

## Comprehensive school: Finland's largest cultural center

Eeva Anttila, Liisa Jaakonaho, Marja-Leena Juntunen,  
Mari Martin, Hanna M. Nikkanen, Riku Saastamoinen & Isto Turpeinen

This policy brief is aimed at municipal culture and education departments, schools that offer basic arts education, centers of children's culture and other producers of services in arts and cultural education.

Numerous studies have shown that arts and cultural education strengthens the cultural capital of children and young people, and supports their capacities to actively participate in society. Based on this premise, comprehensive schools

should be considered as Finland's largest cultural centers, where high-quality, diverse arts and cultural education is equally available to all.

photo: Juha Metso



Arts and cultural education is offered in comprehensive schools, art schools, children's cultural centres, museums, arts institutions, and libraries. Of these, only comprehensive schools reach all children and young people. Although schools carry an important responsibility to ensure cultural and social equality and inclusion, there are not sufficient resources to implement high-quality, diverse arts and cultural education in order to secure pupils' cultural rights.<sup>1</sup>

The quality, diversity and accessibility of arts and cultural education can be improved by strengthening collaboration between schools and providers of arts and cultural education. Through cross-sectoral cooperation, schools will be able to ensure that equality and cultural rights are realized.

### Measures for enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration

- **Municipal culture and education departments** should map out providers of regional arts and cultural education services and, drawing upon past experiences, explore the possibilities and challenges for collaboration with them.
- **Municipal education departments** should collect pupils' wishes and teachers' ideas on how arts and cultural education could be realized within the school day.
- **Municipal education departments** should offer providers of art and cultural services the possibility to use school facilities during and immediately after school hours.
- **Municipal culture and/or education departments** should prepare an arts and cultural education action plan for the municipality, linking this with the municipal or regional cultural wellbeing strategy when possible.
- **Comprehensive schools** should participate in the planning and implementation of the arts and cultural education plan.
- **Comprehensive School Principals** should support teachers to develop local models of collaboration both within and outside of the formal curriculum.
- **Comprehensive school principals** should provide in-service arts and cultural education training for teachers, and allocate sufficient resources for this training.
- **Providers of arts and cultural education services** should seek active cooperation with local schools, taking note of differences in organizational cultures.

### Problem

There are notable inequalities among children and young people in Finland in terms of their access to arts and cultural services. The opportunity to participate in cultural activities and access public cultural services is strongly dependent on family education and socio-economic background.<sup>1</sup> The cultural capital of a child in turn enhances their academic competence and is connected to future educational choices.<sup>2</sup> Socio-economic and cultural factors feed a self-perpetuating cycle of privilege. Parents who have positive experiences of art and culture also want to make these experiences available to their children. In this way, social, material and cultural resources are passed from one generation to another. In contrast, low education and income levels generate cultural disparity and may sustain the cycle of disadvantage. Cultural inclusion – or exclusion – is more an inherited than an individual choice.<sup>3</sup>

A key Government of Finland initiative aiming to improve the accessibility of the arts and culture acknowledges that there are disparities in access to basic education in the arts and children's culture in Finland.<sup>4</sup> Even though there is a broad, national network of art schools, there are considerable inequalities in access to basic education in the arts. Only 12 % of Finnish children, i.e. 135 000 students, receive basic education in the arts. Even with public support, tuition fees (which in music also includes the high costs of instruments) prevent many children and youngsters from taking part. There are also regional differences in access to basic education in the arts. For example, the basic syllabus for basic education in the arts is most widely accessible in Southern Finland and the least accessible in Western and Inner Finland. There are also inequalities within cities. In Helsinki, for example, the arts and cultural supply varies strongly from district to district.<sup>5</sup>

There are also divisions in participation in arts and cultural education along gendered lines: Three out of four of all students in basic education in the arts are girls. With dance students, the percentage is as high as 90%. Architecture is the only field of study where a majority of the students is boys.<sup>6</sup> The gender divide is also alarming with regards to arts education in schools: boys' arts results are poorer and their attitudes towards artistic subjects are more negative than girls. The willingness to enroll for extracurricular studies in the arts is also divided by gender.<sup>7</sup> It appears that access to arts education is affected by social and cultural attitudes connected to gender, where art subjects are seen in schools as feminine pursuits. These preconceptions restrict pupils' space to move and freedom of choice to participate in the arts.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, opportunities for children with disabilities and other individuals who require special support in art activities are very limited.<sup>9</sup>

