sup>60</sup>*

*The comprehensive school [system] was established in the 1970s. ... The best thing was that all children got the same opportunities for education.<sup>61</sup>*

*The comprehensive school started in the neighbouring municipality in 1970. The next year, the whole of Lapland transferred to the comprehensive system. It was a very wise*

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54. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0068, Saimi, grammar school teacher.

55. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0182, Antti, grammar school teacher.

56. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 1003, Anni, elementary school teacher.

57. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2946, Ellen, grammar school teacher.

58. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2406, Heta, elementary school teacher.

59. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2651, Veera, grammar school teacher.

60. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0302, Heini, grammar school teacher.

61. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 1333, Paula, elementary school teacher.

*decision. All Finnish children, regardless of their place of residence or the private wealth of their families, got an education where there was a good opportunity to continue straight to vocational education or to senior secondary school.*<sup>62</sup>

*I thought and still think that it was a wise decision to start the implementation of the comprehensive school from Lapland and the northern areas. During the first years, all levels invested plenty in education and equipment for schools. It seems that there was no lack of money.*<sup>63</sup>

According to previous studies, although there was general agreement about the comprehensive school system, concrete actions and ways of organising the change faced some criticism in the early phase of implementation in the 1970s.<sup>64</sup> The education reform not only included replacing the old schools with new comprehensive schools, but nearly simultaneously, at the beginning of the 1970s, the higher-education reform was carried out as well, and previous college-based teacher training was changed to university master's level education.<sup>65</sup> During the transformation period, teachers in comprehensive schools were either former elementary (primary) school teachers trained in the old teacher training colleges, former secondary (grammar) school teachers who had attained a master's degree or former civic school teachers who had specific training for civic schools.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, previous studies indicate that not all teachers were immediately stalwart supporters of the new comprehensive school system. There were critical comments, particularly from former grammar school teachers. Although they observed that the basic principles of social justice and equality were espoused, the concrete execution of the reform raised some doubts. Previous studies highlight that the former grammar school teachers were concerned about the new comprehensive school system jeopardising their stable and privileged social status. In addition, the academic/subject competence emphasised

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62. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 1566, Martta, elementary school teacher.

63. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2935, Nelli, elementary school teacher.

64. Kyösti Kiuasmaa, *Oppikoulu 1880–1980 [Secondary Schools in Finland 1880–1980]* (Oulu: Pohjoinen, 1982); Arto Jauhiainen and Risto Rinne, "Koulu professionaalisenä kenttänä [School as a Professional Field]," in *Tiedon ja osaamisen Suomi [Knowledge and Know-How in Finland]*, eds. Pauli Kettunen and Hannu Simola (Helsinki: SKS, 2012), 105–43.

65. Osmo Kivinen and Risto Rinne, "Finnish Higher Education Policy and Teacher Training," *Paedagogica Historica* 34, no. 1 (1998): 447–70; Jauhiainen and Rinne, 'Koulu professionaalisenä kenttänä', 105–43.

66. Jauhiainen and Rinne, "Koulu professionaalisenä kenttänä," 105–43; Annukka Jauhiainen, *Työväen lasten koulutie ja nuorisokasvatuksen yhteiskunnalliset merkitykset. Kansakoulun jatkokysymys 1800-luvun lopulta 1970-luvulle [The Schooling Pathway of Working-class Children and the Social Significance of the Education of Youth. The Question of Continuation Schools for Elementary School Leavers from the Late 1800s to the 1970s]* (Turku: Turun yliopisto, 2002), 244–6.

by grammar school teachers and general pedagogy/didactics sometimes were viewed as contradictory.<sup>67</sup>

In the narratives, these disputes were brought up when the former teachers wrote about the tense situation and referred to different attitudes of teacher groups (i.e., former elementary school, civic school and grammar school teachers). In those comments, the disagreements were mentioned briefly, and the writers were cautious in their accounts, avoiding blame. The narrations of the disputes were composed as if the imagined reader already knew what had happened and that there was no need to clarify these events in more detail:

*The establishment of the comprehensive school was opposed by the grammar school teachers usually – for example, I was an exception – and the elementary school and civic school teachers supported it.*<sup>68</sup>

*Here, the grammar school teachers resisted the comprehensive school hard.*<sup>69</sup>

Previously, the micro-level view from teachers' memories had utilised Janne Sääntti through his dissertation about teachers' professional identities in post-war Finland. The sources of his dissertation were teachers' autobiographies collected in 1998. In the results section of the dissertation, when elaborating on teachers' professional identities, Sääntti also touched on the micro-level view of the school reform, noting how a dichotomous view is based on a coarse division by different teacher groups that does not consider personal opinions that could be very diverse and sensible.<sup>70</sup> Although relatively prominent in Sääntti's dissertation, the polarising notions were not heavily present in the present study's reminiscence writings, and the writers passed over or only briefly referred to such disputes.

