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**Tuija Itkonen**

**Contradictions of Finnish Education:  
Finnishness, interculturality and social justice**

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**Abstract**

Year 2017 marked the 100th anniversary of Finland's independence. Over the course of independence, along with the construction of narratives of Finnishness, education has been among the many social and political projects harnessed to support Finland's emergence as a viable nation-state. Finland built an educational system that has gained global attention for its excellence in outcomes. While much of both national and international public, educational, and political discourses operate around the notion of Finnishness, infused with egalitarian values, inclusivity, and ethos of excellence, there are alarming signs of realities conflicting with certain imaginaries of education and social wellbeing in the Nordic country.

This interdisciplinary doctoral thesis, situated across education, and, amongst others, philosophy, sociology, and literary studies, sets out to problematize what is currently happening at the intersection of myth and reality of Finnish education, and asks: 1) How does the notion of Finnishness inform different educational actors, perspectives, and contexts?, and 2) How can Finnishness in education be deconstructed, critically examined, and reconstructed? The thesis examines the way Finnishness is found to inform perceptions on interculturality and diversity in the teaching profession, and how the notion is involved in mechanism of Othering. This work also applies and demonstrates the use of an intertextual method as a pedagogical tool to deconstruct, critically examine, and reconstruct national narratives, here Finnishness. Finally, the work describes critical and reflexive interculturality (Dervin 2016), and conceptualizes and advocates a theoretical shift in the general perception of interculturality in education towards the direction of intercultural ethics.

Research data comprises ten Finnish teacher interviews and 85 open comments, two intertextual case studies with pre-service teachers, but also two commercial products on Finnish education, and Finnish ABC books (a selection 1900–2013). The thesis uses several (dialogical) qualitative methods and operates from critical and reflexive interculturality as the philosophical and theoretical lens.

The results suggest Finnishness set in the realms of the nostalgic and mystified, and discourses on equality/equity and social justice in education embellished and ambiguous. While the intertextual method revealed hidden contestations challenging hegemonies and taken-for-granted ideologies, Finnishness was also found to inform mechanisms that Other those not fitting the norm. Furthermore, notion itself, Finnishness, was found to be Othered and slightly contested. Ethnocentric tendencies and essentialist biases were also found in perspectives on interculturality and diversity among teachers. The positive indications of teachers' ethically caring, fair and just ways of promoting wellbeing and social justice were used to conceptualize and advocate intercultural ethics. With critical and reflexive interculturality as the base, I suggest that intercultural ethics can be used as a tool for meta-level thinking e.g. teacher education and training. I also argue that the proposed intertextual method can serve as a pedagogical tool across disciplines e.g. in phenomenon-based learning.

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*Keywords:* Finnishness, Finnish education, critical and reflexive interculturality, intercultural ethics, equality/equity, social justice, intertextuality

**Tuija Itkonen**

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**Suomalaisen koulutuksen ristiriitaisuuksia: Suomalaisuus,  
interkulttuurisuus ja sosiaalinen oikeudenmukaisuus**

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**Tiivistelmä**

Suomi juhli 100-vuotiaasta itsenäisyyttään vuonna 2017. Itsenäisyyden aikana, muiden yhteiskunnallisten ja poliittisten projektien muassa, koulutus valjastettiin osaksi kansallisia narratiiveja tukemaan kansallisvaltion syntyä ja myöhemmin ylläpitämään sen toiminta- ja kilpailukykyä. Suomi on saavuttanut kansainvälistä huomiota koulutuksen laadusta. Useat suomalaisuuteen ja suomalaiseen koulutukseen liittyvät yleiset ja poliittiset diskurssit ovat ladattuja tasa-arvon ja oikeudenmukaisuuden sekä erinomaisuuden eetoksella niin kansallisesti kuin kansainvälisesti. On kuitenkin hälyttävää, etteivät tietyt mielenmaisemat pohjoisen maan koulutuksesta ja sosiaalisesta hyvinvoinnista enää kasvavassa määrin kohtaa koulutukseen liittyviä realiteetteja.

Tämä monitieteinen tutkimus sijoittuu kasvatustieteisiin ja muiden muassa myös filosofian, sosiologian, kirjallisuustieteen tutkimusperinteisiin. Se tarkastelee suomalaiseen koulutukseen liittyvien myyttien ja realiteettien kohtaamista kysymällä: 1) Miten suomalaisuus vaikuttaa koulutuksen toimijoihin, näkemyksiin ja konteksteihin? ja 2) Miten suomalaisuutta voidaan tutkia käsitteenä koulutuksessa niin, että tuodaan esille piiloisia merkityksiä, tutkitaan niitä kriittisesti ja ajatellaan käsitettä uusilla merkityksillä? Tutkimus tarkastelee, miten suomalaisuus vaikuttaa opettajien ammatillisiin käsityksiin interkulttuurisuudesta ja monimuotoisuudesta, ja miten käsite tuottaa toiseutta. Tutkimus myös soveltaa ja havainnollistaa intertekstuaalisen metodin käyttöä pedagogisena välineenä piiloisten merkitysten löytämiseen kansallisten narratiivien (tässä suomalaisuus) taustalla, niiden kriittiseen tarkasteluun ja monitahoisten merkitysten tuottamiseen. Työ tarkentaa kriittistä ja refleksiivistä interkulttuurisuutta (Dervin 2016) sekä käsitteellistää ja teoretisoi siirtymää kohti interkulttuurista eettisyyttä.

Tutkimusaineisto koostui kymmenen suomalaisen opettajan haastattelusta ja 85 avoimesta kommentista, kahden opettajaopiskelijan intertekstuaalisesta tapaustutkimuksesta sekä kahdesta kaupallisesta tuotteesta liittyen suomalaiseen koululaitokseen ja valikoimasta (1900–2013) suomalaisia aapisia. Tutkimuksessa

käytettiin erilaisia laadullisia (dialogisia) menetelmiä ja sen filosofinen ja teoreettinen kehys on kriittinen ja refleksiivinen interkulttuurisuus.

Tuloksien mukaan suomalaisuus näyttäytyy nostalgisena ja myyttisenä, ja tasa-arvon ja oikeudenmukaisuuden diskurssit kaunisteltuina ja monitulkintaisina. Intertekstuaalisen metodin esilletuomat piiloiset kiistanalaisuudet haastoivat hegemonisia ja ideologisia 'itsestäänselvinä' pidettyjä totuuksia. Suomalaisuuden todettiin olevan osa toiseuttavia mekanismeja kohdistuen niihin, joiden koetaan olevan erilaisia suhteessa suomalaisuuden normeihin. Tämä näkyi mm. aapiskirjoissa ja opettajien käsityksissä interkulttuurisuudesta ja monimuotoisuudesta. Myös suomalaisuuden käsite nähtiin toiseutettuna ja jossain määrin kiistanalaisena. Opettajien näkemyksissä todettiin etnosentrisiä ja essentialistisia asenteita suhteessa interkulttuurisuuteen ja monimuotoisuuteen. Positiivisia ilmauksia opettajien eettisesti välittävästä ja oikeudenmukaisuutta edistävästä toiminnasta käytettiin interkulttuurisen eettisyyden käsitteellistämiseen ja teoretisoimiseen tarkoituksella edistää opettajien meta-tason ajattelua esim. opettajakoulutuksessa. Esitän myös intertekstuaalisen metodin hyödyntämistä pedagogisena välineenä muun muassa ilmiöpohjaiseen opiskeluun ja poikkitieteelliseen tutkimustyöhön.

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*Avainsanat:* suomalaisuus, suomalainen koulutus, kriittinen ja refleksiivinen interkulttuurisuus, interkulttuurinen eettisyys, tasa-arvo/yhdenvertaisuus, oikeudenmukaisuus, intertekstuaalisuus

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Espoo, 29 April 2018

Tuija Itkonen



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# LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This doctoral dissertation is based on the following publications:

## **Study I:**

Itkonen, T., Dervin, F., & Talib, M.-T. (2017). Finnish education: An ambiguous utopia? *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education*, 2(2), July-December 2017, 13–28. doi:10.4018/IJBIDE.2017070102

## **Study II:**

Itkonen, T., Talib, M.-T. , & Dervin, F. (2015). “Not all of us Finns communicate the same way either”: Teachers’ perceptions of interculturality in upper secondary vocational education and training. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 67(3), 397–414. doi:10.1080/13636820.2015.1062998

## **Study III:**

Itkonen, T. (in print). Intercultural ethics in education. In, F. Dervin, R. Moloney, & A. Simpson, (Eds.) *Critical Intercultural Competences and Teacher Education*. London: Routledge.

## **Study IV:**

Itkonen, T., & Paatela-Nieminen, M. (2015). How is the other produced in two Finnish ABC (e-)books – An intertextual reading. In K. Hahl, P.-M. Niemi, R. Johnson Longfor, & F. Dervin, (Eds.). *Diversities and Interculturality in Textbooks: Finland as an Example* (pp. 30–60). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

## **Study V:**

Paatela-Nieminen, M., Itkonen, T., & Talib, M.-T. (2016). Reconstructing imagined Finnishness: The case of art education through the concept of place. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 35, 229–242. doi:10.1111/jade.12057

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*A mere confrontation, eyes catching one another's glance, direct looks superimposing themselves upon one another as they cross. And yet this slender line of reciprocal visibility embraces a whole complex network of uncertainties, exchanges, and feints.*

M. Foucault, *The Order of Things* (1970, 4)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Year 2017 marked the 100th anniversary of Finland's independence. Feeling "genuine joy of our own Finnishness" (Finnish President Sauli Niinistö in his New Year's Day address<sup>1</sup>), Finns have been recapping the past centennial and looking into the future. While the centenary has been celebrated both nationally and internationally, there is a lack of discussion as to what this 'Finnishness' actually means, especially in regards to education. This interdisciplinary doctoral thesis, situated across philosophy, sociology, and literature studies, examines Finnishness as the framework informing perspectives in educational contexts. It aims to promote an expanded understanding of the notion of Finnishness in education and to provide tools for teachers, teacher educators, and researchers to facilitate self-reflexivity, dialogue, and critical thinking in teaching-learning and academic research contexts. The goal is to expand critical awareness of interculturality, equality, and equity (two terms often used) behind Finnish education. Along with educators, scholars, and intellectuals, the thesis calls for policy-makers at national and municipal levels to pursue the conversation on how best to maintain what has already been achieved in Finnish education (e.g. Ahonen 2012; Sahlberg 2011, 2015) but specifically to include in the conversation what has been left (in)visible or silenced while pursuing it (e.g. Seppänen, Kalalahti, Rinne, & Simola 2015; Varjo, Kalalahti, & Silvennoinen 2014). International audiences beyond Finnish borders are also called into these discussions.

Finnishness appears as quite a viable asset especially in educational contexts around the world: Finnish education is (still) heralded as one of the beacons of excellence, equality, equity<sup>2</sup>, and social justice (e.g. Hargreaves & Shirley 2009; Sahlberg 2011, 2015; Simola 2015; Tirri 2014). The necessity to imagine and

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<sup>1</sup>[https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/president\\_sauli\\_niinisto\\_time\\_to\\_make\\_peace\\_with\\_the\\_past/10001517](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/president_sauli_niinisto_time_to_make_peace_with_the_past/10001517)

<sup>2</sup> The difference between these two notions is discussed later.

create the idea of Finnishness was originally harnessed in efforts to build a homogenous people within a new nation state when Finland became independent in 1917, and later to maintain its coherence and independence (Simola 2015; Tervonen 2014). Grand National projects such as building up literacy among the citizens and designing an entire system of education – and its reformed version later on – have served, amongst others, to support these efforts to build and maintain a specific national image. Finnish educational initiatives at the state level have proved successful (e.g. Ahonen 2012; Tirri 2014) and have gained international fame (Simola 2015; Sahlberg 2011, 2015). For Finnishness to be ‘neat and tidy’, Finland’s historical ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, amongst others, were pushed to the margins and silenced in the Grand National narratives and the images thereof (e.g. Tervonen 2014). This largely continues today, only the scale and variety of minorities has increased to include many different kinds of ‘deviance’ from what is considered as the norm of Finnishness (whiteness, middle class, male).

Due to the nature of the profession, teachers are involved in this on all levels of education<sup>3</sup> (see Appendix A; EDUFI 2017ab). Finnishness provides teachers an affective framework that influences their thinking, pedagogies, and conduct particularly in regards to interculturality in professional settings. Likewise, the notion is ideologically perpetuated through textbooks and ABC books, curricula, institutional routines and practices, along with educational policy-making, and public and media discourses on education both nationally and internationally. This has the potential of perpetuating a somewhat narrow world view in educational contexts in regards to interculturality and diversities.

