A CROSS-NATIONAL, COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CULTURAL FACTORS UNDERPINNING 15-YEAR OLD STUDENTS’ PERFORMANCE IN READING LITERACY IN FINLAND, SWEDEN AND INDONESIA

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Abstract:

This thesis investigates educational culture in Finland, Sweden and Indonesia. It compares and contrasts similarities and differences to investigate the degree to which cultural context influences performance in reading literacy. In addition, the research explores whether global educational solutions are inevitable, desirable or even possible. The study is based on the results of the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which shows that Finnish students consistently perform outstandingly well overall, while Indonesian students consistently perform poorly. Swedish students’ performance has dropped significantly since the inaugural PISA survey in 2000 and Swedish speaking Finns in Finland achieve significantly lower outcomes than the Finnish speakers.

Educational systems and cultural values as well as student, teacher and parental attitudes and habits are examined, with a view to identify cultural factors that support high reading literacy outcomes. Because effective literacy education is the key to equity at an international level, the study aspires to offer practical advice to education stakeholders in all three countries, particularly those in Indonesia.

Since the study looks at educational phenomena on a wide scale and at many levels, it requires an equally flexible and wide-ranging theoretical model. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory provides a holistic framework that is able to explain multiple elements of student’s educational development. The intricate inter-relationship between the factors of education that impact on a student’s development at many levels is clearly illustrated in Bronfenbrenner’s approach. A major innovation of this study is the attempt to show how alignment - or lack thereof - in various levels of systems, influences the child. The study generated data from interviews, surveys and observations. Data were first collected by means of online surveys for students, parents and mother tongue teachers undertaken in Finland and Sweden and by hard copy surveys undertaken in Indonesia. Twenty eight school classes were selected by convenience sampling, based on inclusion of urban as well as rural schools. To complement Bronfenbrenner’s framework, an interactive process, “Symbolic Dialogue”,
was used to generate more in-depth information through follow-up communication with participants at the micro level.

This thesis argues that alignment of system levels within an education culture is the key to understanding students’ performance in reading literacy. Results show that, despite the common and current belief in global educational solutions, few aspects of the Finnish educational culture can be easily and immediately transferred to Indonesia. The thesis argues that the cycle of low teacher and student performance needs to be broken by quality training and generating professional trust of teachers. Swedish education culture (on which the Finnish model was based) was also explored to arrive at an understanding of why student achievement outcomes in general and equity and equality aspects in particular have declined in Sweden, while, on the positive side, many Swedish students have achieved a high degree of independence and self regulation. Finally, the differences in achievement and attitudes between Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking students in Finland were investigated through Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems framework and Ogbu’s cultural-ecological theory to explain the lower academic performance of minority Swedish speaking Finnish students.

The thesis refutes the notion of a globally valid education concept and argues that evaluations of effective education cultures cannot be made using discrete quantitative measures. Students' performance in reading literacy is culturally influenced and should be understood in a cultural context. Following Bronfenbrenner, a culture is organic, a complex ecology that grows from a particular past and constantly changes. The thesis argues that effective education systems must be embedded in an education culture that aligns values throughout all systems levels.

Keywords

Achievement, Educational Culture, Globalisation, Learner Development, PISA, Reading Literacy
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List of Publications and Presentations

Conference Presentations

Dec 2010  Australian Association for Research in Education
          International Conference, Melbourne, Australia (peer reviewed paper)

Jul 2010  International Sociological Association
          XVII World Congress of Sociology, Gothenburg, Sweden (no papers were
          peer reviewed)

Jan 2010  23rd International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement
          Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (peer reviewed paper).

Oct 2007  Australian Council of State School Organisations
          Annual Conference in Darwin, Australia (no papers were peer reviewed)

Other Presentations

Mar 2012  Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga, Indonesia; All staff
          presentation; Guest lecture for students at the Faculty of Education;
          Presentation for staff at the Faculty of Education; Presentation for
          students and staff at the Business Faculty

Nov 2011  Faculty of Education, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Sep 2010  Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
          University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia

Sep 2009  Institute of Educational Research
          Jyväskylä University, Finland

Nov 2008  Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
          Canberra, Australia
Publications

“PISA – soft governing with hard core impact”
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“PISA and reading literacy - comparing oranges and apples?”
Peer reviewed paper presented at the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement conference in Kuala Lumpur in 2010. No conference proceedings have been published.