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67. Kiuasmaa, *Oppikoulu 1880–1980*; Jauhiainen and Rinne, “Koulu professionaalisenä kenttänä,” 105–43.

68. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0301, Heini, grammar school teacher.

69. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 1394, Vieno, elementary school teacher.

70. Janne Sääntti, *Pellon pientareelta akateemisiin sfääreihin. Opettajuuden rakentuminen ja muuttuminen sotienjälkeisessä Suomessa opettajien omaelämäkertojen valossa [From the Field to the Academic Sphere – How Teachers' Professional Identities and Roles Have Changed in Post-War Finland]* (Helsinki: Suomen kasvatustieteellinen seura, 2007), 255–7. The teachers' memories of this transformation period also were written by Tuula Hyyrö, whose report was based on her own recollections and eight interviews with former elementary school teachers (Tuula Hyyrö, “Peruskoulun pioneerit muistelevat [The Pioneers Reminisce about the Comprehensive School],” in *Rinnakkaiskoulusta yhtenäiseen peruskouluun [From Two-Tier School System to the Comprehensive School]*, ed. Jouko Kauranne (Helsinki: Suomen kasvatuksen ja koulutuksen historian seura, 2013), 189–213).

## Teachers' and schools' positions in the new comprehensive school system

When the reform was carried out, one of the concrete consequences concerned teachers' work and their new positions and posts in schools. The change in the educational system unbalanced the staff division in schools. This applied particularly to former grammar schools, where teachers' posts were altered more than in the former elementary schools. When grammar schools became comprehensive schools, the teaching staff were supplemented by former civic school teachers. In addition, the number of part-time teachers grew more in grammar than in elementary schools.<sup>71</sup> In the narratives, the situation was described as uncertain and unsteady, which caused tensions among teachers:

*The biggest tension creator in the teachers' room was the approaching comprehensive school reform, which revolutionised the relations between schools also in this municipality. Which position should each teacher receive in the approaching reform? How many upper secondary schools will remain in this municipality? Which headmasters will continue in their positions? I noticed during the school year of 1974-1975 that I had fallen in the middle of the storm.<sup>72</sup>*

*The establishment of the comprehensive school altered the teaching posts; some of the posts were transferred to new posts, to which teachers who were losing their former posts were appointed.<sup>73</sup>*

The narratives included the personal memories of a grammar school teacher or a civic school teacher losing her post, or a description of a change in teaching subjects. These accounts shed light on various life situations and teachers' varying attitudes. For example, even though one of the writers lost her teaching post, her whole narration had a positive tone, and she commented on the major occupational change she made in her career path without any negative or judgemental comments:

*As a matter of fact, my teaching career ended when the comprehensive school came to Tampere in 1974. My teaching hours diminished, and when I found a post in the congregation, I decided to try parish work.<sup>74</sup>*

Three other writers narrated their reminiscences in a more negative tone, providing examples of situations they viewed as unfair or unequal. The narrators commented particularly on the plight of former civic school teachers who, in many instances, had to acquire new qualifications

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71. Kiuasmaa, *Oppikoulu 1880–1980*.

72. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0182, Antti, grammar school teacher.

73. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0196, Antti, grammar school teacher.

74. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0229, Sofia, grammar school teacher.



to maintain their teaching posts. The new circumstances also were difficult for those subject teachers whose academic competence was a bachelor's degree.<sup>75</sup> Three writers' accounts provided insights into how the situation felt at the grassroots level at their schools:

*When the comprehensive school reform was reaching the south of Finland, many civic school teachers thought that one should acquire the qualifications for a subject teacher in order to secure one's teaching post. In light of the present situation, it seems rather inordinate.*<sup>76</sup>

*Before the comprehensive school, we taught in the civic school. ... [In comprehensive school], our subjects were divided into two separate subjects. There was a big change in workload and quality... The holders of the permanent posts had to teach whatever subjects the headmaster ordered to fulfil the teaching obligation of the post. ... The teachers in the same school were placed in an unequal situation towards each other.*<sup>77</sup>

*The comprehensive school came to Helsinki. In one school, the teacher of biology retired. However, there were not enough teaching hours for me. ... I put my heart in a new teaching subject, and luckily, I got advice for that from the teachers' union.*<sup>78</sup>

As in the autobiographies from Sääntti's dissertation<sup>79</sup>, the present study's reminiscence writers related varying experiences of preserving their posts during the transition period. For some teachers, the comprehensive system provided new opportunities, and for others, the change did not touch them personally, or the consequences were negative. Schools in which the staff structure remained the same did not face these tensions. Grammar schools, where staffing was altered the most, elicited the most narratives describing unfair treatment.