With an aim to provide ways to deconstruct, critically examine, and reconstruct Finnishness in education, this thesis proceeds in the following way. Beginning with a discussion of the general notion of (imagined) Finnishness, it proceeds to problematize the way it is often understood in relation to education. After this, terminological issues relating to the notions of equality and equity, interculturality and diversity, and mechanisms of Othering are discussed and explained regarding the way they are understood and applied in this research. Included are also brief descriptions of terms and concepts relating to intertextuality and forms of analysis used in Studies IV and V. This is followed by research syntheses explaining how the five studies composing the core of the research tie in together in relation to the intent. The theoretical underpinnings,

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<sup>3</sup> For education system in Finland see [http://www.oph.fi/download/146428\\_Finnish\\_Education\\_in\\_a\\_Nutshell.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/download/146428_Finnish_Education_in_a_Nutshell.pdf) and [http://www.oph.fi/download/175015\\_education\\_in\\_Finland.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/download/175015_education_in_Finland.pdf)

details on the data and methodologies for each of the five sub-studies are also provided in the research synthesis section. The five sub-studies are then summarized and main findings are discussed in relation to the intent of the thesis. Finally, concluding remarks are presented in regards to future research.





## 2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Imagined Finnishness

Words such as nationality, nation-ness, and nationalism signify multiple meanings, and as Benedict Anderson (1983, 4) states, are “cultural artefacts of a particular kind.” One such artefact, among many, is ‘Finnish-ness’ – one that has been imagined into ‘historical’ being in support of an emerging nation state of Finland over time. Once constructed, these cultural artefacts become ‘modular’ in that they can be transplanted into a number of social terrains (such as education), which are then associated with other sets of complex political and ideological denotations and connotations (ibid). Similarly, the globalization theorist Arjun Appadurai (2006, 24) speaks of “collective imaginings and imagined collectivities.” The image of an ethno-linguistically and culturally homogeneous Finland – and Finns as its people equipped with ‘Finnishness’ – is one of such collective imaginations. The process involves (re)reading, (re)writing, and (re)imagining historical narratives and representations of people, events, places, and spaces with specific goals in mind (Appadurai 2006; Kristeva 1993; Sen 2006; see also Tervonen 2014 on historiography). These narratives, infused with an ethos of survival, hard work, and persistence, told and written, composed into songs and anthems, and painted into ideal landscapes, were necessary in the construction of a national memory and a collective, albeit mythical, past (Ahonen 2012; Anderson 1983; Appadurai 1990; Kärki 2015; Martikainen 2013; Study I, V). The collective mindscapes (Appadurai 1990) create a sense of belonging, a kind of ‘nativeness’ to a particular space as if by virtue of originating or occurring naturally (Appadurai 1990, 2006; Rose 1995; Sen 2006; Study V). These imagined spaces in the core of national and cultural imaginations are ideal in their beauty (see Foucault 1984 in section 2.3.4) and demarcate who and what is allowed to identify with it or not (Rose 1995; Study V) – that is, who/what is invited to identify with ‘Finnishness’.

Essentialization, i.e. regarding individuals or groups in encapsulating ways (Holliday 2011), and juxtapositions have strengthened the ethos of national identity (Appadurai 2006), which, in this work, is Finnishness, over the course of time (Martikainen 2013; Tervonen 2014). In search of ideal Finnishness, various ways of making ethnic plurality less visible took place particularly at the end of the 1800s and over the 1900s. Post-war narratives tended to tidy up the past of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and other ‘deviations’ as they were seen to

threaten the notion of Finnishness (e.g. Martikainen 2013; Study I). In regards to equality and social justice, this has left much to be desired for Finland's historical minorities such as the Roma (Rajala, Salonen, Blomerus, & Nissilä 2011), the Sámi (Keskitalo, Määttä, & Uusiautti 2012; Study I), and other social, religious, and linguistic minorities (e.g. Kananen 2013; Rantala 2011)<sup>4</sup> over the course of Finland's independence since 1917.

Recent growing global flows of immigrants, refugees, and displaced people has increased what Arjun Appadurai (2006) calls a 'fear of small numbers' also in Finland. "In the space of the nation-state," elaborates Appadurai (2006, 44), the small-numbered 'stranger' creates uncertainties by "blurring the boundaries between 'us' and 'them,' here and there, in and out, healthy and unhealthy, loyal and disloyal." The still small numbers of immigrants (in comparison to many other countries) arriving and residing within Finnish borders have not only refueled debates on Finnishness, identities, and belonging (Martikainen 2013; Riitaoja 2013) but also roused deeply-rooted prevailing prejudices and racism in Finnish society (Puuronen 2011; Study I, II). Categorizations such as minority and majority, belonging and autochthony, inclusion and exclusion are created through these contestations over time – one would not exist without the other. As Appadurai (2006, 45) states, "minorities are not born but made." Representing the Other (e.g. Appadurai 2006; Bauman 2004; Hall 1995; Sen 2006; Shi-xu 2001) to majority, minorities often tend to be targeted as the scapegoat for the lack of safety and security and for any number of problems attached to global economies and/or national insecurities (Appadurai 2006, 42–45; Study II). One only needs to see the daily news in Finnish media, walk through neighborhoods or local shopping malls, or to observe a school yard during an outdoor break to find samples of these contestations in Finland.

## 2.2 Finnishness in education

Education has a major role to play in the processes of consolidating the 'ethnos'<sup>5</sup> into 'we' (Appadurai 2006, 50–51), as it did about a hundred years ago when imaginaries of Finnishness were beginning to form. For Finland, building up literacy among its citizens, and planning and implementing an entire system of

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<sup>4</sup> The Sámi are indigenous to the Arctic area of the Nordic countries plus the Kola Peninsula. The Roma are a regionally dispersed linguistic and cultural minority in Finland (and Sweden) since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>5</sup> The origin and etymology of the Greek *ethnos* refer to nation, people, caste, tribe; and is akin to Greek *ēthos* custom (Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethnos>)

education from the late 1800s onwards, were among the many social and political projects harnessed to support Finland's emergence as a viable nation-state (see Anderson 1983): the notion of Finnishness narrowed down and became a fairly tight normative goal also in educational contexts (Ahonen 2012; Kärki 2015; Riitaoja 2013; Simola 2015; Tervonen 2014). As indicated above, for the Finnish Sámi and the Roma, this has meant having been subject to extensive assimilation procedures also in educational contexts – the consequences of which still affect the schooling and further education of children and youth of both ethnic communities (Keskitalo et al. 2012; Rajala et al. 2011; Lanas, Rautio, & Syrjala 2013; Study I). Recent research has also pointed to the troubles many other minorities have had in the Finnish system of education and 'fitting' into Finnishness. Among them are studies on the education of e.g. Orthodox evacuees from Karelia (Kananen 2013), Swedish-Finns (From & Sahlström 2016), the gifted (Laine 2016), the deaf (Rantala 2011) (Study I), and Russian and Estonian care sector workers (Antikainen 2010), to mention a few (Study I, II). These studies refer to the power of hegemonic (Gramsci 1971) interpretations, the dominant cultural, ideological, social, and economic influences that manifest through educational discourses, classifications, pedagogies, and institutional routines. The ideologies behind everyday practices create tacit consensus that has the potential to render invisible any deviation from what is considered 'Finnish' (Riitaoja 2013; see Bourdieu 1991 on symbolic violence from a broader perspective; Study I, II, IV, V).

Meanwhile, Finland's reform of its entire system of basic education in the 1970s was based on egalitarian ideals that all children are able to learn regardless of social background, gender, domicile, or personal disposition (Ahonen 2012). Efforts to ensure equality of opportunity, equity of outcomes, and quality of attainment included e.g. establishing extensive special needs practices, abolishing tracking and streaming, and setting up a dense network of schools and teacher education programs throughout the country (e.g. Ahonen 2012; Simola 2015; see also Appendix A; EDUFI 2017ab; Study I). Teacher education and committed, pedagogically skilled teachers are merited for their part in the success of the reform and outcomes thereof (Simola 2015; Tirri 2014; EDUFI 2017ab). Finnish 15-year-olds have excelled in mathematics, sciences, and literacy in international assessment studies such as Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) over the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (e.g. OECD 2004, 2008, 2010, 2016; Study I). Studies now show that promoting equality (but not equity) in educational systems supports high quality of learning (OECD 2010, 2012, 2016; Study I). This has made Finnish education to be heralded as one of the beacons of

excellence, equality, equity, and social justice (e.g. Hargreaves & Shirley 2009; Sahlberg 2011, 2015). However, it should be noted that while the notion of equality may offer everyone access to education, equitable measures in regards to individual needs may be necessary to ensure equity of outcomes.

While much of both national and international public, educational, and political discourses operate around the notion of Finnishness infused with egalitarian values, inclusivity, and ethos of excellence, there are alarming signs of realities conflicting with these imaginaries of education and social wellbeing within national borders (Ouakrim-Soivio, Rinkinen, & Karjalainen 2015; Seppänen et al. 2015; Kuusisto, Tirri, & Rissanen 2012; Study I, II). Most worrying are the reports on the rather large numbers of young Finns (aged 15–25) under the threat of or already marginalized, i.e. those not registered for employment, education or training beyond comprehensive studies (NEETs) (Ristikari et al. 2016; FNBE 2014; OECD 2017). Finnish studies also report on growing spatial socioeconomic and ethnic differentiation and educational segregation (e.g. Bernelius 2013; Seppänen, et al. 2015) as parents are rejecting disadvantaged neighborhoods and schools (e.g. Kosunen 2014; Varjo, Kalalahti, & Silvennoinen 2014). The principles of equality, inclusivity, and universality operating behind the Finnish school reform in the 1970s are increasingly challenged as differences in performance between schools and between classes are reported (Kosunen 2014; Berisha & Seppänen 2017) and school selection processes are shown to be affected by economic capital transforming into embodied cultural capital (Kosunen & Seppänen 2015). Completing the same educational level enabled upward social mobility for many Finns over the past decades (Ahonen 2012; Erola 2010; Sirniö 2016). Today, however, intergenerational socioeconomic transmission for instance is shown to favor those in higher income brackets (Sirniö 2016). Despite numerous political measures and much new research on educating diversities (see section 2.3), children of immigrants in Finland tend to achieve at lower levels than the majority (e.g. Kilpi-Jakonen 2011). Furthermore, we are only beginning to see the big picture from the terminological confusion (e.g. Holm & Zilliacus 2009; Dervin 2016) regarding the business of inter/cultural (see section 2.3.2) communication and competences (Abdallah-Preteuille 1986, 2006; Holliday 2010, 2011; Shi-xu 2001; Dervin 2014, 2016; Study II, III) and other matters related to interculturality and teaching diversities (see section 2.3.2).

Teachers are feeling the weight of these (new) burdens. The complexity of increasingly inclusive, rapidly diversifying teaching-learning conditions are challenging to teachers. Many find it demanding on their sense of professional efficacy and personal wellbeing, which then often results in ethical dilemmas (e.g.

Tirri 2002; Räsänen 2002b; Study II, III) exhaustion, work attrition, or teachers leaving the profession for other jobs with their Master's degrees (Kumpulainen 2014; Lanas 2017; Linnansaari-Rajalin et al. 2015; Malinen & Savolainen 2016; Mäkinen 2013; Pudas 2015). Since the 1990s, an increasing number of studies in Finnish educational research are addressing issues of professional and pedagogical ethics (e.g. Gholami & Tirri 2012; Räsänen 2002b; Talib 1999, 2005; Talib et al. 2009; Tirri 2002, 2007). Among these are articles by Finnish teacher educators on ethics and moral conduct within schools compiled by Trade Union of Education (OAJ/Opettajien ammattijärjestö 1998, 2002, 2007). Interestingly, both practicing teachers and teacher students in Finland (N=864) self-estimated their ethical sensitivity at high levels, which Kuusisto et al. (2012, 8) read as an indication of internalized professional ethical codes of teaching<sup>6</sup> and conclude that “caring and equality are the core values and ethos of Finnish educational policy.” Yet – or perhaps due to – teachers show signs of weariness, which is why this thesis attempts to open new ethical perspectives into interculturality and diversities in education.

## **2.3 Terminological discussions**

In this section, three sets of concepts central to this research are unpacked, namely the notions of equality/equity, interculturality and diversity, and mechanisms of Othering in regards to education. The aim is to open the reader's critical awareness of the fact that these notions are quite polysemic, which is why their meanings tend to fluctuate depending on socioeconomic, political, philosophical, practical, and other contextual perspectives (Dervin 2016; Li & Dervin 2018). A brief look is also provided into terms and concepts relating to intertextuality and forms of analysis used in Studies IV and V.