“Is PISA counter-productive to building effective education systems?”
Social Alternatives, vol 30: 4: 2011
Declaration of Originality.

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: [Signature]

Date: 1/5/12
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Chapter 1.

This thesis explores cultural factors underpinning achievement outcomes in reading literacy in Finland, Sweden and Indonesia. It studies the impact of the globalisation of education on the concept of education, education policies and education cultures, and whether global solutions are inevitable, desirable or even possible. Importantly, the thesis adopts a holistic methodological approach that highlights the socio-cultural aspect of education and enables the exploration of the alignment of system levels, as defined below, and thus the impact of the education culture on student performance.

1.0 Introduction.

Education is generally understood to be a socio-cultural process and as such it is embedded in, and is a reflection of a particular culture. No educational system can, nor aspires to be culturally neutral, since it is through education that cultural values and beliefs are transmitted through the socialisation of children (e.g. Hoffman, 1999; Masemann, 1976; Purves, 1987; Reinikainen, 2007; Torney-Purta & Schwille, 1986). This is why national steering documents usually identify what the goals for education are considered to be. Typically, there are a wide range of aims relating to students’ personal, physical, mental and social development alongside cognitive academic achievement (Dall, 2010b). This is in keeping with the longstanding pedagogical ideals of ancient Greece paideia and the German Bildung tradition which emphasise a wider sense of education (Straume, 2011).

Contemporary society is commonly described as a knowledge or lifelong learning society and education is acknowledged as a human right (United Nations, 1948). Logically the question arises, education for what purpose and knowledge of what content? The discussion of the role and meaning of education is vital in a democratic society (Biesta, 2009; Straume, 2011).

However, the impact of globalisation on education has resulted in a limited sense of educational purpose and content. It has been neutralised and is often assumed to be value free. At the same time as sustaining claims to improve the quality of education systems, its focus is narrowed to core skills that can be quantified, standardised, measured and compared (Biesta, 2009; Straume, 2011).
The Program of International Student Assessment, PISA, can be seen as an expression of the globalisation of education. Since its inception in 2000, the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, has become a major authority on the quality of educational systems and OECD recommendations for strategies to improve student performance are generally taken seriously and acted on (Grek, 2009). For each cycle, an increasing number of countries are taking part. The PISA surveys are claimed to be cross culturally valid, which would suggest that they provide universal advice for the building of effective education systems (OECD, 2010f). However, how can the effectiveness of a system be evaluated without an open discussion of effect in relation to goals and values? How can the quality of education be reduced to discrete quantitative data? As noted above, a focus on the socio-cultural elements of education in different cultural contexts highlights the qualitative nature of culture and education and facilitates exploration of the alignment of various aspects of socio-cultural systems. In this it brings to light the important impact of globalisation on education cultures, where PISA can be understood as an effect and an expression of globalisation. A key aim of the present study is to go beyond quantitative PISA league tables as measures of educational success and pose normative, value orientated questions about the nature and significance of education in different cultural contexts.

1.1. Comparative studies.

Cross-national projects provide researchers with tools for understanding other cultures as well as delving into their own. In addition to emic, (or insider) perspectives, studies are able to go beyond the scores and rankings, to expose and analyse underlying beliefs and values. Such studies can access ideas that would otherwise have gone unobserved or might have been deemed meaningless. Studying academic achievement cross-nationally in this way can make it possible for cross-cultural understanding to occur in a culturally sensitive way and result in improved academic performance (Bempechat, Jimenez, & Boulay, 2002; Hoffman, 1999; Purves, 1987). The present study provides a comparative analysis using Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems theory. The framework enables the comparison of differently embedded education cultures. This comparative study highlights factors underpinning individual and cultural successes that would have otherwise gone unnoticed.
1.2. Selection of participating countries.

Consistently, in all PISA surveys, Finnish students have been top performers. However, Swedish speaking Finnish students perform at a statistically significant lower level than Finnish speakers. Indonesian students, on the other hand, have been relegated to the lower end of the spectrum. In the initial PISA survey in 2000, where reading literacy was the main focus, Swedish and Australian students achieved significantly above the OECD average (OECD, 2001b). In light of the current common belief in global solutions, the intention of this study is to investigate whether there are common denominators between the three Western countries. The study is thus concerned with identifying factors underpinning high achievement outcomes in reading literacy that could be implemented cross-culturally in developing countries such as Indonesia.