In addition to the discussions of teaching posts, previous studies point out that when the implementation of comprehensive schools reached southern Finland, with its larger towns, the conflicts between the old and new systems became more visible. At that time, the comprehensive school system faced criticism about uniformity and inefficiency that diminished when the reform settled into place and positive learning results reached the public.<sup>80</sup> One narrator described these disputes:

*Not until the comprehensive school reached the area of the capital city did a big, critical stir begin about the comprehensive school and its problems. It [the comprehensive*

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75. Grammar school teachers usually had master's degrees.

76. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0189, Antti, grammar school teacher.

77. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0453, Kati, civic school teacher.

78. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2417, Maikki, grammar school teacher. The writer had a bachelor's degree.

79. Sääntti, *Pellon pientareelta akateemisiin sfääreihin*, 245.

80. Ahonen, "Yleissivistävä koulutus hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa," 153.

*school] was regarded as creating uniformity and as being an inefficient school where school talents could not improve, nor be fulfilled.<sup>81</sup>*

Besides these disagreements, the question was the future of the old classical lyceums in the new education system, i.e., the old grammar schools, in which the curriculum included Latin and Greek.<sup>82</sup> In one reminiscence, the narrator crystallised this distress, stating that the comprehensive school became a transition point for the classical lyceums and the classics. In her account, she emphasised the heritage of these distinguished schools and vividly described subject teachers' concerns:

*One of the transition points became the establishment of the comprehensive school and the individual pupils changing to the pupil material [i.e., the masses of pupils]. How in that crash could the heritage of the classical lyceums be saved? A working party was set up for carrying out planning in 1972. Its results gave Latin groups like [those] which the contemporary comprehensive schools have, but otherwise, its optimism was empty. ... The teaching of Greek completely ended.<sup>83</sup>*

In the reminiscence writings, the teachers also brought up bigger, more contentious issues concerning the old private grammar schools and their relationship to the new comprehensive school system. The question of the municipalisation of private grammar schools had been politically sensitive, eliciting intense opinions for and against. In most private grammar schools, the teachers were in favour of municipalisation, while private-school associations were against it. When the private grammar schools were municipalised, they lost their administrative authority. The reminiscence writers wrote about those disagreements, one of whom even humorously describing disputes that had been quite heated. The temporal distance gave the writer a perspective on the issue:

*In Espoo [a municipality in the south of Finland], I was caught up in the upheaval of the school [reform]. The reform of the comprehensive school was coming from the north and private grammar schools; there were several of them in the capital city area transferred to the ownership of the municipalities. In southern Espoo, the discussions already had finished, and teachers seemed to be quite unanimous that there was no other future than to be a municipal school. To the best of my recollection, [it was] the art teacher [who] said, a little amused, that when the discussion about the municipalisation was swelling at its hottest, there was present, at every possible meeting, a group which was called "the platoon of the kick sleds". In the group, there was an old man who, every time when he had a chance to say something, harped on the*

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81. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0302, Heini, grammar school teacher.

82. Ahonen, "Yleissivistävä koulutus hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa," 153.

83. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0121, Tessa, grammar school teacher.

*same string: “When we with the kick sleds collected funds for this school...”. His conclusion was always the same: The school should not be municipalised.*

*There was a much bigger problem in one other private school in Espoo. The school association started a strong resistance against bringing the school under municipal ownership.<sup>84</sup>*

According to previous studies, the dispute over the place of private grammar schools in the comprehensive school system resulted in an agreement that municipalised most of the private schools, whereas some would remain private, becoming so-called parallel schools in the municipal school system. Nevertheless, the private parallel schools resembled comprehensive schools: They had to accept all children from their catchment area, they were not allowed to collect tuition fees and they had to follow the same curriculum as the comprehensive schools.<sup>85</sup>

The demanding implementation of the comprehensive-school system also caused major changes in administration. For example, the number of officeholders in the provincial administration doubled between the end of the 1960s and the end of the 1970s, with the same phenomenon occurring at the municipal level.<sup>86</sup> The narrative writers seldom commented on these changes, and the tone of those accounts was anti-bureaucratic. The narration included remarks on how unnecessary some new administrative posts seemed at the grassroots level of the schools, and how relieved they felt when they were abandoned after a short period:

*The comprehensive school brought along increased bureaucracy. Chief education officers were appointed to municipalities and townships to be superiors of principals who had worked independently in their schools earlier. Some of the old principals found it humiliating. ... The most unnecessary [bureaucrats] for a while functioned in the provincial administration. From there, gentlemen or ladies came sometimes to haunt the schools. Fortunately, those departments were closed soon.<sup>87</sup>*

In addition to the changes in administration, the narrators rarely brought up how the comprehensive reform altered relationships between teachers' unions, and how teachers reacted to these changes. Until the comprehensive school system was implemented, the union field was diverse, containing separate unions for teachers, depending on their school contexts.<sup>88</sup>

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84. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0198, Antti, grammar school teacher.