**Only 12 % of Finnish children have access to basic education in the arts.**

**Three quarters of all students in basic education in the arts are girls.**

## Why is equal access to arts and cultural education important?

The right to culture and the arts is widely recognized in international human rights conventions. In these policies, the value of art and culture is described as intrinsic, understood as natural phenomena of human life that are intertwined with civilization and democracy.<sup>10</sup> Studying the arts enhances one's ability to respect and take others into consideration, which is a prerequisite for democracy, and to empathize with the circumstances of other people. Arts education supports the development of a tolerant and understanding citizenry, and breaks down prejudices and stereotypes. The different forms of interaction and expression connected to artistic activities foster a sense of community, togetherness and shared meanings. Aesthetic experiences are a natural and necessary part of all human life. To live a meaningful life also requires the securing of one's right to express oneself, play and use one's imagination. People with disabilities and others who require special support should be ensured the possibility to experience and create art without barriers, through recognition of their right to self-determination and human integrity. The possibility to participate in the arts and culture is a basic need and right that belongs to all people.<sup>11</sup>

Cultural inclusion and active citizenship are also among the key goals of Finland's National Curriculum for Basic Education. Indeed, the core curriculum highlights the importance of supporting pupils' extracurricular activities.<sup>12</sup> There is solid empirical evidence for the positive effects of arts education on learning, wellbeing and the development of social skills. High-quality arts education strengthens learning skills, identity work, self-esteem and, most importantly, skills for encountering others.<sup>13</sup> Art and arts education have proven to have holistic effects on wellbeing: they have been shown to enhance learning capacities, while reducing behavioral problems.<sup>14</sup> This is especially evident in cases of pupils who need special support in schools. The ArtsEqual intervention studies in schools confirm these findings.<sup>15</sup> Arts education also plays an important role in improving the school atmosphere. It is alarming that in 2016, approximately half of under 12-year-old schoolchildren felt some degree of cynicism towards school and 15 percent regarded school as insignificant for their future.<sup>16</sup> A stronger status of the arts in schools could be a source of incentive, as engaging in the arts offers pupils possibilities to be active participants in school activities, express themselves and influence their learning environments. The indirect effects of arts education are manifested as improvements in the school atmosphere and a sense of community.

The government's key project to improve the accessibility of the arts and culture allocates subsidies for after school clubs and recreational activities collaboratively coordinated by schools and the arts and culture sector, supporting the idea of a flexible school day. The pupils' wishes, based on research surveys, and the specific needs of schools have been taken into consideration in the funding decisions. However, continuing research on these programs reveal that some problems have arisen in terms of collaboration. There have been challenges to the collaborative planning between schools and arts and cultural institutions: for example, differences in the organizational cultures have

hampered cooperation. Research-based information gained from previous projects in this area should be better utilized in future collaborative developments.<sup>17</sup>

In an ArtsEqual intervention study, the idea of including arts educational activities in the school day was positively welcomed: they have been found to give rise to, among other things, new pedagogical approaches and ways of interacting with pupils.<sup>18</sup> Another intervention study showed that offering financial support and school premises for pupils to learn musical instruments immediately after the school day has encouraged more pupils to take up music as a hobby. Research also supports the notion that cultural stereotypes can be overcome when teaching in performing arts is offered to all pupils regardless of their differences, for example, gender.<sup>19</sup>

***The possibility to participate in the arts and culture is a basic need and right that belongs to all human beings. There is solid empirical evidence of the positive effects of arts education on learning, wellbeing and the development of social skills.***

## Comprehensive school as a cultural center

Finland's comprehensive school system can become Finland's largest cultural center if it engages in closer collaboration with arts and cultural education, especially on a cross-sectoral dimension. In this way, it would be possible to cross regional, socio-economic, cultural and economic boundaries and boundaries connected to learning capacities or gender issues, as well as approach differences between individuals and organizational cultures as an asset and a resource. Comprehensive school education reaches all children in any given age group. The teachers' pedagogical skills and knowledge of pupils serve as a solid foundation for high-quality arts education. Professionals from arts and cultural institutions can enrich school culture by participating in the arts education offered in schools during the school day and by introducing new practices to schools. Cultural equality can be increased by offering extracurricular arts and cultural activities in schools immediately after the school day, making them easily accessible to all pupils. What is essential is that all parties respect one another, learn about other organizational cultures, recognize the individual needs and development of a child or young person and support their growth.