However, in the 2009 PISA survey, where reading literacy was again the prime area of study, Sweden and Australia were two of only four countries where scores had significantly deteriorated (OECD, 2010f). The Finnish education system is modelled on the Swedish. Therefore, it was considered of value to explore why Finnish students have progressed from average to top performance, while in Sweden, students have reverted from top to average achievers, and to discuss possible reasons for their weakened results.

In Australia it proved extremely difficult to access state schools. Due to paucity of data this country has been excluded from this study. This is further discussed in chapter 4, subsection 4.12.2.

1.3. Research aim and research questions.

The overarching aim of this project is to explore the impact of globalisation on education policy and education culture in three countries: Finland, Indonesia and Sweden, and to discuss whether global solutions are inevitable, desirable or even possible. The study also explores how the alignment of different levels of socio-cultural systems may have an impact on education culture and thus on student performance. The ultimate aim is to investigate whether there are factors underpinning high achievement outcomes in reading literacy that are not culturally
located, and can be implemented universally and thus benefit students in all participating countries, and in particular Indonesian students.

Within this context, and based on deliberations discussed under 1.2., the specific research questions are:

- Why do Finnish students consistently attain top achievement outcomes in PISA surveys in reading literacy?
- What Finnish “success “strategies” can be transposed and implemented in developing countries such as Indonesia to improve outcomes in reading literacy?
- How can the significant drop in performance in Sweden be explained?
- How can the difference in performance between Swedish-speaking Finns and Finnish-speaking Finns in Finland be explained?

This thesis problematises the idea that strategies can simply be transposed from one national context to another and tests the proposition that the level of academic performance correlates to the level of alignment of the various systems in the education culture. A Bronfenbrenner analytical framework, described below under 1.6 and further in chapter 4, enables such a comparison between different national education systems.

The study aims to compare to what degree systems in Finland and Indonesia are in alignment, and examine whether strategies and values underpinning the Finnish high achievement outcomes in reading literacy can be transposed to the Indonesian education culture. The study aspires to provide an understanding of the impact of globalisation of education in Sweden and to investigate whether systems are aligned in a negative way to cause a drop in performance. Finally, it endeavours to explore whether the Swedish speaking Finns’ minority status has contributed to a misalignment of systems in their education culture and influenced performance levels.

In short it is hypothesised that all systems need to be in alignment for an optimally effective education system and culture, and that educational reforms have to be seen not in isolation but within the larger cultural context. Five major themes arising from this study have been discussed in various chapters and are pertinent to a consideration of factors informing systems alignment and reading literacy outcomes: 1) The purpose of schooling – education in a wider or more limited sense;
2) The possibility of a concept of universal literacy; 3) The impact of bilingualism; 4) Teachers – training and trust; 5) The impact of decentralisation of education.

1.4. Culture.

There are a multitude of definitions of culture. It has been said to be one of the most difficult words to define (Hodkinson, Biesta, & James, 2007).

Culture is a variable that has been discussed in educational research for decades, since there has been no single accepted definition. In large, cross-national surveys, attempts to quantify culture and reduce it to discrete variables to fit into causal models have met with frustration. Currently, cross-national researchers tend to employ a dynamic model where culture, represented by values, habits and ideals, is understood to permeate every aspect of society (Hoffman, 1999; LeTendre, 2000).

Hofstede’s (2005) cultural theory is one example of how culture can be defined in more detail. He sees culture as a mental program for patterns of thinking, feeling and acting. He distinguishes between human nature, which is inherited and universal; culture which is learned and specific to a particular group of people, and finally personality, which is specific to an individual, partly inherited and partly learned. He explains that within national cultures there are subcultures such as regional/ethnic/religious/linguistic, gender, generation, social class, work organisational cultures. As most people belong to several sets of cultures, this can mean they are subjected to different, even conflicting cultural practices and values.