85. Ahonen, “Yleissivistävä koulutus hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa,” 153–4.

86. Marja Jalava, Hannu Simola and Janne Varjo, “Hallinnosta hallintaan [From Administration to Governance],” in *Tiedon ja osaamisen Suomi [Knowledge and Know-How in Finland]*, eds. Pauli Kettunen and Hannu Simola (Helsinki: SKS, 2012), 72–5.

87. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0302, Heini, grammar school teacher.

88. Kiuasmaa, *Oppikoulu 1880–1980*, 437–48.

The establishment of the comprehensive school system caused the unification of these unions, which one narrator described as a rather difficult process:

*At the organisational level [of the unions], the comprehensive school meant that two separate teacher organisations could not continue. We grammar school teachers realised that the position of the subject teachers had to be guaranteed in the new circumstances of the school. It was not an easy operation to abolish the Teachers' Central Union and Finnish [Elementary School] Teachers' Union and establish the Trade Union of Education in Finland. Even though some joked about how one [one of the unions] was marrying for money and the other [union] marrying for academic prestige.<sup>89</sup>*

Changes in administration and in unions did not stir much interest among reminiscence writers and were seldom discussed in the accounts. The narrators preferred telling stories from the grassroots level and highlighting concrete everyday issues and schools' concerns.

### **In-service training days for teachers about the new comprehensive school system**

When implementing the comprehensive school system, it was deemed necessary to introduce teachers to the basics of the new comprehensive school pedagogy and to the new national curriculum. The first voluntary courses on comprehensive pedagogics started as far back as 1967. Those who participated in the summer courses, supervised by the National Board of Education, were mainly elementary school teachers. At the beginning of the 1970s, in-service training during the transition period (SIVA) began for all teachers.<sup>90</sup> According to their collective-bargaining contract, the teachers had to attend five in-service training days, in which they were taught the new pedagogy and the novelties of educational science. The themes touched upon included the aims of the new comprehensive schools, teaching methods (e.g., group work, discussions and individual assignments), differentiation, planning of teaching and learning, motivation, assessment, cooperation and overcoming learning difficulties.<sup>91</sup> Because the aim of the new system and curriculum was to develop pupils' whole personality (cognitive,

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89. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0069, Saimi, grammar school teacher.

90. The transition period lasted three years since a school changed to a comprehensive school.

91. Kiuasmaa, *Oppikoulu 1880–1980*, 435; Ahonen, "Yleissivistävä koulutus hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa," 153–6; Armi Mikkola, "Opettaja kehittää ja kehittyy [Teacher Educates and Develops]," in *Yhtenäisen koulun menestystarina [The Success Story of Comprehensive School]*, eds. Kauko Hämäläinen, Aslak Lindström and Jorma Puhakka (Helsinki: Yliopistopaino, 2005), 152–169.

affective and psychomotor areas), SIVA training focused on approaches and methods that were considered to support these aims.<sup>92</sup>

The hierarchical training system was organised by the National Board of Education, which appointed and trained national-level instructors. Furthermore, the provinces named teachers to participate in training at the provincial level, who, in turn, trained teachers at the municipal level. The cooperating teachers from the municipalities then taught and supported teachers at the grassroots level.<sup>93</sup>

The reminiscence writings included accounts of the in-service training days from the points of view of both grassroots-level teachers and those arranging the mandatory in-service training days. In the narratives of cooperating teachers and teachers of the province, the arrangements were framed positively as opportunities for new posts within the system. The tone of their narrations concerning their own new posts was positive, optimistic and enthusiastic. They described these events as follows:

*In consequence of the comprehensive school, the schools suddenly received plenty of money from the state. I was chosen as a cooperating teacher, and I got many opportunities to train outside my hometown. It was refreshing. I was excited about the comprehensive school.*<sup>94</sup>

*It [the comprehensive school] led to ... the training system at the provincial level. This way, the initiation into the change of the education system was guaranteed to [all] teachers. [In addition], the training was arranged for the instructors and for the teachers of the provinces. There were no financial impediments. ... When I worked as the co-operating teacher of the municipality and as the teacher of the province, I had a chance to get to know teachers who worked in different schools. It enriched my own thinking and made me question my own methods.*<sup>95</sup>

*In May 1972, I received a phone call from the government inspector of schools. He said that he was looking for teachers to be nominated as teachers of the province. He asked me to be a teacher of environmental studies. ... He assured me that the National Board of Education would train me for the job. ... After a few days of consideration, I let him know that I was accepting and shortly after that, the invitation arrived for training in Jyväskylä. ... At the beginning of June, we gathered at the University of Jyväskylä. In the general lectures, highly qualified experts and officials lectured mainly about the contents of POPS [the national curriculum of comprehensive schools]. I listened with keen ears and partly even admired what they said. Was it real that the reform of the*

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92. The new curriculum for the comprehensive school defined that its aim was to develop pupils' whole personality and it divided this aim into three areas: cognitive, affective and psychomotor areas. Kiuasmaa, *Oppikoulu 1880–1980*, 460; Erkki Lahdes, *Peruskoulun uusi opetusoppi [New Didactics of Comprehensive School]* (Helsinki: Otava, 1977), 72–3, 199.