### **2.3.1 Equality/equity and social justice**

The terms *equality/equity* are often companion to discourses on (social) justice in education. As said above, equality of access to education does not necessarily mean equity of educational outcomes. In a brochure targeted at international readers interested in the Finnish education, the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI 2017, 6) headlines “Equity in education” as ensuring “equal

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<sup>6</sup> *Code of Ethics for Finnish Teachers*. (2010). Trade Union of Education, Helsinki, Finland.  
[https://www.oaj.fi/cs/oaj/Ethical%20Principles%20for%20the%20Teaching%20Profession\\_en](https://www.oaj.fi/cs/oaj/Ethical%20Principles%20for%20the%20Teaching%20Profession_en)

access to high-quality education and training” and providing “the same educational opportunities (...) to all citizens irrespective of their ethnic origin, age, wealth, or where they live.” This (ibid, 6–9) includes education being free of charge at all levels, all pupils and students having rights to receive educational support for learning and guidance and counselling for well-being, and “efforts to support language minorities and migrants.” Similarly, *Equality Roadmap*<sup>7</sup> by Trade Union of Education in Finland positions equality (of access and opportunities) at its core. While both documents are (anecdotally) informative, they leave it up to the reader as to what this might mean in practice, and neither seem to question equity of outcomes – an issue that much recent research on equality/equity in education is addressing (e.g. Kalalahti & Varjo 2012; Kilpi-Jakonen 2011; Kosunen 2014; Lanas et al. 2013; Riitaaja 2013; Ristikari et al. 2016; Varjo et al. 2014; Study I, II).

Problematizing the notion of social justice in relation to marginalization and belonging in Finnish and Chinese education, Li & Dervin (2018, 14) argue against “a universal agreement on what social justice in education means, refers to and how it can be dealt with,” but claim that “in many contexts, there seems to be an agreement that social justice is both a goal and a process.” Their study (ibid, 33) points to the term as “multifaceted and always ideologically marked,” which is why it is important to apply critical awareness and problematize any given (micro- and macro-level) contexts regarding social, political, ideological, and philosophical connotations surrounding the issue – especially in regards to interculturality and educating diversities (see below). Similarly critical, Adrian Holliday (2011, 48) approaches equality/equity from the standpoint of ‘inequality’ which he claims “is largely denied in the dominant approach to IC (intercultural communication) studies,” and points to the necessity of increasing the awareness of institutional and cultural racism and power structures (Study II). Also Dervin (2013; Study II) underlines reflexivity of scholars and practitioners in regards to the notion of in/justice by questioning how personal ideologies may be part and parcel to injustice when speaking for and over the ones we defend: noble objectives may harm and disempower students for example when immigrant students are ‘forced’ to study their ‘heritage language’ or to represent their ‘culture’ in ways they might feel is not part of their identity (Study II; Li & Dervin 2018).

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<sup>7</sup> *Equality Roadmap*. Trade Union of Education in Finland.  
[https://www.oaj.fi/cs/oaj/Equality%20roadmap\\_en](https://www.oaj.fi/cs/oaj/Equality%20roadmap_en)

### 2.3.2 Interculturality and diversity

Culture, the root of the term *interculturality*, can be referred to as sets of *meaningful practices* that extend into complex, inter-related, and dynamic properties and dimensions of human interaction (Shi-xu 2001, 283). Traditionally, these practices relate to categorizations associated with individuals and/or specific groups of people (e.g. origin, nationality, gender, socioeconomic status). Embedded in historically situated, social (ideological/political) discourses and interaction, they are learned, acquired, and performed patterns of thinking and acting (Bauman 2004, 78). As such, they refer to cultural *identity* formations as in individuals negotiating their cultural selves ('we'/'us') in relation to the Other ('they'/'them') (Shi-xu 2001, 283; Bauman 2004; Hall 1995; Piller 2011; Studies I–V). Martine Abdallah-Preteille (2006, 479, 481–482) speaks of *culturality* as a notion that opens cultural phenomena to be viewed as dynamic fusions, active transformations, and manipulations. She (ibid) points to the importance of self-reflection and questioning one's own identity in relation to the other as integral to interculturality (Holliday 2011; Talib 2005). Objecting to essentialist (Holliday 2011) perspectives on (cultural) identities that tend to encapsulate groups and rid individuals of their agency, Abdallah-Preteille (2006, 479) calls for an educator's ability to "discriminate between the essential and the accidental, the universality of the process and the singularity of their actualization" (Bauman 2004; Hall 1995; Holliday, 2010; Shi-xu 2001). Similarly, extending 'intercultural' to *interculturality* (Dervin 2016, 2) allows for the notion to be thought of as co-emergent, fluid processes, always in the making rather than being something that is static and fixed (Holliday 2010, 2011; Study III).

The meaning of the term *intercultural* depends on the context, user, and purpose (e.g. Phillips 2007; Piller 2011) and should always be carefully explained (Dervin 2016, 2). The term multicultural refers largely to diverse societal conditions (Holm & Zilliacus 2009) and to specific pedagogies, skills, and competences in educational contexts (e.g. Gay 2000; Dervin 2013), while the term intercultural is connected with interaction and relationships among and between culturally diverse individuals and groups (e.g. Coulby 2006; Holm & Zilliacus 2009; Piller 2011). The terminological shift from multicultural to intercultural began several decades ago – one of the arguments being that multicultural education lacked in addressing issues of racism and "offered only tokenistic understanding of non-dominant knowledge", essentially reducing cultural difference to exoticism (Coulby 2006, 246–247; Abdallah-Preteille 1986, 2006; Talib 2005).

Whether referring to the phenomenon, pedagogies, policies, skills, or competences, multicultural/intercultural matters seem to cause confusion, unease, and at times, strong resistance in academia, media, education, and among general public (Coulby 2006; Studies II, III). Educational scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers in particular need to be aware of the risks involved when either term is utilized to conceptualize, frame, and explain teaching-learning, research, and policy-making contexts (e.g. Ahmed 2010; Holliday 2010; Phillips 2007; Shixu 2001). Social imaginaries (Taylor 2004) operating as unconscious road maps within us all may (unintentionally and implicitly) produce new and perpetuate existing differential biases and injustices, i.e. systematic structures that expose certain groups to different forms of discrimination (Dervin 2016, 3–4; Ahmed 2012; Holliday 2010; Studies I–V).

The term *diversity* needs to be used with caution as well. Polysemic and bearing ideological and political denotations and connotations, the term often refers to differences as against homogenized ‘oneness’ (and opposed to multiplicity) (Ahmed 2012; Dervin 2016; Wikan 2002). As with the term multi/intercultural, using the term diversity in education risks enabling systematic (hidden) inequities and have the potential to make academics, educators, administrators, and policy-makers accomplices to injustices (Dervin 2016, 28; Ahmed 2012; Wikan 2002; Studies II, III, V). Teachers need to be aware that everyday talk and practices, along with well-meaning institutional orders and categorizations, may turn against original intentions of understanding ‘diversity’ and taking ‘diverse students’ into consideration. As Riitaoja (2013) maintains, categorizing students as different and deviant from what is considered ‘normal’ objectifies them towards ‘normalizing’ practices. One should also be cautious of not using the term inaccurately and avoid employing it in ways that deny individuals their agency and/or hide people behind it (Abdallah-Preteille 1986, 2006; Phillips 2007; Wikan 2002). Because individuals negotiate and co-construct their (multiple, perceived, and acquired) identities through interaction that involves intersections of e.g. gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, social class, Amartya Sen (2006, 13) argues for the term diversity to be thought in the plural as *diversities* (see also Anthias 2013) also in regards to intra-group or inter-individual differences (see also Dervin 2013, 2016 for ‘diverse diversities’). Furthermore, ideologies, stereotypes, and representations also inform identity formations and discourses about the Self and Other, which then affects (intercultural) encounters among individuals and groups (Dervin 2016; Holliday 2010; Sen 2006; Studies I–V).



### 2.3.3 Othering

The terms Other, Othering, and Otherness are related to the process of differentiations of Self from Others. The root of the term often refers to an opposition, exclusion or a difference with attributions of inferiority attached to groups or individuals (Appadurai 2006; Bauman 2004; Hall 1995; Sen 2006; Shixu 2001). In regards to interculturality, the verb Othering, in Adrian Holliday's (2011, 198) words, applies to "cultural or another sort of chauvinism to a particular group of people, or to a person as though they are essentially defined by the imagined negative characteristics of that group."

Intertextually, the Other can be approached from a poststructuralist perspective, i.e. it can refer to different meanings and objects such as to a place or space of signifiers, to a subject him/herself, or to texts (Kristeva 1984; for *text*, see section 2.3.4; Study IV, V). For Kristeva (1991, 1993), the term Other can refer to anything or anybody: we project upon the Other that which is undesirable in ourselves or what is repressed in our unconscious. Referring to the Other as the Stranger (foreigner/outsider/alien) hidden but participating in us, Kristeva (*ibid*) argues that acknowledging the Stranger (Otherness) in ourselves enables us to accept the difference in the Other (Studies I–V).

The reader may find here a resemblance with Paul Ricoeur's conceptualization of the notion of Self/Other. Steering away from the dichotomizing perceptions of *self* and *other-than-self*, he (1992, 3) suggests a type of otherness that is intrinsically constitutive of one's selfhood that "one cannot be thought without the other, that instead one passes into the other." He calls this *oneself-as-another* while signifying the importance of "as" with an implication of *oneself inasmuch as being other* (Study III). Ricoeur (1992, 172) extends the notion of ethics from interpersonal relations to systems and structures of shared spaces – such as education in this work – and defines *ethical intention* as "aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions". With this he (*ibid*, 194) implies the need for justice and fairness as he regards institutions as structures "irreducible to interpersonal relations and yet bound up with (...) the notion of distribution" (Study III). He (*ibid*, 193) also includes the concept of *solicitude* (a kind of deep regard and respectful caring towards others) as integral to ethical subjectivity (how one personally regards the notion of ethics): in an ethically caring relationship solicitude linked with an ethical intention is understood as a "dimension of value, whereby each person is irreplaceable." Ricoeur (*ibid*, 202) explains further,

*Solicitude provides to the self another who is a face (...). Equality provides to the self another who is an each. In this, the distributive character of 'each' passes from the grammatical plane (...) to the ethical plane. Because of this, (...) the sense of justice presupposes it, to the extent that it holds persons irreplaceable. Justice in turn adds to solicitude, to the extent that the field of application of equality is all of humanity."*

Here, Ricoeur guides the reader towards a shift in thinking, to regard our individual selfhood beyond the vacuous separateness towards a deeper ethical regard of others: because 'I' co-exists in a relationship with others, it is morally imperative for 'me' to extend ethical care and action towards other human beings. Along the same line, Levinas (2000, 127) also talks of the “*deference* of the Same to the Other,” a deeply respectful manifestation that no longer subordinates the ethical relationship of Same and Other to ontology or the thinking of being (Study III). This is where I see the notion of ethics in conceptualizations of Self/Other intersecting with critical and reflexive interculturality towards what I advocate as *intercultural ethics* (Study III; c.f. Chang & Bai 2016).

By now the reader may have noticed that the core scholars in this piece are from Europe. However, if one looks at Buddhist hermeneutics that views all beings as co-emerging, co-involved, and intertwined in co-incidental ethical relations (Chang & Bai 2016, 26), we can notice similarities – which thus situates this thesis off the center. Drawing from the terminological discussions above, this thesis rests upon an expanded understanding of interculturality and diversity as concerning all of human interaction, i.e. it encompasses any type of diversity among and within individuals and groups of people we encounter and not only in terms of traditional connotations such as ‘ethnicities’, ‘cultures’, ‘immigrants’, or the like (Study III).

#### **2.3.4 On terms relating to intertextuality and forms of analysis**

This section provides a brief look into terms and concepts relating to intertextuality (as a method) and forms of analysis used in Studies IV and V, namely *text*, *intertextuality*, *rhizome*, *rhizomatic logic and learning*. The reader also finds here an abridged description of *heterotopia* (Foucault 1984) as it applies to Otherness of places and spaces, a lens that was applied in Study V to examine Finnishness through the concept of place.

The word *text* is rooted in a Latin word *textus*. As a noun it means ‘a weaving’ and as a verb ‘to weave’ (Latin dictionary, 2016). Linguistically and poststructurally, text is understood as a textual space where any intersecting

visual, auditory, spatial, verbal, and/or kinaesthetic signs provide networks of textual relations that convey plurality of meanings (Barthes 1998) (see *intertextuality* below). Kristeva's (1984) subjective and associative approach towards texts involves both the conscious and the unconscious of the subject in the process of meaning-making. Textual traces remain in other texts, as texts also have an unconscious; the unconscious of the text becomes visible as the cracks in the surface mobilize the meanings stored in the text's memory (Kristeva 1984). (Studies IV, V; Paatela-Nieminen & Itkonen 2015a, 2017).

Kristeva (1984, 59–60) defines the term *intertextualité* (*intertextuality*) as several different sign systems overlapping one another. Involving various types of textual systems, concepts, methods, and theories, intertextuality is understood as a structure behind the process of reading, interpretation, and signification (Frow 1993). Similarly, Bakhtin (1998) and Barthes (1998), understand intertextuality as a textual space where texts interweave and create new and plural meanings as they are read in relation to each other both subjectively and within various contexts. Intertextuality assumes that there is always a text within a text (Frow 1993). (Studies IV, V; Paatela-Nieminen & Itkonen 2015a, 2017).