Hofstede depicts culture as multilayered and manifesting at various levels of depth. The most superficial cultural expressions are the symbols that are shared and understood uniquely by the people of that specific culture, for example, language, gestures, status symbols, and jargon. On the next deeper level heroes are found; models for behaviour that can be persons that are alive or dead, real or imaginary. Rituals are activities that are socially essential but practically not necessary. Symbols, heroes and rituals are cultural practices that are visible to all but insightfully interpreted only by the ones initiated into the specific culture. Finally, values lie at the core of cultural identity – what is considered good or bad, moral versus immoral, normal or abnormal, dangerous or safe (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

For the purpose of the present study, this operative definition of culture will be used: culture is an ecological expression of our ethos, who we are (being and
becoming), our way of life, how we act and interact, based on shared beliefs and values.

1.5. Education culture.

Culture exists wherever people live and learning takes place wherever people interact. Thus, a learning culture is much more than an educational site. The present study concerns student achievement in formal learning situations, in schools. What transpires in schools is influenced by the microlevel as well as the macrolevel culture. Therefore, cultural expectations and practices will impact on what forms of learning are endorsed and made possible or conversely hindered (Hodkinson, et al., 2007).

Education culture will in this study be detailed using Bronfenbrenner’s 1979 ecological systems theory, described further in chapter 4. The Bronfenbrenner model makes it possible to break down education cultures into component parts and enables cultural comparisons of education beyond the commonly used model in which only formal education systems, and schools, are analysed.

The intricate inter-relationship between all the factors of education, at the many various layers that impact on a student’s development are easily and clearly illustrated in Bronfenbrenner’s approach. The innermost layer is the microsystem of face-to-face, direct contact interrelations, e.g. student–parent, student–teacher. The mesosystem refers to links between two or more microsystems, i.e. interactions between settings in which the student participate, for example, between the student’s family and his school, whereas the exosystem refers to the influence on the student by activities in systems where he does not actively, personally take part and which he has no control over, e.g. decisions by the school board or at his parents’ work place. The macrosystem is what is generally called culture, a consistent pattern in similarities and differences in the micro-, meso- and exosystems. Finally, the chronosystem refers to changes over a lifetime and to socio-historical conditions, the times we are born into.

Hence, education culture in the present study is defined by how processes, attitudes and expectations at the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrolevels promote or hinder learning and to what extent the systems are aligned. As stated above, this study explores whether stronger alignment of system levels means stronger impact of the education culture on student performance.
1.6. Structure of the thesis.

Literature relevant to this study is integrated in support of contextual descriptions, arguments and justification of methodology throughout chapters 2 – 7.

This thesis is set in the context of the globalisation of education. In chapter 2 the interrelationship between national education policies, national cultures and globalisation are explored, with a view to understand how education systems and policies are currently affected by the globalisation process, particularly as expressed in the form of PISA. The importance of the complex concept of reading literacy in today’s society is also examined and problematised in this chapter.

In chapter 3, the background, aims and framework of PISA are described as well as “the PISA impact” on educational policies and systems in a global knowledge society, and ensuing implications are discussed.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theoretical framework is discussed in detail in chapter 4, and situated within an epistemological context. The choice of methodology is rationalised, the choice of methods is justified and the innovative survey concept, Symbolic Dialogue, is described. The data gathering process is explained and finally, difficulties encountered, and limitations to the study are described in this chapter.

Ch 5, 6, and 7 all use a Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems framework to investigate the cultural context of national location.

Chapter 5 undertaking a direct comparative analysis of Finnish and Indonesian education cultures, using Bronfenbrenner’s framework, with particular reference to reading literacy.

Chapter 6 analyses the changing Swedish education culture in order to generate explanations for the significant drop in Swedish students’ achievement outcomes in reading literacy.

Chapter 7 discusses the differences in performance and attitudes between the Swedish-speaking and the Finnish-speaking students in Finland.

Finally, in chapter 8, findings of the present study are analysed and synthesised, followed by future directions and recommendations for further research.
Chapter 2: Reading literacy in the context of globalisation of education.

2.0. Introduction.

This thesis explores cultural factors underpinning achievement outcomes in reading literacy in Finland, Sweden and Indonesia, using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theoretical framework (described in chapter 4). The project emanated from the PISA 2000 survey. Therefore, in this context chapter the interrelationship between national education policies, national cultures and globalisation will be explored, with a view to understand how education systems currently are affected by the globalisation process, particularly as expressed in the form of PISA. The importance of the complex concept of reading literacy in today's society will also be problematised below.