- We propose in this policy brief that schools are developed into a cultural center that embraces equality and where
- cross-disciplinary arts education is an integral part of the comprehensive school system
- arts and culture are offered through clubs and other extracurricular activities
- the effects of the arts and culture that support personal development reach all children and young people regardless of age, gender, residence or socio-economic background

- the pupils encounter and experience all forms of art, cultural inclusion and agency, while building a natural relationship to the local actors in the field of the arts and culture
- all pupils express their own individuality and develop their personal potential

## References

- 1 POPS 2014 (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014); Constitution of Finland; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 2 Vettenranta 2015.
- 3 Af Ursin 2016; Catterall et al. 2012; Knell et al. 2015; Martin 2017; Purhonen et al. 2014;
- 4 <http://valtioneuvosto.fi/hallitusohjelman-toteutus/osaaminen/karkihanke4>.
- 5 Etelä-Suomen aluehallintovirasto (Regional State Administrative Agency of Southern Finland) 2014; Koramo 2009; Lapsiasiavaltuutetun vuosikirja (Annual Report of the Ombudsman for Children) 2015; Vettenranta 2015; Vismanen, Räisänen & Sariola 2016.
- 6 Taiteen perusopetuksen alueellinen saavutettavuus 2012.
- 7 E.g. Laitinen, Hilmola & Juntunen 2011.
- 8 Kuoppamäki & Vilmilä 2017; Kuoppamäki 2015; Turpeinen 2015.
- 9 Helén 2016.
- 10 E.g. UN Convention on the Rights of a Child (59/1991).
- 11 Nussbaum 2011; Dissanayake 2009; Lehikoinen & Rautiainen 2016.
- 12 POPS 2014 (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education), 42.
- 13 E.g. Anttila 2013; Nikkanen 2014; Turpeinen 2015.
- 14 Cultural Learning Alliance 2017.
- 15 E.g. Jaakonaho 2017.
- 16 Salmela-Aro & Tuominen-Soini, in print.
- 17 Anttila 2013; Uptitis 2006.
- 18 Turpeinen 2017; Jaakonaho 2017.
- 19 Anttila 2013.