The term *rhizome* (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) stands for a disordered, non-centered network; rhizomatic connections can be found anywhere. Depicted as illogical, unexpected offshoots, rhizomes connect with other rhizomes by plateaus that are types of multiplicities of rhizomes; these 'intensities' are always in the middle of the rhizomes, and each plateau can start anywhere and relate to any other plateau (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Paatela-Nieminen & Itkonen 2015a, 2017, 13). An intertextual method developed by Paatela-Nieminen (1996, 2000) enables this *rhizomatic logic* to be part of the processes of exploration, discovery, and production of traces of texts and rhizomes that link texts to cultural memory. *Rhizomatic logic*, then, supports learning processes as this logic is "constantly renegotiating and reinventing the goals of learning in the specific local contexts of learners and teachers" (Lenz Taguchi 2010, 19; Study IV, Study V). Learning may then be understood as rhizomatic, resembling a complex web of interconnections, and intertextuality, as a pedagogical method, supports both logical (linear) and subconscious/rhizomatic (non-linear) learning (Studies IV, V; Paatela-Nieminen & Itkonen 2015a, 2017).

Finally, a brief description on the notion of *heterotopia*. The results of the intertextual processes of two student teachers were analyzed through the concept in Study V. In Michel Foucault's (1984) theory of heterotopology, spatiality represents vibrant other places. Heterotopia is a concept in human geography that describes places and spaces of otherness, simultaneously physical and mental.

These spaces have more layers of meaning or relations to other places than are immediately visible and comprehensible. What is real and imagined for instance in (collective) cultural memory is a utopia mixed with reality, somewhat like a reflection in a mirror, simultaneously creating a heterotopia, an emplacement of otherness. (Foucault 1984; Johnson 2006). Foucault (1984) argues that all cultures constitute heterotopias and that the forms they take are heterogeneous. Heterotopias can change function within a society in various ways, refashioning their use over time. They may take the form of contradictory sites, juxtaposing many real, incompatible spaces in one space (such as the theatre, where diverse worlds and customs converge on the stage). Heterotopias are connected with both the accumulation of time and in the fleetingness of time (as quasi-eternity like museums and temporal as with festivals). They are not necessarily freely accessible but require a system of opening and closing that isolates them from other spaces while retaining their penetrability (such as hospitals, cemeteries, or rituals). Heterotopias have a function in relation to all other sites. (Foucault 1984, 3–9; Topinka 2010, 56–61; Study V).

### **3 RESEARCH INTENT: HOW TO DECONSTRUCT, CRITICALLY EXAMINE, AND RECONSTRUCT FINNISHNESS IN EDUCATION**

This thesis examines the notion of Finnishness in education through the following two questions: a) How does the notion of Finnishness inform different educational actors, perspectives, and contexts? and b) How can Finnishness in education be deconstructed, critically examined, and reconstructed? The research consists of three sections (see Table 1): Part I (Study I) provides the general platform of the problematics of Finnishness in education, i.e. what is currently happening at the intersection of myth and reality of Finnish education. Part IIa (Study II) examines the way Finnishness is found to inform perceptions on interculturality. This is complemented with Part IIb (Study III) that opens ethical perspectives into interculturality. Finally, Part IIIa (Study IV) and Part III b (Study V) explain and demonstrate the use of an intertextual method as a pedagogical tool. Study IV utilizes the method as a tool to examine Finnishness through ABC books, while Study V provides an example of how national narratives may be deconstructed, (re)examined, and re-imagined/reconstructed through the use of the intertextual method. Table 1 below illustrates how the five studies tie in together in this thesis.

**Table 1.** The figure illustrates how the five studies tie in together.

<p><b>Contradictions of Finnish Education: Finnishness, interculturality and social justice</b></p> <p>1. How does the notion of Finnishness inform different educational actors, perspectives, and contexts? 2. How can Finnishness in education be deconstructed, critically examined, and reconstructed?</p>	
<p><b>PART I: Finnishness in education: Examines the intersection of myth and reality of Finnish education</b></p> <p><i>Study I: Finnish Education – An ambiguous utopia?</i></p>	
<p><b>PART II a: Finnishness informing perceptions on Interculturality</b></p> <p><i>Study II: “Not all of us Finns communicate the same way either”: Teachers’ perceptions of interculturality in upper secondary vocational education and training</i></p>	<p><b>PART II b: Opening ethical perspectives into interculturality</b></p> <p><i>Study III: Intercultural Ethics in Education</i></p>
<p><b>PART III a: The intertextual method as a pedagogical tool to examine Finnishness in ABC books</b></p> <p><i>Study IV: How is the Other produced in two Finnish ABC (e-)books – An intertextual reading</i></p>	<p><b>PART III b: The intertextual method as a pedagogical tool to deconstruct, examine, and reconstruct Finnishness as a national narrative</b></p> <p><i>Study V: Reconstructing imagined Finnishness: The case of art education through the concept of place</i></p>

## 4 RESEARCH SYNTHESIS

This section reviews the research process for the work at hand. Starting with a description of the researcher's positions, the thesis is then situated within the transformative paradigm with critical and reflexive interculturality as the philosophical and theoretical base. This is followed by descriptions of data and methodologies utilized in the five sub-studies. Table 2 provides the main aims of each sub-study, the data/informants, the methods used, and the data analysis applied. Table 2 also includes the five original studies, each of which report on the findings, and the way the publications are partitioned for this thesis (see also Table 1).

**Table 2.** Summary of the main aims, data/informants of each sub-study, data collection, and form of analysis in Publications I–V.

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### **Part I – Finnishness in education: Examines the intersection of myth and reality of Finnish education**

**Study I:** Itkonen, T., Dervin, F., & Talib, M.-T. (2017). Finnish education: An ambiguous utopia? *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education*, 2(2), Jul-Dec 2017, 13–28.

**Aims:**

- Promote an increased understanding of what happens at the intersection of the myths and realities of Finnish schooling
- Add to critical work on the influence of international agencies and consultancies in discussions of excellence and performance in education around the world

**Data:**

- *Finnish Lessons*, a book on Finnish education by a Finnish author
- *The Finland Phenomenon*, a 60-min. documentary on Finnish education by an American producer

**Analysis:**

- Critical discourse analysis
- Critical interculturality

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## Part II a: Finnishness informing perceptions on interculturality

**Study II:** Itkonen, T., Talib, M.-T., & Dervin, F. (2015). "Not all of us Finns communicate the same way either": Teachers' perceptions of interculturality in upper secondary vocational education and training. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 67(3), 397–414.

**Aims:**

- Support educators in conceptualization of culture beyond conventional (ethnic) dimensions among minority and immigrant students
- Promote educators' awareness of their personal preconceived cultural and institutional beliefs and ideologies and of their positionalities as educational professionals
- Promote a critical and reflexive approach to interculturality in education
- Detail critical and reflexive Interculturalism

**Data:**

- Ten semi-structured interviews and 85 voluntary and anonymous responses to 'open comment' section in an electronic survey; educators in practical nurse training in five Finnish VET institutions in the capital area of Helsinki, Finland, in 2011-2012

**Analysis:**

- Theoretically-based content analysis
- Critical and reflexive interculturalism

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## Part II b: Opening ethical perspectives into interculturality

**Study III:** Itkonen, T. (in print). Intercultural ethics in education. In, F. Dervin, R. Moloney, & A. Simpson, (Eds.) *Critical Intercultural Competences and Teacher Education*. London: Routledge.

**Aims:**

- Conceptualize and advocate intercultural ethics in education via positive indications of teachers' ethically caring, fair and just ways of promoting wellbeing and social justice
- Detail critical and reflexive Interculturalism

**Data:**

- Ten semi-structured interviews and 85 voluntary and anonymous responses to 'open comment' section in an electronic survey; educators in practical nurse training in five Finnish VET institutions in the capital area of Helsinki, Finland, in 2011-2012

**Analysis:**

- Critical discourse analysis
- Critical and reflexive interculturalism



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### **Part III a: The intertextual method as a pedagogical tool to examine Otherness in Finnish ABC books**

**Study IV:** Itkonen, T., & Paatela-Nieminen, M. (2015). How is the other produced in two Finnish ABC (e-) books – An intertextual reading. In K. Hahl, P.-M. Niemi, R. Johnson Longfor, & F. Dervin (Eds.). *Diversities and Interculturality in Textbooks: Finland as an Example* (pp. 30–60). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishers.

**Aims:**

- Present and advocate the intertextual method for use as a pedagogical tool in schools and in research
- Demonstrate the use of the method to explore otherness in the cultural space of plural and hidden meanings
- Add to the critical tradition of textbook research

**Data:**

- The ABC book collection in the Minerva Library at University of Helsinki Faculty of Educational Sciences; Two Finnish ABC (e-) books: *Pikkumetsän aapinen* [Little Woods ABC] (Wäre et al. 2013), *Taikamaan aapinen* [Magic Land ABC] (Raikunen et al. 2013)

**Analysis:**

- The intertextual method
- Critical interculturality

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### **Part III b: The intertextual method as a pedagogical tool to deconstruct, examine, and reconstruct Finnishness in national narratives**

**Study V:** Paatela-Nieminen, M., Itkonen, T., & Talib, M.-T. (2016). Reconstructing imagined Finnishness: The case of art education through the concept of place. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 35, 229–242.

**Aims:**

- Demonstrate and advocate the method for use in teacher education in order to facilitate teaching-learning environments that allow for deconstruction and critical exploration of e.g. national narratives feeding national memory
- Demonstrate the use of the method to explore, deconstruct and re-imagine Finnishness through the concept of place

**Data:**

- The intertextual processes (written & visual) and artistic end-products of two (out of 14) teacher students in an Environmental Art Ed. course at the University of Helsinki, taught by co-author Paatela-Nieminen

**Analysis:**

- The intertextual method
  - Heterotopia (Foucault 1987)
  - Critical interculturality
-

## 4.1 Researcher's positions

The process of authoring Study III (written as the final article of the five) clarified my goals for the doctoral compilation and steered my thinking towards intercultural ethics in education. Cautiously aware of my positions and tasks as researcher, I find myself a case in point in regards to the trouble with competence-based interculturality and cultural competence assessment. While conducting a study (not included here) originally intended to measure vocational education and training teachers' intercultural sensitivities, it was the teachers' communication on intercultural issues and encounters that steered me to acknowledge the complexity of social and educational realities of teachers working with diversities and the challenges thereof. It has taken several years of critically-oriented research, thinking, and discussions with like-minded researchers to be able to address the hype, the general discomfort, and, occasionally, strong resistance towards intercultural matters in teaching and various educational contexts.

My curiosity in why the phenomenon of interculturality surfaces passions and why the terms and definitions linked to it cause such confusion grew along the way. I had to think about what these issues mean to me personally, as a multilingual Finn and a cosmopolitan individual, as a teacher student at the University of Helsinki studying Multicultural Education as a minor, as a (Finnish) class teacher working in an international school, and in particular as a product of Finnish teacher education and an educational researcher. I began to see the problem with essentializing categorizations and competence-based thinking, and specifically in assessing the sensitivities or competence(s) related to these notions. How is it possible to measure or properly teach something that lacks clear definitions and goals? How might it be possible for culture(s) and human difference(s) to be regarded more appreciative ways, without locking individuals (peoples, ethnicities, religious groups, etc.) out of the agency each of us is due, and without blaming 'culture' or 'difference' for nearly any matter of misinterpretation or human conflict? No wonder I detected weariness, exhaustion, even anger, along with the few indications of hopefulness and clear, positive insights among the teacher interviews and open comment responses. I started to see why these issues need addressing, and why I find it important to release teachers of the burden of having to deal with these issues alone – particularly so with the business of competences.

Studies IV and V have affected my thinking and understanding in particular ways. The first of the five studies to materialize, Study V on the reconstruction of Finnishness through the notion of place introduced me into intertextuality, peaked my interest towards the notion of Otherness, renewed and steered my thinking

towards the exploration of Finnishness. Learning the method provided me a way to examine the many different layers of textualities to find pluralities of accumulated meanings in various contexts. I began to understand the workings of national narratives and the ways they inform identity formations and a sense of belonging. I began to see how integral textbooks and pedagogies are in transferring prevailing values and ideologies over generations. I had only to think back to the school years of my parents to understand how very young we Finns are as a nation in regards to living with the notion of diversities. I started to understand how certain visual-verbal discourses had created (in)visibilities and silences in Finnish society and particularly in educational contexts over time. Interestingly, while it was quite easy for instance to find a character Othered in an ABC book (and to follow the presentations of the Other backwards to see how it had transformed and reappeared), it was eye-opening to find Finnishness Othered in another ABC book. This is when I realized the power and applicability of the intertextual method not only as a pedagogical tool to facilitate and foster multiliteracy and critical literacy in education across disciplines but also as a very needed critical tool for educational research and teacher (re)education.