93. Kiuasmaa, *Oppikoulu 1880–1980*, 435; Ahonen, "Yleissivistävä koulutus hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa," 153–6; Armi Mikkola, "Opettaja kehittää ja kehittyi," 155–7.

94. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 1394, Vieno, elementary school teacher.

95. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2406–2407, Heta, elementary school teacher.

*education system, which had been under dispute for years, was now being carried out? And I was along on this wagon? Unbelievable!*<sup>96</sup>

In teachers' reminiscences at the grassroots level, additional in-service training about the new comprehensive school system elicited some mixed feelings. While they mostly agreed that there had been a need for this training, they remembered losing leisure time, causing irritation among teachers. These accounts did not include narrations describing activities during training days, nor did they contain more detailed commentaries on the new pedagogies of the comprehensive school:

*There was some opposition to the in-service training among teachers. There was especially grumbling about the in-service training days that were placed on Saturdays. The municipalities had permission to deduct wages if one did not participate. I do not know how often this happened. Many kinds of critiques were expressed [against the in-service training days]: Some had not learned anything new; others found that they had received plenty of useful knowledge for their work.*<sup>97</sup>

*The lecturer came from far away, for example, from Helsinki. It was useful, even though Saturdays were lost -- no in-service training during working hours. Later, it [the in-service training days on Saturdays] was given up. Perhaps we got new ideas from there [from the in-service training days].*<sup>98</sup>

*At that time, one had to take many courses, and one learned plenty of new [knowledge].*<sup>99</sup>

In one narrative, a writer commented that at the beginning of the major reform, when the hierarchical training system was not yet in full operation, teachers at the grassroots level voluntarily participated in additional education courses for a fee. She narrated the early days of the comprehensive school and non-mandatory courses, and conveyed a positive outlook on the new pedagogy. The interesting feature in her account was the distinction between non-mandatory and mandatory training:

*The summer school of Kymenlaakso organised many good courses. My own family situation prevented me from undertaking studies of a long duration, but in many summers, I took part in courses arranged for elementary teachers. We always received real practical advice for our daily work from them. We, ourselves, paid them, of course. Not until later did the municipality pay some of the expenses. In addition, there were in-service training days organised by the municipality for all teachers on some*

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96. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2935, Nelli, elementary school teacher.

97. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2936, Nelli, elementary school teacher.

98. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 3037, Hilja, elementary school teacher.

99. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 1333, Paula, elementary school teacher.

*Saturdays. Sometimes, there were teachers from the neighbourhood municipality. These occasions were very official.*<sup>100</sup>

In addition, the narratives included two stories in which the teachers who had led mandatory training days commented on these days. These accounts demonstrated the versatile attitudes of grassroots-level teachers, as well as the thoughts of teachers arranging the mandatory courses. One teacher from the province described the negative attitudes of teachers in her account:

*Teachers were obliged to participate in VESO and SIVA days.<sup>101</sup> It caused grumbling and reluctance. Without training, one was not able to get into the new system. ... One reason for the unwilling attitudes of the teachers was the rush. In addition, the attitudes could have been better; they [teachers] could not let go of the thought that they had graduated as teachers and knew all about teaching. New knowledge did not interest [them].*<sup>102</sup>

Another teacher from the province who had led training sessions commented on the in-service training days, portraying that she mainly was welcomed by teachers. Moreover, she elucidated in her reminiscence about how she arranged the teaching in order to reach an audience of teachers. Her narration provided insight on in-service training days:

*In the countryside, teachers knew each other. The positive buzz of the conversation was heard from the hall, and the sock knittings tinkled. Sometimes, one wondered how to get started and how to silence the hall. Generally speaking, I always received a positive reception [in the schools]. One had to think of a catchy opening; that was what one had to do. One had to praise, encourage, give examples of which everybody felt like they had a good grasp. Into that, one would insinuate new matters. ... The teacher of the province usually had to use her own speech; an overhead projector, if necessary; a slide projector; and sometimes also a record player or a ghetto blaster. Usually, I wrote an uncontrolled text and made a framework into slides. At the same time, I learned the content by heart, so I could forget about reading from the paper.*

*The training system of the province disappeared without any big announcement at the beginning of the 1980s. Then the optional education opportunities for teachers started, so-called substitutive training days, which were arranged especially by the subject teacher organisations.*<sup>103</sup>

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100. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 3036, Hilja, elementary school teacher.

101. VESO days refer to the in-service training days according to the teachers' collective bargaining contract.

102. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2406, Heta, elementary school teacher.

103. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2937–8, Nelli, elementary school teacher.