## Sources

- Anttila, E. 2013. Koko koulu tanssii! Kehollisen oppimisen mahdollisuuksia kouluyhteisössä. Acta Scenica 37. Helsinki: Teatterikorkeakoulu.
- Catterall, J., Dumais, S. & Hampden-Thompson, G. 2012. Arts and at-risk-youth: Findings from four longitudinal studies. Research Report #55. Washington, DC: National Endowment of the Arts. <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Arts-At-Risk-Youth.pdf>
- Cultural Learning Alliance. 2017. Imagine Nation. The value of Cultural Learning. [http://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/images/uploads/ImagineNation\\_2\\_the\\_value\\_of\\_cultural\\_learning.pdf](http://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/images/uploads/ImagineNation_2_the_value_of_cultural_learning.pdf)
- Dissanayake, E. 2009. The artification hypothesis and its relevance to cognitive science, evolutionary aesthetics, and neuroaesthetics. Special Issue on Aesthetic Cognition. Cognitive Semiotics 5, 148-173.
- Etelä-Suomen aluehallintovirasto. 2014. Taiteen perusopetuksen alueellinen saavutettavuus 2012. Aluehallintovirastojen peruspalvelujen arviointi. Etelä-Suomen aluehallintoviraston julkaisuja 28/2014.
- Helén, E. 2016. SATA - Saavutettava lastenkulttuuri ja taiteen perusopetus -hanke. Esiselvityksen raportti. Tampereen kaupunki.
- Jaakonaho, L. 2017. Encountering and embodying difference through dance: reflections of a research project in a primary school in Finland. Teoksessa S. Burridge & Svendler Nielsen, C. (toim.), Dance, access and inclusion: Perspectives on dance, young people and change. New York: Routledge.
- Jääskeläinen, Liisa et al. 2015. Tasa-arvotyö on taitolaji. Opas sukupuolten tasa-arvon edistämiseen perusopetuksessa. Oppaat ja käsikirjat 2015:5. Helsinki: Opetushallitus.
- Koramo, M. 2009. Taiteen perusopetus 2008. Selvitys taiteen perusopetuksen järjestämisestä lukuvuonna 2007-2008. Helsinki: Opetushallitus.
- Korkeakoski, E. & Pääjoki, T. 2014. Taikalampun näkyvät ja vaikuttavat. Lastenkulttuurin taikalamppuverkoston keskuksen vuosien 2009-2013 toiminnan vaikuttavuuden arviointi. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön julkaisuja 2014: 8. Helsinki: Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö.
- Knell, J. 2015. Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth. The 2015 Report by the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture/finalreport/warwick\\_commission\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture/finalreport/warwick_commission_final_report.pdf)
- Kuoppamäki, A. 2015. Gender lessons: Girls and boys negotiating learning community in Basics of Music. Studia Musica 63. Helsinki: Taideyliopiston Sibelius-Akatemia.
- Kuoppamäki, A. & Vilmilä, F. 2017. "Musta tuntui, että mulla on ohjat". Nuoret musiikillisen toimijuuden sanoittajina. Nuorisotutkimusehti. Painossa.
- Laitinen, S., Hilmola, A. & Juntunen, M.-L. 2011. Perusopetuksen musiikin, kuvataiteen ja käsityön oppimistulosten arviointi 9. vuosiluokalla. Koulutuksen seurantaraportit 2011:1. Helsinki: Opetushallitus.
- Lapsiasiavaltuutetun vuosikirja 2015. Harvojen yhteiskunta vai kaikkien kansakunta? Hallituskausi 2011-2015 lapsen oikeuksien näkökulmasta. <http://vuosikirja.lapsiasia.fi>
- Lehikoinen, K. & Rautiainen, P. 2016. ArtsEqual Policy Brief 1/2016.
- Martin, M. 2017. (tulossa). Lastenkulttuurikeskukset osallisuutta tuottamassa. Huoltajien arvioita lastensa osallistumisesta ja osallisuudesta taiteeseen ja kulttuuriin. Lastenkulttuurikeskusten liitto ja Taideyliopiston ArtsEqual-hanke.
- Nikkanen, Hanna M. 2014. Musiikkiesitykset ja juhlat koulun toimintakulttuurin rakentajina. Helsinki: Taideyliopiston Sibelius-Akatemia.
- Nussbaum, M. 2011. Talouskasvua tärkeämpää: Miksi demokratia tarvitsee humanistista sivistystä. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Nussbaum, Martha 2010. Creating Capabilities: The human development approach. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- POPS 2014. Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014. Helsinki: Opetushallitus.
- Pulkkinen, L. 2015. Innostava koulupäivä: ehdotus joustavan koulupäivän rakenteen vakiinnuttamiseksi. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2015:6. Helsinki: Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö.
- Purhonen, S. & työryhmä. 2014. Suomalainen maku: Kulttuuripääoma, kulutus ja elämäntyylien sosiaalinen eriytyminen. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- Räisänen, P. 2014. Taide keskittyy keskustaan. Helsingin kulttuuri- ja kirjastolautakunnan avustusten alueellisen jakautuminen vuonna 2013. Helsinki: Helsingin kulttuurikeskus.
- Taiteen perusopetuksen alueellinen saavutettavuus 2012. Aluehallintovirastojen peruspalvelujen arviointi. Etelä-Suomen aluehallintoviraston julkaisuja 28/2014.
- Turpeinen, I. 2015. Raakalautaa ja rakkautta. Kolme sommittelmaa oman elämän tanssista. Acta Scenica 41. Helsinki: Teatterikorkeakoulu.
- Turpeinen, I. 2017. Raw-board-working-style, Pedagogical Love and Gender. Teoksessa S. Koff & C. Svendler Nielsen (toim.), Twist & Twin Dancing Identities. 2015 Dance and the Child International Congress Proceedings. Braddon, Australia: Ausdance.
- Af Ursin, P. 2016. Explaining Cultural Participation in Childhood - Applying the Theory of Planned Behavior to German and Finnish Primary School Children. Kasvatustieteen laitos. Annales Universitatis Turkuensis B 423. Turku: University of Turku.
- Salmela-Aro, K. & Tuominen-Soini, H., painossa. Koulu-uupumuksesta innostukseen. Teoksessa Välittäkää kukaan. Gaudeamus. [https://teholapaisi.wikispaces.com/file/view/Salmela-Aro\\_LV\\_JRNksa.pdf](https://teholapaisi.wikispaces.com/file/view/Salmela-Aro_LV_JRNksa.pdf)
- Suomen perustuslaki 1999/731. <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1999/19990731>.
- Vettenranta, J. 2015. Koulutuksellinen tasa-arvo Suomessa. Teoksessa Millä eväillä osaaminen uuteen nousuun? PISA 2012 -tutkimustuloksia, toim. Jouni Välijärvi & Pekka Kupari, 72-93. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön julkaisuja 2015:6. Helsinki: Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö. <http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/75126/okm6.pdf>
- Vismanen, E., Räisänen, P. & Sariola, R. 2016. Taiteen perusopetuksen tila ja kehittämistarpeet Helsingissä. Helsinki: Helsingin kulttuurikeskus.
- Uptitis, R. 2006. Challenges for artists and teachers working in partnership. Teoksessa P. Burnard & S. Hennessy (Eds.). Reflective practices in arts education. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 55- 65.
- YK:n Yleissopimus lapsen oikeuksista. <https://www.unicef.org/crc/>.