My analytical perspectives in each of the five studies as well as this compilation has been influenced by many aspects. Before the doctoral thesis, I had studied and lived abroad over extensive periods of time. I grew up as a Finn in Finland but having conducted my undergraduate and graduate studies abroad in English has meant living in multicultural and multilingual conditions both professionally and personally. I also raised a bilingual son as a member of a minority religion in Finland. Having adjusted myself to many different (cultural, linguistic, social, educational) contexts both abroad and as an expat returning to Finland, my identity as an individual and a researcher has been enriched through this.

## **4.2 Philosophical and Theoretical base**

### **4.2.1 Transformative paradigm**

The thesis reflects on the way Finnishness is found to inform perceptions in educational contexts. It aims to provide practitioners, scholars, and educational decision-makers ways to expand their conceptions of interculturality and diversities. The transformative paradigm was chosen as the main philosophical framework because it focuses on social justice and ethics in education, recognizes power differences in regards to diversities, and as such, advocates social change

(Mertens 2015). Among the theories informing transformative paradigm are Critical Race Theory, Disability Theory, Feminist Theory, Indigenous Theory, and Queer Theory, to mention a few (Mertens 2015, 21). The work is grounded on critical and reflexive interculturality (see section 2.3, expanded below in 4.2.2), and it utilizes a set of various qualitative methods. Inspected through four major paradigms – postpositivism, constructivism, transformativism, and pragmatic or pragmatist – this work situates within the transformative paradigm (Mertens 2015, 11, 22–23) in the following way (see Table 3):

**Table 3.** The figure illustrates how the thesis situates within the transformative paradigm (framework adopted from Mertens 2015, 11, 22–23).

<b>TRANSFORMATIVE PARADIGM AS THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEORETICAL BASE</b>			
<b>AXIOLOGY</b> Nature of ethical behavior	<b>ONTOLOGY</b> Nature of reality	<b>EPISTEMOLOGY</b> Nature of knowledge	<b>METHODOLOGY</b> Systems of inquiry
Promotes an expanded understanding of human rights and social justice as well as equity of educational achievement.	Rejects cultural relativism (e.g. regarding all cultures as equal)  Recognizes that social positionings inform multiple perspectives on realities, and is consciously aware of how these positionalities affect versions of social realities.  Shares this with the constructivist paradigm, which also recognizes multiple realities as socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann 1966).	Permeating into the constructivist paradigm, assumes the interactive link between the knower and the would-be-known.  Underlines multiple ways of knowing, as knowledge is understood as historically and socially situated (Berger & Luckmann 1966), and that some knowledge is more privileged than others and may also be more privileging than other knowledge (Bourdieu 1991).	Utilizes several qualitative (dialogic) methods to examine issues related with power, privilege, and inequities.
Shares axiological, epistemological, and methodological characteristics of pragmatism (practical approaches towards education) in that the knowledge gained is influenced by the values and politics of the researcher(s) since the methods have been matched to specific questions and purposes of the study.			

As illustrated in Table 3, the work aims to promote an expanded understanding of human rights and social justice as well as equity of educational outcomes. Rejecting cultural relativism, it recognizes that multiple perspectives on realities are informed by various social positionings, and that these positionalities have an effect on versions of social realities. It also acknowledges multiple ways of historically and socially comprehended, at times informed by privileged as well as privileging knowing (Berger & Luckmann 1966; Bourdieu 1991). Several qualitative (dialogical) systems of inquiry are applied to examine matters related to power, privilege, and inequities, while the values, ideologies, and politics of the researcher(s) are acknowledged to influence the analysis.

Before moving on to describe critical and reflexive interculturality as the theoretical lens for this research, a few words on how this work adds to the educational research in Finland. Alongside educational research on professional ethics (see section 2.2), research on teaching diversities in Finland started in the 1990s under the umbrella of multicultural education. Talib (1999; 2005), Räsänen (2002a), Paavola (2007), Soilamo (2008), and Jokikokko (2010) are among those that integrated multicultural educational theory into Finnish teacher education. Much of this research tradition has been influenced by Western/American educational theories and perceptions on social justice (see Li & Dervin 2018). Recently, this research has taken a turn towards critical interculturalist theory (Dervin, 2016), which for instance Layne (2016), Riitaoja (2013), and the five sub-studies of this thesis rely on.

#### **4.2.2 Critical and reflexive interculturality**

With the thesis now situated within the transformative paradigm, this section details critical and reflexive interculturality as the philosophical and theoretical lens. Research oriented through critical and reflexive interculturality (see also section 2.3) operates from the understanding that identities are fluid, co-constructed, and result from individuals negotiating them in interaction (Abdallah-Preteille 1986, 2006; Bauman 2004; Dervin 2016; Hall 1995; Shi-xu 2001). When deconstructing, examining, and reconstructing discourse and appearances beyond immediate surfaces, this research pays close attention to intersectionality (e.g. Anthias 2013; Dervin 2016; Study III) as well as contexts. Acknowledging difference but being cautious of overemphasizing culture and “differentialist bias”, it seeks to replace narratives of differences with those of shared values, commonalities, and underlying universal processes (Dervin 2016, 103–106; Abdallah-Preteille 2006; Holliday 2010; Shi-xu 2001; Studies II, III). Instead of modelling the concept around the “awareness of and sensitivity to the

essentially different behaviors and values of ‘the other culture’”, critical and reflexive interculturality employs the model around “the ability to read the underlying universal cultural processes,” as Adrian Holliday (2011, 2; Study III) states.

Critical and reflexive interculturalists challenge the use of the many intercultural competence models currently operating around the world (on the three models used most in Finnish teacher education, see Dervin 2016, 75). The competences, often described as combinations of awareness, attitudes, skills, and means, are applied in attempts to minimize, explain, and/or avoid cultural misunderstandings and conflicts associated with global, international/multicultural education (e.g. Dervin 2016), and culturally responsive schooling (e.g. Gay 2000). However, since the models – rooted in dichotomizing Western viewpoints (Said 1978, 1990) but also used outside the West – mostly operate from the premise of knowledge accumulated about particular cultures/nations, they are criticized for relying on deterministic and essentialist claims to cultures as static and homogeneous (e.g. Fougère & Moulettes 2007; Dervin 2016; Dervin & Tournebise 2013; Holliday 2011; McSweeney 2002; Piller 2011). As such, the use of the models risks perpetuating existing stereotypes, biases, prejudices, and ethnocentrism (e.g. Abdallah-Preteille 1986, 2006; Holliday 2010; Shi-xu, 2001; Studies II, III), and cater towards the call for particular competences and prescriptive ‘quick fixes’ to manage (inter)cultural challenges (Studies II, III).

The discourse of (inter)cultural competences tends to weigh on the negative and/or juxtaposing perspectives on human encounters, i.e. in the expectance of perceived (cultural) difference(s) is present at the outset (e.g. Shi-xu 2001, 280–281; Study II, III). Furthermore, attaining the competences (not a dialogical effort) is assumed as the responsibility of an individual, or here the teacher (c.f. Shi-xu 2001; Study III). Resorting to essentializing and simplifying models and prescriptions results from a lack of understanding of the dynamics behind cultural processes and phenomena as well as from the confusion caused by the sheer number and variety of approaches towards cultural competency. Adding to the fire is that the competence(s) involved are difficult if not impossible to assess, as for instance Shen (2014) attests (Study III).

Finally, Study III describes critical and reflexive interculturality in greater detail, and conceptualizes a theoretical shift in the general perception of interculturality in education towards the direction of intercultural ethics (see sections 2.3 and 4.2.2; Study III).

### 4.3 Data and methods

This section compiles the data and methods of each of the five sub-studies in relation to the two research questions, which are a) how does the notion of Finnishness inform different educational actors, perspectives, and contexts? and b) how can Finnishness in education be deconstructed, critically examined, and reconstructed? (see Table 1). We begin with the data and methods of Study I (Part I) that sets the general platform of the problematics of Finnishness in education, i.e. what is currently happening at the intersection of myth and reality of Finnish education. Study II then examines the way Finnishness is found to inform teachers' perceptions on interculturality and diversity. This is complemented in Study III (Part IIb) that opens ethical perspectives into interculturality through the set of data shared with Study II. Finally, in addition to providing additional contexts exploring Finnishness, Study IV and Study V (Part IIIab) explain and demonstrate the use of an intertextual method as a pedagogical tool. Study IV utilizes the method as a tool to examine Finnishness through ABC books, while Study V provides an example of how national narratives may be deconstructed, (re)examined, and re-imagined/reconstructed through the use of a specific method. See Table 1 for the way the five studies tie in together in this thesis.

Several qualitative methodologies (see Table 2) are utilized in this research: Studies I and III apply forms of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2013), Study II a theoretically-based content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs 2008; Burns & Grove 2005), and Studies IV and V an intertextual method by Paatela-Nieminen (1996, 2000; see also Paatela-Nieminen & Itkonen 2015a, 2017).

#### 4.3.1 Study I

Study I *Finnish education: An ambiguous utopia?* (see Table 2) examines the way Finnishness and specifically how the notions of equality and equity in Finnish education are presented and constructed in two commercially marketed products on Finnish education, for the general public, emerging from academia. The aim is to promote an increased understanding of what takes place at the intersection of the myths and realities of Finnish schooling. The intention is also to add to current critical work on the influence of international agencies and consultancies in the discussions of excellence and performance in education around the world.

The data comprises a book *Finnish Lessons: What can the world learn about educational change in Finland* (2011 and 2015 editions; referred to as *Finnish Lessons*) by a Finnish educator and scholar Pasi Sahlberg and a 60-minute documentary film, *The Finland Phenomenon: Inside the World's Most Surprising*

*School System* (2011; referred to as *The Finland Phenomenon*) by an American documentary film-maker Robert Compton. The reasons for this selection are as follows:

- Both products are directed at educational scholars and practitioners, decision-makers, and the general public. As such, they are implicitly part of the meta-narrative of Finnish education and have an impact on the way Finnish education is discussed and marketed nationally and internationally, and link with current global trends in educational reform.
- *Finnish Lessons* is available in over 20 languages and features forewords by influential North-American educational authorities and an afterword by an internationally recognized speaker for education. Therefore, it has the potential of being one of the most influential and quoted books on Finnish education.
- *The Finland Phenomenon* was the only documentary film about Finnish education on DVD distributed to educators at the time of writing, is available online as well as a single DVD, and is included in a set of six feature-length documentary films on global education issues by Robert Compton.
- At the time of writing the article, both the author and the producer were connected with Harvard University, and the author of *Finnish Lessons* had been touring extensively to promote the book and interacting with both practitioners and decision-makers.

In order to identify and critically examine ideologies, imaginaries, and constructions of equality and equity in Finnish education, which construct a certain image of Finnishness, a form of critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough 2013; Dervin 2014) was applied to see the immediate surface and descriptions of the written, visual, and auditory elements of the data. This choice was informed by Bakhtin's (1998) dialogism and by methods from the interdisciplinary movement of research on the Dialogical Self (inspired by Bakhtin, Hegel and Mead); dialogism pays particular attention to linguistic markers or forms, reported discourse, passive voices, and repetitions in order to identify multiple and contradictory voices in the data. The questions guiding the analysis were 1) How is the discourse on Finnishness and Finnish education presented and constructed?, 2) How is this discourse negotiated contextually and with others? and 3) What imaginaries and ideologies result from the discourse?

Both editions of *Finnish Lessons* were analysed side by side with specific attention paid to the 2015 edition. The number of times/contexts the words *equality*, *equity*, *egalitarian*, *equitable* appear in the 2015 edition is 44. The words



*equality* and *equity* were uttered only once in the film, while the ideas and ideologies behind them were recurrent in other discursive forms. These contexts were explored to see how Finnishness was presented and constructed, i.e. who/what was allowed voice or visibility vs. left silenced or hidden. The excerpts from the books were marked (p. x/y), x referring to pages in the 2011 edition and y in the 2015 edition. The documentary was transcribed with indications of images accompanying the discourses, and viewed several times. With attention paid to both written/spoken text as well as visual images and sound, the analysis was multimodal. The transcribed written text appearing on screen was marked in order of appearance, as in EC1 (excerpt 1), EC2 (excerpt 2), etc., and transcribed spoken words as EX1 (extract 1), EX2 (extract 2), etc., accordingly. Punctuation for excerpts follows what appears on screen, while natural flow of speech is followed as closely as possible in extracts. The findings are discussed in Study I under headings *Finnishness essentialised – Finland Mystified*, *Invisibilities – Silenced Minorities*, and *Equality, Equity, and Trust – A Finnish Utopia?*

#### **4.3.2 Studies II & III**

Study II on teachers and Study III on intercultural ethics in education share the set of data but analyze it from different perspectives (see Table 2). The data includes ten semi-structured interviews and 85 responses (voluntary and anonymous) to open comments from educators involved in practical nurse training (a sub-field of Social and Health Care) in five Finnish VET institutions in the capital area of Helsinki, Finland. University of Helsinki Department of Teacher Education conducted an electronic survey in cooperation with the University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education Palmenia in 2011–2012. The response rate to the electronic survey was 37 % (N=177). Two male and eight female educators (ages 35–65 years old with 6–28 years of work experience) of those (n=61, N=177) who indicated their willingness to be interviewed were selected. The informants reflected on diversities and intercultural encounters in their work during the individual, semi-structured interviews, which took 30-60 minutes (conducted and recorded by the author, transcribed by personnel at Palmenia). The interview excerpts were coded in M/F (male/female)+numeral and the open comments with the letter C+numeral by the author. Each excerpt, representing a specific category, was translated from Finnish into English by the author. The different approaches to the analyses are explained next.