As this excerpt mentioned, the provincial training system ended in the 1980s, once the comprehensive schools had consolidated their position in the education system.

### **Everyday experiences: difficulties and successes**

The implementation of the comprehensive school system caused changes in the daily work of schools. The new national curriculum for comprehensive schools stressed more mathematics and language learning than the curriculum for grammar schools, and the weight of practical subjects diminished in grades 5-9 in comprehensive schools compared with civic schools or grammar schools.<sup>104</sup> In addition, teaching had to be planned and put into practice according to the new research-based comprehensive pedagogy, which emphasised teaching methods such as group work, discussions and individual assignments. The new didactics were influenced by educational psychology, and it has been described as child-centred and individualised. The aim was to offer teaching that was differentiated and suitable for all pupils. Differentiation had been one of the subjects taught to teachers during mandatory in-service training days (SIVA), and in the early phases of implementation, pupils were streamed into pedagogically different groups for mathematics and language teaching.<sup>105</sup>

Many of the reminiscence writers described their experiences in the new comprehensive school system at the grassroots level and provided concrete examples of where the difficulties and successes of everyday teaching were expressed. One reminiscence writer narrated details of the adjustment period relating to the new comprehensive schools, especially as compared with the old grammar schools. In her account, she described the adaptation process and new differentiation requirements as overwhelming:

*At the grassroots level, the establishment of the comprehensive school felt difficult. At first, attempts were made to teach languages and mathematics in pedagogically streamed groups. Those were given up shortly. For the non-streamed group, one would have to find the suitable area of teaching for each individual pupil, but for that, I lacked the time and skills. I thought that I left gifted pupils to learn by themselves. ... The*

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104. Mathematics and language teaching increased from 46% to 48% in comprehensive schools' classes 5-9 compared with grammar schools. Practical subjects decreased from 28% to 23%. Compared with civic schools the change was even bigger. (Kiuasmaa, *Oppikoulu 1880–1980*, 461.)

105. Ahonen, "Yleissivistävä koulutus hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa," 156; Hannu Simola, Jaakko Kauko, Janne Varjo, Mira Kalalahti and Fritjof Sahlström, *Dynamics in Education Politics. Understanding and Explaining the Finnish Case* (London & New York: Routledge, 2017), 90–3; Kiuasmaa, *Oppikoulu 1880–1980*, 460–2.



*adjustment difficulties often felt too excessive. Stumbling and by learning from errors, we tried to go forward.*<sup>106</sup>

When studies on the reform's results confirmed the difficulties in learning and teaching that teachers had been reporting, the pedagogically streamed groups were abandoned by a new act in 1974, and they were completely buried by the time of the national curriculum in 1985. The studies done by educational researchers pointed out that the streaming declined pupils' learning results, and it became apparent that pupils in lower-level groups – of which many were boys – were disadvantaged in terms of access to secondary education.<sup>107</sup>

Another challenge during the transition period – especially at the secondary level – was posed by the heterogeneous pupil cohorts. Previously, children had been streamed, after four or five years of elementary school, into separate schools – namely, civic schools and grammar schools – and teachers were accustomed to teaching more cohesive and homogeneous groups. In their narratives, reminiscence writers described some former grammar school teachers in particular having faced difficulties in adjusting their teaching to satisfy the needs of the new pupils and classes. The tone of the writings was compassionate and sympathetic, both towards the teachers and pupils:

*Teachers should have been prepared for the comprehensive school with pedagogically and attitudinal realistic reasons. When this did not happen, it caused a lot of suffering. ... I witnessed up close how many former grammar school teachers – skilled in teaching, a good person and compassionate towards pupils – experienced a major crisis in the comprehensive school. Suddenly, there was a class with multiple problems in front of her: pupils with different learning skills or mental problems, pupils who did not have support at home – on the contrary, the conditions at home were tearing them apart – the youth in their fragile development phase. At that time, there were no school psychology or student welfare groups.*<sup>108</sup>

Two reminiscence writers commented on how they felt the heterogeneous pupil populations had influenced the educational atmosphere. The narrations included descriptions of positive events in which the writers had conquered difficult situations:

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106. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0069, Saimi, grammar school teacher.

107. Ahonen, "Changing Conceptions of Equality in Education – A Look at the Basic School in Finland during the 1900s," 266–7; Ahonen, "Yleissivistävä koulutus hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa," 156.

108. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0302, Heini, grammar school teacher.