## Authors



**Eeva Anttila** (Doctor of Arts in Dance, Ed.Lic.) works as professor of dance pedagogy at the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. Within the ArtsEqual research initiative, she is the team leader of the Arts@School research group. During 2009-13 she headed a project entitled "The Entire School Dances" (Koko koulu tanssii), which was financed by the City of Vantaa and the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. [eeva.anttila@uniarts.fi](mailto:eeva.anttila@uniarts.fi)



**Liisa Jaakonaho**, MA, is a doctoral student at the Performing Arts Research Centre at the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. She has studied dance pedagogy and she is a registered dance movement therapist. She has worked extensively with students who need special support, applying dance as a means of supporting holistic learning. Her doctoral dissertation deals with ethical questions connected to inclusive art pedagogical activities for people with intellectual disabilities. [liisa.jaakonaho@uniarts.fi](mailto:liisa.jaakonaho@uniarts.fi)



**Marja-Leena Juntunen** (Ph.D., Ed.Lic. MMus) is professor of music education at the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. She has nearly thirty years of experience in educating music teachers. She has published numerous teaching materials on music pedagogy as well articles in international journals and monographs. She has also served as an expert for e.g. the Finnish National Agency for Education and TPO (Association for Basic Education in the Arts, Finland). [marja-leena.juntunen@uniarts.fi](mailto:marja-leena.juntunen@uniarts.fi)



**Mari Martin** (Doctor of Arts in Theatre and Drama) works as a researcher at the University of the Arts Helsinki. Before her career as a researcher, she worked long as a theatre pedagogue and a teacher of in-service training courses. Her interests revolve around questions of multiculturalism, special needs groups, exclusion and inequalities in arts education. Her special fields of expertise are arts integration and the use of autobiographical narrative in artistic processes, which her doctoral dissertation from 2014 also centered on. [mari.martin@uniarts.fi](mailto:mari.martin@uniarts.fi)



**Hanna M. Nikkanen** is a comprehensive school music teacher and a postdoctoral researcher at the University of the Arts Helsinki. As a teacher at a multicultural comprehensive school, she aims to speed up the integration of research and practice to develop school and municipal practices based on research and to bring thematics and information on schools and the life of schoolchildren under research. Nikkanen is especially interested in the development of an equal educational culture that supports a sense of community and agency in schools. [hanna.nikkanen@uniarts.fi](mailto:hanna.nikkanen@uniarts.fi)



Artist, teacher and researcher **Riku Saastamoinen** (MA Theatre Pedagogy) works as director of the Master's Degree Programme in Theatre Pedagogy at the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. His research interests focus especially on the status hierarchies and other normative power practices connected to art pedagogy and school environments, and on means of supporting equal peer relations through cooperative work methods of performing arts. [riku.saastamoinen@uniarts.fi](mailto:riku.saastamoinen@uniarts.fi)

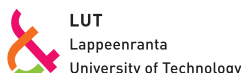


**Isto Turpeinen** (Doctor of Arts in Dance) works as a postdoctoral researcher in the Arts Equal research initiative and as a regional dance artist (region whole Finland) at Arts Promotion Centre Finland. He is a founding member of the Art Cooperative Apinatarha and the Free Dance School. His specialty is the raw board method, which he developed over the several decades he worked in dance education among boys and men. [isto.turpeinen@uniarts.fi](mailto:isto.turpeinen@uniarts.fi)

The ArtsEqual policy briefs present to policy makers latest research and research-based discussion produced by the ArtsEqual initiative. The Arts Equal research initiative, coordinated by the University of the Arts Helsinki, examines, in collaboration and interaction with more than 50 partners, how the arts as public service can increase equality and wellbeing in Finland and meet the social challenges of the 2020s.



### Consortium partners



**Arts as Public Service: Strategic Steps towards Equality**  
Cross-disciplinary research project (2015-2020)  
coordinated by the University of the Arts Helsinki.  
Project leader: professor Heidi Westerlund,  
Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki  
[www.artsequal.fi](http://www.artsequal.fi)

### Financier