**Study II** “*Not all of us Finns communicate the same way either*”: *Teachers’ perceptions of interculturality in upper secondary vocational education and training* focuses on teachers’ perceptions of diversity and interculturality in the

context of VET in Finland. A theoretically-based content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs 2008; Burns & Grove 2005) was applied on the data through a template based on a critical and reflexive interculturality. The analysis was guided by coding rules in the theory-based chosen categories. Table 4 (below) provides examples of each category, its definitions and coding rules with a sample excerpt. The four categories bear some similarities with a Dervin & Tournebise (2013) study that utilized a template of six categories to analyse how university educators/researchers, specialised in intercultural communication, shared discourses of the ‘intercultural’. The categories were revised in Study II to fit the context of VET. The four categories range as a continuum from culturalist bias (culture as an explanation for all) to commitment to justice, with intermediary phases named complexity creating uncertainty and from a single identity to the intersection of identities. The categories do not represent ‘stages’ or ‘levels’ of interculturality as they do not refer to ‘competence(s)’ in any way in Study II. The continuum refers to the notion that an informant may shift from one position to another within minutes. The categorization works as follows:

- If specific nationalities, religions and/or religious traditions (e.g. gender issues) are juxtaposed (e.g. Abdallah-Preteille 2006) or the North/South/East/West-axes (e.g. Said 1978, 1990; Holliday 2010; Shi-xu 2001) are used, the excerpt is listed under the category *Culturalist bias in IC in VET* (‘IC’ stands for ‘intercultural communication’).
- Discourses that indicate instabilities, wavering between two or more stances (c.f. Dervin & Tournebise 2013), or mentions of prescriptions to solve the ‘intercultural’ (e.g. Piller 2011), were analyzed under the category *Complexity creating uncertainty in IC in VET*.
- Teacher’s awareness of ‘diversity within diversities’ (Sen 2006; c.f. Dervin 2016), i.e. intra-group or inter-individual differences in terms of traditions, behaviors, age, gender, etc. (e.g. Anthias 2013; Sen 2006) was examined within the category *From a single identity to the intersection of identities in IC in VET*.
- The category *Commitment to justice in IC in VET* relates to discussions of institutional (neo)racism, unjust educational routines and systems, or attempts at equity, equal rights, and social justice for diverse students (e.g. Ahmed 2012; Riitaoja 2013).

**Table 4.** Categories, definitions, examples, and coding of discourses on interculturality in VET in Study II.

<b>Intercultural Communication (IC) in VET</b>			
<b>Category</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Coding of discourses on interculturality</b>
<b>Culturalist bias in IC in VET</b>	<p>Culture used to explain student behaviour, ability or achievement:</p> <p>Cultural superiority Categorizing according to nationalities, ethnicities or religion Collectivistic/individualistic</p>	<p><i>‘Somali girls’ education always raises questions: why do they actually educate themselves when their education most often ends when they get married’</i> C51</p>	<p>Specific countries linked to specific abilities:</p> <p>Categorizing based on nationality, Cultural superiority</p>
<b>Complexity creating uncertainty in IC VET</b>	<p>Awareness of (inter)culturality:</p> <p>Awareness of collection of cultural traces in individuals’ actions, Realizing there are no clear, all-inclusive descriptions for IC pedagogies, Tolerance of ambiguity Contradicting oneself</p>	<p><i>‘I myself at least... I do feel I just don’t know enough. Then I throw the ball to them [immigrant students] asking how they think this should be handled or thought about’</i> F3</p>	<p>Admitting to not knowing:</p> <p>Accepting ambiguity and incomplete understanding, Openness to new knowledge</p>
<b>From a single identity to the intersection of identities in IC in VET</b>	<p>Diversity within diversities Identities co-constructed:</p> <p>Gender, age, social class, ethnicity, religion, etc. intersecting in human encounters</p>	<p><i>‘There wasn’t all that much difference in [teaching the Roma students]. We all use similar ways to communicate. They do have some... but you did notice change there too... Not all us Finns communicate the same way either. There are differences within individuals, personal, also generational and gender differences’</i> F2</p>	<p>Awareness of intersectionality within own and other group:</p> <p>Finding similarities</p>

<b>Commitment to justice in IC in VET</b>	Awareness of institutional and cultural racism & power structures:  Commitment to combat inequality, injustice, and discrimination through attitudes and social action skills, Professionalism, positionality and personal ideologies	<i>'Some [immigrant] students are treated unfairly when they are separated into their own groups... with limited language skills and teaching hours they fall at the first hurdle. You feel bad [as their teacher] because the will to teach and to learn is there but the situation is impossible' C76</i>	Strong sense of positionality, professional identity and competence:  Equal requirements for all students
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Finally, it was noted that some excerpts in Study II contained derogatory, racist and/or sexist language that the teachers used. Given the size of the sample, the intention of Study II is not to generalise from the data to all VET teachers in Finland. Rather, the aim is to present that there are some strong sentiments among VET educators who work with immigrant students. The findings are discussed in Study II as *Intercultural Communication (IC) in VET* under the headlines corresponding with the four categories: *Culturalist bias in IC in VET*, *Complexity creating uncertainty in IC VET*, *From a single identity to the intersection of identities in IC in VET*, and *Commitment to justice in IC in VET*.

While the findings in Study II suggested the presence of cultural essentialism and national/cultural hegemony in VET teachers' communication, the results in the fourth category (*Commitment to justice in IC in VET*) sparked the author's interest. A decision was made that **Study III** would thus focus and build upon the positive indications of teachers' awareness of positionalities and ideologies affecting their communication. This supports the aim of the thesis to expand critical awareness of educational practitioners relating to these issues. The same set of data (see Table 2) was then examined several times again with critical and reflexive interculturality (see sections 2.3 and 4.2.2) as the theoretical lens and a guide. With a discourse-analytic approach (Fairclough, 2013), the focus was now on indications involving dilemmatic decision-making and ethical caring. As much of the teachers' communication centered on immediate concerns over language skills, seemingly differing values, complicated institutional/systemic issues, etc., these matters are discussed as dilemmatic decision-making and ethical concerns, and related to theory. Then, in order to best demonstrate an ethical intention of "aiming at the 'good life' with and for others in just institutions" (Ricoeur 1992,

172), a decision was made to use one particular special needs VET teacher (H9) as a case study. The positive indications were particularly clear in the way this teacher spoke about his work with students among whom were those with severe educational challenges and/or those under the threat of dropping out and/or becoming marginalized. The findings are discussed in Study III under headlines *Towards intercultural ethics*, *Ethical matters concerning diversity and interculturality*, and *Solicitude – aiming at good life with and for others in just institutions*.

### 4.3.3 Studies IV and V

Studies IV and V utilized an intertextual method developed by Martina Paatela-Nieminen (1996, 2000). The method has evolved through action research from a specific tool to examine picturebooks into a pedagogical model that can be applied in general education across disciplines for intercultural, intermedial, and intersubjective purposes (Paatela-Nieminen 1996, 2000; Paatela-Nieminen & Itkonen 2015a, 2017). It applies linguistic and poststructuralist theories from Genette (1997a, 1997b), Kristeva (1989), and Deleuze & Guattari (1987). Genette's (1997a, 1997b) systematic linguistic approach of determining text's relations to other texts (in a literary continuum) is combined with Kristevan subjectively associative way of constructing meaning that breaks the context and extends it into collective cultural memory. Intrinsic to the method, rhizomatic logic (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) supports the open-endedness of the meaning-making process (for terminological definitions, see section 2.3.4; see also Paatela-Nieminen & Itkonen 2015a, 2017, 11; Studies IV, V). It enables the unconscious to participate in the process of discovering and producing (re)representations and new, parallel, and multiple meanings and interpretations. As such, the method encourages exploration, play, and discovery among logical/linear, contextual, and inspiration-based/associative meanings<sup>8</sup>.

The method was applied in **Study IV** *How is the other produced in two Finnish ABC (e-) books – An intertextual reading* provides the structure and dialogic space to examine Otherness in relation to what (inter)cultural attitudes and concepts, traditions, and values are found and how they transform and perpetuate via multimodal textual modes within this specific Finnish visual-linguistic contexts. Thereby Study IV also serves to demonstrate the use of the

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<sup>8</sup> For an in-depth look into theory, terms, structure, and workings of the intertextual method as a pedagogical tool, see Paatela-Nieminen & Itkonen (2015a, 2017).

method as a pedagogical tool. The data in Study IV includes *Taikamaan aapinen* [Magic Land ABC] (Raikunen, et al. 2013) and *Pikkumetsän aapinen* [Little Woods ABC] (Wäre, et al. 2013) (referred to by their English translations henceforth). The reasons for this selection are as follows:

- Both were current at the time of writing and include an interactive e-learning environment. While the simulation of the printed pages leaves the digital material somewhat flat, the digital material does extend into reading, writing and auditory exercises.
- The books differ extensively: *Little Woods ABC* supports an ideology (environmental protection) and portrays insulated image of Finnishness, whereas *Magic Land ABC* eclectically illustrates children's reality in 2014 by (re)mixing elements of the international/global (rhymes, fairy tales, narratives, fantasy) with what is considered Finnish.
- From a design perspective, *Little Woods ABC* is targeted at school children, whereas *Magic Land ABC* attracts a wider audience with its multiple levels and ways of comprehension (see Bakhtin 1998 on polyphonic reading).

The first three phases of the method were applied to enable the examination and production of intertextual relations in Finnish ABC books: 1) relations among and between visual and written texts in the two Finnish ABC books, 2) relations and dialogues among and between textualities within the Finnish ABC book genre, and 3) relations within an extended cultural (Finnish) context that includes popular culture, media, design, fine arts, music, literature, among others.

The intertextual process begins with the reader's perception of a text within another text. As researcher-subjects, the authors studied the two ABC books and became interested in how Otherness appeared in them. Both books were examined within an extended genre of ABC books from the collection in the Minerva Library (Department of Teacher Education) at the University of Helsinki. In order to produce a clear difference in how representations of Otherness have varied and transformed, a visual continuum was created and studied from the newest to the oldest (see Genette 1997b on palimpsestical reading) within the ABC book genre. The continuum, non-linear but taking its shape in forms of transformations, (re)cycles, and accumulations (ibid), included seven Finnish ABC books ranging from 190? to 2013 (see Study IV for details). The next phase, combining the Kristevan (1984) associative and the rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) readings, enabled studying the difference of Otherness in relation to varying texts within the Finnish cultural context. The co-researchers' subjective readings affect the process of signification and interpretation as hidden/embedded, new, and

multiple meanings of Otherness are allowed to surface through dialogue. The findings are discussed in Study IV under headlines *Phase 1a: Other/ing in ABC books* (the character Alaska), *Phase 1b: Othering Finnishness*, *Phase 2: The visual and verbal within the ABC genre*, and *Phase 3: Other/ness in the cultural context*.

**Study V** *Reconstructing imagined Finnishness: The case of art education through the concept of place* applies the intertextual method to examine imagined (Anderson 1983) Finnishness and how it is reconstructed through the concept of place. The data for Study V includes the intertextual processes (written and visual) and artistic end-products of two teacher students, Iina and Minna (real names) who were chosen among the 14 participants in an Environmental Art Education course (taught by co-author, Martina Paatela-Nieminen) at the University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education. The students were to study Finnish culture, heritage, and identity intertextually, i.e. to apply the intertextual method to their choice of *My place*, a place/site of subjective interest and importance. The two cases stood out with their profound and clear intertextual analyses and outcomes. They also differed from the rest in regards to focus at the site, the visual outcome, and representation. The choice for Iina was the National Library of Finland in Helsinki and for Minna, a café/rug washing site called Mattolaituri also in Helsinki.

Both teacher students first examined their preferred places as a text in relation to the site's historical (time/place) contexts through subjective questioning (Phase 1). They produced an intertextual continuum of related sites/places and examined the continuum from the newest to the oldest (see Genette 1997b on palimpsestical reading) enabling them to discover embedded and hidden differences (Phase 2). These differences they examined as textual relations within a wider cultural context (Phase 3), which produced a mosaic of texts with rhizomatic (see *Definitions* above) connections to collective cultural memory and to the unconscious of the individual viewer (see Kristeva 1984). This discursive process allows for the discovery a plurality of meanings. Both students finished the process with a creation of a new artistic product that combines existing, the newly discovered, and produced meanings of their places (Phase 4). The co-authors of Study IV examined the results of both processes through the lens heterotopia (see section 2.3.4). The results are discussed in Study V under headlines *The case of the National Library of Finland* and *The case of Mattolaituri*.