*The south of Finland transferred to the comprehensive school, which was felt in the atmosphere of classes. The eagerness [of the pupils] to learn varied from one extreme to the other.<sup>109</sup>*

*The last grammar school classes were big because all were enrolled – whoever wanted in. The classes were very heterogeneous. Learning difficulties were diverse. No class was calm and quiet, so finding the right touch [when teaching] took up the first lessons.<sup>110</sup>*

One writer brought up the issue of negatively streamed classes. The concept of negatively streamed classes referred to classes formed during the transition period, when the first pupils from civic schools began attending the new comprehensive schools. These pupils were placed in their own classes, separating them from the former grammar school pupils. In addition, the writer raised the question of the adjustment process for elderly teachers, whom he felt endured a more difficult transition than the younger teachers:

*It left much to be desired how the elderly teachers adjusted themselves to the comprehensive school and to the negatively streamed classes. Many of them wanted to teach as they had done in the old grammar school.<sup>111</sup>*

In former teachers' narratives, challenging classes were not the only problem in the comprehensive school system. A former elementary school teacher noted the increased demands for elementary teachers' expertise in her account: '*Some elementary teachers feared that they would not cope with their new demanding work. There were many elementary teachers among us*'.<sup>112</sup> The narrator did not clarify her comment, only briefly mentioning the 'new demanding work' that elementary teachers might have faced. Another reminiscence writer who also had worked as a teacher of the province brought up the adjustment period's timeline. The narrations included notions and critical comments on the speed of the change, which was considered too hasty occasionally:

*The characteristics of work changed. There were too many planning sessions; novelties<sup>113</sup> were taken into practice before experiences were analysed and before evaluations were made. The feeling was that much of the reform work was left unfinished before moving on to the next issue. ...*

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109. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0566, Elsa, grammar school teacher.

110. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2564, Senni, grammar school teacher.

111. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0205, Antti, grammar school teacher.

112. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 1394, Vieno, elementary school teacher.

113. The writer did not specify more detailed the pedagogical novelties she was referring.

*Many of the teachers were annoyed at the speed of the changes, and they pondered whether the experiences had been analysed properly and whether the well-tested solutions had been left in the practice.<sup>114</sup>*

She also mentioned in her narrative how important and decisive the support and orientation of the municipal chief education officer were. Her account emphasised the necessity of encouragement and aid from the administration during the transition process:

*The attitude of the chief education officer towards the teachers' work was significant. When implementing the comprehensive school system within the first wave, we received steady support from the chief education officer. He was a teacher with all his heart, and he worried about the development of the school, especially in sparsely populated and outlying areas. Therefore, we participated actively in the experimentation with collaborative teaching and the development of curricula and teaching materials.<sup>115</sup>*

Although the reminiscence writers narrated the difficulties faced in the implementation period, there were also recollections about how – especially at the primary level – teachers' professional work was not altered considerably, and that the changes were moderate. Two writers even described the reform process from pupils' perspective, mentioning that the children remained the same. One of them mentioned that in the comprehensive system, the school became more technical. However, she did not elaborate on her comment further. The writer's comment can be understood as hinting at the launch of audio-visual teaching aids, such as overhead projectors and language studios, which took place in the early phases of the comprehensive school system reform.<sup>116</sup> Both writers' narrations ended with conclusions that summed up teachers' main focus when teaching -- pupils:

*Luckily, very soon, I noticed that school life, as far as primary teaching was concerned, did not change very much. What happened was tolerable as far as the primary teacher was concerned. ... Many things changed, but very cautiously.<sup>117</sup>*

*Circumstances and time changed the school work. In the 1970s, the comprehensive school was introduced. Pupils as people did not change.<sup>118</sup>*

*The school changed to the comprehensive school and became more technical. Children, the most important [thing], remained, nevertheless, mostly the same.<sup>119</sup>*

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114. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2406, 2408, Heta, elementary school teacher.

115. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 2408, Heta, elementary school teacher.

116. Lahdes, *Peruskoulun uusi opetusoppi*, 54–5.

117. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0043, Auli, elementary school teacher.

118. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 1468, Tuula, elementary school teacher.

119. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0073, Petra, elementary school teacher.

## Discussion

This paper discussed teachers' memories of reform to the Finnish education system in the 1970s, when elementary (primary) schools and lower secondary (grammar) schools were transformed into comprehensive schools. The analysed data consisted of the reminiscence writings of 23 teachers, in which they reflected on the transformation period. The writings belong to the larger collection of school memories arranged in 2013 by two academic societies, the Finnish Literature Society and the Finnish Society for the History of Education.

The narrated stories mostly expressed mutual understanding and agreement, stressing the positive consequences of the reform. For example, the writers highlighted the benefits of the increased financial resources given to schools and – most of all – the equal opportunities for all children to receive an education. Some writers did not mention any disputes or make any contradictions in their reminiscences, whereas others recalled their experiences at the grassroots level and described both positive and negative incidents. On one hand, the new comprehensive schools' reformist ideas were represented in the writings. On the other hand, they included narrations explicating concrete everyday problems. The reform was not always easy to implement at the local school level, represented particularly in the narrations concerning staff structuring and the implementation of the new comprehensive pedagogy in the practical work. The collective narrative in the accounts transformed from uncertainty and contradictions at the beginning of reform implementation to favourableness and positive attitudes towards the new education system after the transition period.

The chronological structure of the teachers' reminiscence writings made their narrations easy to follow, and the linear timeline emphasised particular plots that writers provided. Writings included narration, in which materialised alternatives of past events were argued causally, i.e., the writers utilised emplotment.<sup>120</sup> Ning de Coninck-Smith argues that the characteristic features of narratives are that they are acceptable to listener(s) or reader(s), and they follow some conventions.<sup>121</sup> Through emplotment, the writers created stories in which the singular events became understandable and part of a larger narration.

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120. Jyrki Pöysä, "Tekstin ajat. Tulkintoja muistelukirjoitusten temporaalisuudesta [Times in Text. Interpretations of Temporality in Reminiscence Writings]," in *Tekstien rajoilla. Monitieteisiä näkökulmia kirjoitettuihin aineistoihin [In Borders of Texts. Multidisciplinary Points of View to Written Sources]*, eds. Sami Lakomäki, Pauliina Latvala and Kirsi Laurén (Helsinki: SKS, 2011), 319. 118. Ning de Coninck-Smith, "The Class of 1980: Methodological Reflections on Educational High School Narratives from Denmark in the 1970s and 1980s," *Paedagogica Historica* 44, no. 6 (2008): 733–46.

The narrators' personal life experiences and perspectives left room for various interpretations, although all writers narrated a general line of positive conclusions concerning the major reform. As Sikes and Goodson note, life stories as research data include diverse and multiple viewpoints.<sup>122</sup> The writers' reminiscence narratives considered the whole history of the comprehensive school system, and some of the writers ended their narratives in the present tense, including contemporary discussions about educational issues. Many of the writers intertwined the change made in the education system with their personal life histories, carrying the reader through their life paths.

The reminiscence writers' retrospective gaze allowed them to reflect analytically and employ different viewpoints. For example, although many of the writers recalled tensions between teachers owing to their different educational backgrounds, the disagreements they mentioned were placed in the framework of understanding others' interpretations. The writers emphasised the positive aspects of the reform and did not interpret contradictions as overwhelming, although some narratives included reminiscences in which the disputes that took place during that period were crystallised. According to the Pollyanna principle, people usually want to recall pleasant issues and narrate them positively.<sup>123</sup> This is especially evident among elderly people, who tend to describe their past in a positive light.

The teachers' narratives comprised vivid and concrete memories. They remembered the past nostalgically and – sometimes – longingly or even humorously. In reference to autobiographies, Anni Vilkkö employs the concept of 'lively memories', which their narrators perceive as authentic, truth. The lively emotions awakened by them are then transferred to the reader to be experienced.<sup>124</sup> Philip Gardner describes how the story may become the story of the historical landscape within which lives have been lived. At best, the story can illuminate the past as if the reader witnessed and lived through the events personally.<sup>125</sup>

Concerning the reminiscence process, Janne Sääntti refers to narrative knowledge, which could offer, in spite of its inaccuracies, as truthful an image as any other types of knowledge.<sup>126</sup> In addition, Philip Gardner notes that memory may serve the construction and maintenance of identity, though it is also a witness to truth in history, and researchers may remain content to

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119. Sikes and Goodson, "What You Got When You've Got a Life Story?" 60–71. See also Thomson, "Life Stories and Historical Analysis," 101–17; Gardner, "Oral History in Education," 175–88; Goodson, "The Story of Life History," 23–33.

123. Sääntti, "Muistin ja menneisyyden välisestä suhteesta," 175.

124. Vilkkö, *Omaelämäkerta kohtaamispaikkana*, 39. See also Plummer, "A Manifesto for Social Stories," 209–19.

125. Gardner, "Oral History in Education," 184.

126. Sääntti, "Muistin ja menneisyyden välisestä suhteesta," 169–86.

listen to a narrative on its own terms, as a constructed and purposeful account, and engage with it as just that.<sup>127</sup> Brendan Walsh, referring to Gardner, reminds us that ‘despite scholarly scepticism, the strength of memory is that it “bring(s) to mind real events that once happened”; it may not be wholly accurate, but it is “directed towards prior reality” ’.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, Alistair Thomson argues that an event becomes a remembered and meaningful experience through narrative.<sup>129</sup> As one reminiscence writer expressed:

*The more I thought about it, the more I thought that the reminiscence process helped me to understand my former self. Therefore, I am partly writing for the collection, partly because I want to find out how my life has become. Indeed, I have wondered about it before...*

*I try to be as sincere and honest as I can.*<sup>130</sup>

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127. Gardner, “Oral History in Education,” 175–88. See also Plummer, “A Manifesto for Social Stories,” 209–19.

128. Walsh, “‘I Never Heard the Word Methodology’.”

129. Thomson, “Life Stories and Historical Analysis,” 103–4.

130. SKS KRA Koulu 2013, 0129, Antti, grammar school teacher.