#### **4.4 On validity and ethical concerns**

In order to provide the reader with a transparent and comprehensive view of this work, the intent and design is provided in section 3 (see also Table 1), and the research synthesis, including the philosophical and theoretical base, the procedures and methodologies, is provided in section 4 (see also Table 2) and in each of the original sub-studies. As several qualitative (dialogic) methods were used to match specific questions and purposes of each of the five studies, it should be noted that the knowledge gained is influenced by the values and politics of the researcher (Holliday 2011) and her co-researchers. As is characteristic to the transformative paradigm (Mertens 2015), this thesis acknowledges the importance of multiplicity of realities and truths: it aims to promote multiple perspectives on realities and of knowing, as each is informed and affected by multiple historical, social, and educational positionings (Berger & Luckmann 1966) and by (un)privileged situatedness (Bourdieu 1991). This is a difficult and an ethically delicate task, as the ideology of the research setting (critical and reflexive interculturality), the subjectivity of the researcher (see section 4.1) and of her co-researchers inevitably inform the process of interpreting data (on critical interpretivism, see Holliday 2011, 28). Moreover, researcher subjectivity takes on a particular role in this work, as much of the intertextual analysis (Studies IV and V) involves multiple readings and is guided through individual interest as well as dialogue. The signifying process operates within the limits of the subject(s) and, due to the open-ended and rhizomatic nature of intertextuality, the reading of the data is never final nor complete.



## 5 SUMMARIES OF STUDIES I–V

**Study I** *Finnish Education – An ambiguous Utopia* argues that there is more to the story of excellence of Finnish education than is discussed nationally and internationally. As Finland is actively involved in marketing its education globally, it is necessary to examine and revise the myths and realities of Finnish education. The study analyses how the discourses in two commercially marketed products on Finnish education present and construct Finnishness and Finnish education particularly in relation to equality, equity and social justice. It pays close attention to how these discourses are negotiated contextually and with others, and to the resulting imaginaries, silences, and ideologies. The study makes visible some of the less talked about narratives and promotes an increased understanding of what happens at the intersection of the myths and realities of Finnish schooling. It also adds to current critical work on the influence of international agencies and consultancies in discussions of excellence and performance in education around the world.

**Study II** “Not all of us Finns communicate the same way either”: Teachers’ perceptions of interculturality in upper secondary vocational education and training examines teachers’ perceptions on interculturality and working with diverse students in the context of upper secondary VET in the field of social and health care (practical nursing). Rapidly diversifying local and global demographics challenge teachers’ understanding of identity formation, their sense of interculturality, and readiness to treat the ‘other’ fairly. The study aims to support educators’ conceptualization of culture beyond conventional (ethnic) dimensions among minority and immigrant students, to promote teachers’ awareness of their own preconceived cultural and institutional beliefs and ideologies, and to increase teachers’ awareness of their positionalities as educational professionals. By doing so, the study promotes a critical and reflexive approach to interculturality in education.

**Study III** *Intercultural Ethics in Education* shares both the context and the data with Study II. However, the analytical approach differs from Study II. While the results of Study II suggest the presence of cultural essentialism and national/cultural hegemony in VET teachers’ communication, the particular focus of Study III is on the positive indications of teachers’ awareness of their positionalities and ideologies affecting their communication about interculturality and working with diversities. Study III conceptualizes and advocates a shift towards intercultural ethics by taking a step beyond competence-based approaches

towards interculturality and linear notions of ethics in education. It details critical and reflexive interculturality in depth as the theoretical framework and complements it with Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the (ethical) self, and with Emmanuel Levinas' and Buddhist perspectives on ethics. The study draws on the data to discuss educators' role in promoting ethically caring teaching-learning conditions and facilitating social wellbeing for all involved. The conceptualization aims to advocate an ethical turn not only in practice but also in educational research and teacher education/continuing education, to support teachers' professional development in interculturality and ethics, and to raise awareness among municipal/national political and educational leadership to pay attention to critical approaches towards diversity and interculturality.

**Study IV** *How is the other produced in two Finnish ABC (e-)books – An intertextual Reading* underlines the notion that, as educational media, ABC books reflect cultural and social norms, values, and traditions of the surrounding society and represent prevailing ideologies and knowledge considered worth transferring to new generations. As such, they have the potential to perpetuate biases through local and global representations. Alongside the fact that many Finnish ABC books come with digital learning platforms, growing web technologies are creating complex multimodalities in everyday life. New strategies for learning are needed for the multiple new ways of being 'literate', i.e. to be able to critically navigate among, interpret, and comprehend the complex textualities of multimodal environments. The new National Core Curriculum of Basic Education in Finland (2016) addresses the issue of multiliteracy (*monilukutaito*, singular in Finland), but lacks specific tools for it. Addressing this gap, Study IV demonstrates how texts accumulate and convey meanings in two Finnish ABC (e-)books, and as such, advocates the intertextual method for use as a pedagogical tool in schools and in research. In Study IV, the method provides a structure and contexts to examine Otherness (the Othering of Alaska and Finnishness Othered) in regards to (inter)cultural attitudes and concepts, traditions, and values exist and how they transform and carry on via multimodal textual modes within this specific Finnish visual-linguistic contexts. As such, Study IV adds to the critical tradition of textbook research. Study IV also maintains that learning is not only transforming from linear to open-ended and rhizomatic but also transforming towards being increasingly individual, learner-centered, and self-empowered. This puts pedagogical demands on teachers to expand their and students' repertoires of interaction among (extended) texts, critical reading, and interpretive meaning-making skills. One way to foster these ideas is to apply the intertextual method as a pedagogical tool for critical, open-ended exploration of texts across disciplines.

**Study V** *Reconstructing imagined Finnishness: The case of art education through the concept of place* examines imagined (Anderson 1983) Finnishness and how it is reconstructed through the concept of place. The study focuses on Finnish cultural memory, imagined Finnishness, as it was represented in two student teachers' intertextual process, their written and visual products. The students applied the four phases of the intertextual method to examine their chosen places/sites subjectively, and generated plural meanings by reading them as texts of diverse meanings, not just as plain sites. The authors of Study V explored imagined Finnishness as it relates to places and spaces of otherness. By applying Foucault's concept of heterotopia to the two case studies, they were able to find more layers of meaning and relationships to other places than are immediately visible and comprehensible. The study demonstrates the use of the method to explore, deconstruct, and re-imagine Finnishness, and advocates its use in teacher education in order to facilitate teaching-learning environments that allow for the deconstruction and critical exploration of e.g. national narratives feeding national memory.



## 6 FINDINGS: FINNISHNESS IN EDUCATION

In the following section, the main findings are discussed in relation to the intent of the thesis, i.e. how the notion of Finnishness is found to inform educational actors, perspectives, and contexts, and to deconstruct, critically examine, and reconstruct the notion in the context of education. We begin by looking into the various ways Finnishness set into the realms of the nostalgic and mystified and this is challenged. Then, we move on to how the notion informs mechanism of Othering and essentialist bias. Finally, intercultural ethics, supported by critical and reflexive interculturality, is offered to aid teachers' in their meta-level thinking, and the intertextual method is discussed as a pedagogical tool.

### 6.1 Finnishness in the realms of the nostalgic and mystified

While in many ways informative, both the book *Finnish Lessons* and the documentary *The Finland Phenomenon* analyzed in Study I contain elements that essentialize and mystify Finnishness (see Anderson 1983, on imagined communities; see section 2) and Finnish education. Both products resort to a number of features such as popular anecdotes on traits, values, and characteristics that construct national narratives and feed national/international mindscapes about Finns, Finland and its education. The reaffirmation its values of fairness, social justice, equality/equity, and other related (cultural) determinants sets Finland apart from the rest of the nations, creates and maintains a sense of national exceptionality (Appadurai 2006; Sen 2006) for Finns themselves as well as the way Finns, Finnishness, and Finnish education are discoursed globally. These types of reaffirmations are heard e.g. from the mother/teacher and several other actors interviewed in the documentary as they talk about values or the notions of equality/equity and trust as ways of 'doing' education. These narratives not only directly support imagined (Anderson 1983) Finnishness but also run the risk of reinforcing stereotypes leading to culturally essentializing (Holliday 2011) views on all Finns. The documentary takes this even further with its simplified and fantastical approach by opening with anecdotal information on Finland, Finns, and Finnish education. The producer's choice of somewhat privileged schools and the visible absence of diversity and minority voices adds to the embellished image of Finland's system of education. Furthermore, while highlighting the notions of equality, equity, trust, and social justice as integral to Finnish society and its educational system, neither product properly problematizes these issues in relation

to the increasing societal and educational diversification and segregation in Finland (e.g. Bernelius 2013; Seppänen et al. 2015). Both also leave Finland's historically silenced and current minorities/diversities invisible and without a proper voice (Study I; see section 2).

The intertextual study of the *Magic Land ABC* (Study IV; see sections 2.3.4 and 4.3.3) also found Finnishness set into the realms of the nostalgic and mystified – or, if one prefers, found the notion Othered (see section 2.3.3). Seemingly ‘familiar’ textualities representing Finnishness seemed slightly ‘askew,’ and, set among the plentiful intertextual links to both local and global (literary, visual, etc.) cultures, numerous traces were available for discovery as paths into the collective cultural memory of Finns. However, the ‘purity’ of Finnishness now manifested in the blue skies and lakes, islands, swans, and forests only in the hazy horizons on the pages of the ABC book. Finnishness is also ‘preserved’ as an outdoor museum (see also Study V; see Foucault on heterotopia in section 2.3.4) with modern-looking role-players doing ‘historic’ chores such as milking cows by hand and weaving cloth. In the midst of the surreal neatness of the museum, an artist paints the exact scene – which leaves the reader wondering whether Finnishness is a thing of the past and soon to be viewed as a collectible (Study IV). Yet, in the end, *Magic Land ABC* offers Finnishness as a refuge (Study IV), steering the reader right ‘back home’ into the serenity of the familiar and traditional fields, woods and houses in the ‘right’ colors – along with a reaffirming folklore rhyme tapping right into the collective cultural mindscapes of Finns. The reader is left wondering whether any room is left for acceptance of any kind of difference in Finnishness.

## **6.2 Hidden contestations – myths challenged**

Discoveries on Finnishness were also found through the intertextual processes (written and visual) and artistic end-products of two teacher students. In order to explore Finnish culture, heritage, and identity, the students were given the task to apply a specific intertextual method to their choice of *My place*, a place/site of subjective interest and importance (see Study V for details). One of the student teachers found contradictory textualities regarding her ‘preferred’ site, the *National Library of Finland* (in Helsinki). For instance, while the building was set to pay tribute to Tsar Nikolai I, the decorative elements inside highlighted the autonomy of the university and symbolized freedom of knowledge. Having been built in 1840–45, situates the site within the period when narratives constructing a new-emerging nation-state were taking on speed and (political, institutional, societal) power imbalances were contested on many levels. As such, and since

libraries create a kind of universal archive that enclose objects of all times, eras, forms, and styles within a single space, the site represents Finnishness as a form of a heterotopia (see section 2.3.4). Similarly, the other teacher student's intertextual process (Study V) provides a window into a disappearing Finnish tradition (the rug washing), while simultaneously forming a new one (now a café called *Mattolaituri*) in Helsinki. Her study revealed e.g. that while some of the rug piers, including *Mattolaituri* in an affluent section of Helsinki, are still in use in one form or another, they are disappearing from Finnish imaginations as a tradition. Yet, busloads of tourists visiting Helsinki for a day are taken to visit the site for its 'Finnishness.' Her analysis of rug washing sites in several neighborhoods of Helsinki revealed the sites as cultural spaces with plural and hidden meanings relating to power relations, social class distinctions, labor issues, non-unionized women's organizations as well as landscapes and sceneries. Both teacher students found their identity as Finns added with more layers, and found their awareness and understanding of Finnishness expanded.

### **6.3 Finnishness producing Otherness**

Next, we can go deeper into the ways Finnishness informs educational actors, perspectives, and contexts. In addition to finding Finnishness Othered in *Magic Land ABC*, the character Alaska is found Othered in *The Little Woods ABC* (Study IV). Alaska is signified as an outsider (Kristeva 1991; see section 2.3.3) in several ways: her character as a raccoon (non-endemic species to Finland), her name, clothing, manners, and habits the unfamiliarity of which cause uncertainty and alarm among the villagers (e.g. Kristeva 1991; O'Sullivan 2009; Pesonen 2013; Varga & Zug 2013; Said 1978). Despite Alaska's efforts to fit in, the others remain somewhat suspicious and resist (Kristeva 1991) sharing their space with her. In the end, Alaska's Otherness is smoothed over as she exhibits her agency by constructing it through available cultural discourses and practices (Adams St. Pierre 2000), i.e. she participates in Finnish traditions and takes on habits and ways of the locals. Her willingness to assimilate into Finnishness is not questioned as no major difficulties are expected due to the character representing the 'civilized West' (Said 1978). Furthermore, Alaska is 'harmless' as the Other, since nothing in her character represents any controversial ethnicity, religion, or (sub)culture, nor any disadvantage such as low economic status or disabilities of any kind, i.e. she attributes towards the Occidental rather than the Oriental (Said 1978).

Extending the examination of the production of Otherness into the Finnish ABC genre revealed differences in the tones of the notion. The intertextual continuum included Finnish ABC books from the early 1900s to 2013 (see Study V for references). The tones in the depictions, e.g. of Native Americans, varied from playful and accepting of cultural distinctions in the newest ABC books to objectifying and highly derogatory (by today's standards) ones. For example, the 1967 *ABC* image of a Native American is ample with texts supporting the production of Other (Kristeva 1991; O'Sullivan 2009; Pesonen 2013; Varga & Zug 2013; Said 1978), as are similar images in the 1955 *Fairy Tale ABC* and the 1968 *Golden ABC tales*.

One of the most derogatory images is that of a black female figure, depicted with full lips, very white eyes, and black curly hair up in a bun, kneeling by a pond in both the 1968 *Golden ABC tales* and the 1955 *Fairy Tale ABC*. The verse telling us that she is not able to wash the blackness off her face sets the tone of Otherness so derogatory that it makes one uneasy to realize how little time has passed since these ABC books were still in use in Finland. An image accompanying a rhyme *Pepe merimatka* [Pepe's Sea Voyage] in a 1951 *Finnish Children's ABC* goes even further with an illustration of an androgynous black child *Pepe*, floating in the sea inside a wooden tub with a large white cruise ship coming to the rescue. The figure is distanced and dehumanized (Kristeva 1991) by the lack of regard to the gender and by the rhyme attributing the figure with words such as "peculiar" (see Smith 2006). Denying *Pepe* any agency of its own, the rhyme renders the figure responsible for his/her precarious actions – all of which reflects the behavioral uncertainty of the Other (Kristeva 1991; Smith 2006).

It should be noted here that the interpretations of the intersecting texts is very much guided by the subjectivity of the researchers/readers. This is why the intertextual traces in the 1951 image of *Pepe* link e.g. with one of the core pieces in Finnish 1900<sup>th</sup> century art, *The Aino Myth* (1891) by Gallén-Kallela (1865–1931). As the national artist of Finland, Gallén-Kallela, inspired by the national epic of Kalevala, his works have contributed towards the constructions of national narratives in many ways. The intertextual links into the collective cultural memory of Finns are direct, as the pose of the characters in *Pepe* closely resembles that in *The Aino Myth*. Other traces in *Pepe* link with e.g. Tintin and Donald Duck comic books, black licorice candy *Laku-Pekka* [Licorice-Pekka], and Finnish children's literature – all of which include intertextual elements referring to the grotesque golliwog doll (Varga & Zug 2013). The internationally pervasive golliwog figure is a derogatory (considered racially insensitive today) characterization of an African male with long frizzy hair, pop eyes, and thick pink lips wearing a minstrel costume. The golliwog also appears as imitations in e.g. Finnish vaudeville acts



such as *Pekka & Pätkä* (1960s) and a children's card game of *Musta-Pekka* [Black-Pekka]. The roots of the figure can be traced all the way back to Aesop's fable *The Aethiop* (Widger 2008) – translations of which can also be found in Finnish children's literature.

## **6.4 Ethnocentric tendencies and essentialist bias**

In regards to Finnishness as a framework informing teaching-learning contexts, Study II reveals the presence of national hegemony and ideologies (e.g. Appadurai 1990, 2006; Sen 2006; Shi-xu 2001), ethnocentric tendencies, and essentialist bias (e.g. Abdallah-Preteille 2006; Dervin & Tournebise 2013; Holliday 2011; McSweeney 2002) in the teachers' communication. It also reveals the presence of prevailing 'classic' stereotypes and cultural hierarchies as well as an imbalance of power between 'us' and 'them' (e.g. Abdallah-Preteille 2006; Shi-xu 2001; Holiday 2010; Piller 2011; Wikan 2002).

The ethnocentric and differentialist tendencies (Dervin 2016; see section 4.2.2) have a way of polarizing intercultural interaction. This leaves teachers wishing for (cultural) competences in efforts to avoid, minimize, or solve misunderstandings and conflicts during intercultural encounters. Relying on 'classic', often essentializing (Holliday 2011) approaches carries the risk of categorising individuals/learners according to their cultures ('nations'), ethnicities, (dis)abilities, etc., and may lead to simplified and moralistic judgments (Holliday 2010; McSweeney 2002). This, along with expectations of reciprocity (Chang & Bai 2016; Pudas 2015; see also Noddings 1984, on care ethics), leaves teachers with feelings of ambiguity, confusion, and weariness for the lack of clear, ethically sustainable solutions. The more meta-level thinking and reflection the teacher has done, the less confrontational the communication about interculturality and diversity is.

## **6.5 Intercultural ethics – critical and reflexive interculturality for meta-level thinking**

Study III, then, offers intercultural ethics as an aid to teachers (educational scholars and decision-makers) in expanding their awareness of interculturality and diversities (see section 2.3.2). Premised in critical and reflexive interculturality (see sections 2.3 and 4.2.2), it operates from the argument that ethical reflection builds educational practitioners' capacities of patience, discernment, and ability to be readily responsive in the immediacy of educational contexts (Chang & Bai 2016; Campbell 2008; Colnerud 2006, 2015; Talib 2005). It increases teacher's

professional sensitivity and courage to challenge hidden injustices and biases, and to pay close attention to intersectionality in regards to identities (e.g. Anthias 2013; Dervin 2016; Shi-xu 2001). For example, one of the teachers was equipped with positive attributions about his students and colleagues, and believed in everyone's ability to learn regardless of challenges. The teacher was aware of his position as an agent of change (Talib 2005) for his students. He concentrated on shared commonalities (Holliday 2011) rather than hid behind differentialist bias (Dervin 2016) and categorizations, and spoke of facilitating community/work-like teaching-learning environments in efforts to support the students' sense of belonging and self-empowerment. The way he works supports critical and reflexive intercultural perception of identity formations as fluid and always in the process of becoming, co-emerging through interaction (Chang & Bai 2016; see section 2.3). The deep sense of professional ethics gained by meta-level self-reflection, along with an open attitude towards shared and plural humanity (see section 2.3) enables his commitment towards professional caring without consuming or exhausting himself: his sense of self and professional efficacy frees him from the need to categorize students (and/or colleagues) in ways that encapsulate individuals out of the agency each is due (e.g. Abdallah-Preteuille 2006; Holliday 2011). This teacher's sense of solicitude (see section 2.3) affects his pedagogical thinking, ethical decision-making, and action thereof. His example shows how a teacher is able to work with ethical intention "as aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions" (Ricoeur 1992, 172).

## **6.6 The intertextual method as a pedagogical tool**

In addition to intercultural ethics, the thesis offers a specific intertextual method (Paatela-Nieminen 1996; 2000) as a pedagogical tool for use in practice across disciplines and (with adaptations) in any level of education. For instance, the National Core Curriculum of Basic Education in Finland (FNBE 2014) addresses the issue of multiliteracy (*monilukutaito*, singular in Finland) as one of the many competencies. New strategies for learning are needed for the multiple new ways of being 'literate', i.e. to be able to critically navigate among, interpret, and make sense of the complex textualities of multimodal teaching-learning environments.

In summary of the above sub-sections, the notion of Finnishness in educational contexts has been opened with a critical look into some of the silences, cultural assumptions, and taken-for-granted ideologies behind Finnish education: the notion equality/equity appears embellished and ambivalent. Scholars and practitioners need to pay close attention to being part of the constructs that may reinforce and perpetuate stereotypes, bias, and (hidden) injustices (e.g. Ahmed

2012; Holliday 2010; Phillips 2007; Shi-xu 2001). Exposure and critical examination of these types of (in)visibilities paves the way for reconstructing Finnishness in educational contexts. The thesis also found the presence of essentialism and hegemony in the teachers' communication on interculturality and diversity. Another angle into the same set of data concentrated on positive, ethically caring indications in the teachers' talk. Addressing the issue of perceived differences through the lens of shared and plural humanity, a shift in the general perception of interculturality beyond prescriptive lists, fixed identities, and static (cultural) systems was advocated towards intercultural ethics. Finally, the intertextual method, applied and demonstrated in Studies IV and V, serves a pedagogical tool to be applied across disciplines. Here, the method was demonstrated and applied to explore how the notion of Finnishness is involved in the mechanisms of Othering, and to deconstruct, examine, and reconstruct Finnishness as a national narrative.



## 7 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Considering that ethnicist (encapsulating individuals/groups of people according to ‘cultures’) tendency is inherent in narratives that construct and maintain an image of a homogenous nation (Appadurai 2006), it is not a surprise to find Finnishness to inform teachers’ perspectives in essentializing and hegemonic ways. Neither is it so to find discourses in the book and the documentary embellished in regards to equality, equity and social justice, and selective about visibility and voice against the tapestry of (globally) mystified Finnish quality and excellence in education, nor that the notion of Finnishness is involved in the mechanisms of Othering as in the case of the ABC books. While the few politically incorrect discourses in the teachers’ communication may cause unease as findings, they do show the need for teachers in general to expand their conceptualisation of identities beyond one-dimensionality and cultures beyond ethnic dimensions and fixed categorizations. This is crucial as teachers generally consider themselves ethically sensitive (e.g. Kuusisto et al. 2012) and egalitarian (Talib 2005) instead of cultural hegemonists (Gay 2000). While this may read as a Western vision of teaching, I do believe that teachers, teacher students, and teacher educators around the globe should think about their own preconceived beliefs and ideologies in regards to culture and institutions. This type of reflection is necessary in order to be aware of one’s positionalities as a professional and to understand how one’s personal experiences may influence everyday encounters in educational institutions (Holliday 2010, 2011; Talib 2005; Wortham 2006). Similarly, educational scholars (politicians, decision-makers, administration) involved in narratives that create and maintain specific imaginaries should be able to more readily acknowledge and be critically aware of not reinforcing and perpetuating stereotypes, bias, and (hidden) injustices (e.g. Dervin 2016, 28; Ahmed 2012; Wikan 2002).

It is integral for teacher education and continuing teacher education to facilitate and promote opportunities (to learn) to do this kind of critical reflection meta-level thinking, and to provide opportunities for deep dialogue with others on these issues. This would give practitioners more confidence in acknowledging (individual and institutional) power imbalances (e.g. Ahmed 2012; Dervin 2016; Räsänen 2002a; Talib 1999, 2005) in the prevailing imaginings of equality and equity, and to have more courage to reject being complicit to (often hidden) structures and ideologies that enable Othering and perpetuate bias and injustice (e.g. Gorski 2008). It is of equal importance for educational consultancies,

agencies, and the media to critically discuss their roles in spreading taken-for-granted and imagined views of Finnish or any given systems of education. These platforms would gain from more nuanced understandings of how the intersecting gendered, classed, ethnic, political, etc. identifications and ideologies affect educational practitioners and society at large. Particular attention should be directed at educational decision-makers at both municipal and national levels in regards to coherence of learning objectives and ideologies behind educational documentation, teacher education, and continuing education. This, in turn, calls for increased support from national and municipal political and educational leadership who are familiar with and understand critical perspectives on diversity and interculturality. Furthermore, as multidisciplinary and critical research on education continues to address issues involving interculturality and diversities both nationally and internationally, much more of this research needs to reach teacher educators, teacher students, practicing teachers, and also be discussed more and in proper ways in the media.

Why I have chosen to go against the grain of established ideologies in and about Finnishness in education, is that I myself am a practicing (Finnish) teacher and, while a novice at this point, consider myself a critical scholar who has been provided the tools and a lens in critical and reflexive interculturality. Most of all, I believe I have the courage to examine these issues and contexts critically is that I am a product of Finnish teacher education. Despite the recent slight declines in the international assessments such as PISA, Finnish educational system still produces literate, educated citizens with good vocational and professional skills and high aspirations for the future. I believe in the capacity of Finnish teachers to learn to look beyond established truths and ideologies and in the ability to expand their awareness and understanding of interculturality and diversities, and to apply this pedagogically.

Finally, as I suggest in Study III, perhaps we really should talk about *human* encounters rather than ‘intercultural’ – especially in educational contexts. As said, if we keep on taking the apparent at face value and do not consider it beyond assumptions or representations, then we run the risk of missing much of the richness humanity has to offer. The notion of ethics deserves more attention in this regard, as reflections upon available choices make way to decisions on action: how the choice affects us and our conduct towards and about others and the consequences thereof weighs on the process. Alongside Shi-xu (2001, 280), I remain hopeful of “the deep rational-moral motivation” and the capacity of human culture to reform and transform itself in spite of the language of cultural differences.

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**Appendix A.** Education System in Finland.  
 Retrieved from [http://www.oph.fi/english/education\\_system](http://www.oph.fi/english/education_system)