In the next chapter, chapter 3, PISA will be defined from the perspectives of what PISA is, what PISA measures and the “PISA impact”.

2.1. Globalisation.

The section below will explore the processes of globalisation and how they are seen to affect nation states and cultures by various educational theorists, with a view to understand the ensuing impact on national educational policies. First, the general concept of globalisation will be discussed, before focusing on the specific relationship between education and globalisation.

2.1.1. Is there such a thing as globalisation?

Globalisation is as ubiquitous a notion in present society as it is a contested one. There is ongoing debate as to its origins and consequences, and whether the impact is of a positive, negative or indifferent nature (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

There are sceptics who challenge the very existence of a significant globalisation process. Hirst and Thompson (1999), for example, claim that there is nothing new in what is described as globalisation, that these processes have been in existence since the late 1800s. They argue that globalisation is largely a myth necessary to justify neo-liberal demands such as deregulation, privatisation and marketisation, in the process sacrificing welfare systems and a globally fair
distribution of resources. A system that links prosperity and fairness would be based on international open cooperation between connected nation states (Jones, 1998).

Thus, there is a difference between internationalisation and globalisation, even though the two concepts often, confusingly, are used interchangeably. Internationalisation interpreted in terms of world trade and markets, and the spread of political, cultural and religious ideas has been in existence for millennia (A. Little & A. Green, 2009). It has been characterised as the voluntary cooperation between nation states. In international organisations, for example, representatives are given a mandate to act on behalf of their national government. It is a conception that is interlocked with notions of independent nation states, accountability and democracy. Globalisation, on the other hand, rests on the premise of transnational and supranational practices that are not transparent or monitored at the national level (Cheung & Chan, 2009; Dale, 2000; Jones, 1998; Marginson, 1999).

2.1.2. The concept:

While the sceptics justify their refutation of globalisation (as described above) by referring to these processes having been in existence since the late 1800s, others see that very same fact as the beginning phase of globalisation. Rizvi and Lingard (2010), for example, refer to this period as the stage of colonialism, when markets were linked and expanded. Distance and space shrunk as transport was improved and new communication technology such as the telegraph brought people together, and across the world brands like Coca Cola and Campbell’s soup quickly became household names (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

Regardless of whether globalisation is seen as a recent or historical phenomenon, it is generally recognised as a potent and rapidly progressing reality. When the actual term “globalisation” was coined in the 1980s it initially referred to the economic domain but quickly came to be applied also in the political and cultural fields (Biraimah, 2008). Some main features of globalisation are the merging of markets, free trading, free movement of people, services and capital and the borderless networking by transnational companies (TNCs), intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) and global non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The global market forces define the direction of national politics with TNCs often being more powerful and richer than most nation states (Moutsios, 2010). Global competition to attract investment has strongly intensified as the capital easily moves
to where conditions for return on investment is optimal, based on, for example, labour skills and costs, government regulations, political stability and infrastructure. Thus, highly industrialised countries have moved into high knowledge, high tech production areas, which demands highly skilled workers and at the same time they aim at keeping social costs down for increased cost efficiency with the intention of attracting international investment (Ball, 1998; A. Green, 1999; Henry, 1999; Rizvi & Lingard, 2000, 2010; Zambeta, 2005).

It is commonly accepted today that globalisation is a very real phenomenon affecting economic, political and cultural institutions as well as people’s identity, expectations and aspirations (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). In the public debate, and this is also a view expressed by the OECD, it is depicted as a natural and inevitable progression of societal development; TINA, There Is No Alternative has become the established consensus (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Sidhu & Matthews, 2005).

Some proponents for globalisation agree with this, but go even further and deem the globalisation process as reified and an inevitable extension of neoliberalism that will inexorably lead to economical and political convergence and the death of the nation state (see e.g. Reich, 1992). Others take a middle position – they acknowledge the strength of global interconnectedness and the shifting power relations between national and transnational levels, but do not equate that with the demise of nation states. They also argue that the globalisation process is not homogenous and predetermined, but filtered through and shaped by regional and local contexts and cultures (A. Little & A. Green, 2009; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

2.1.3. Interconnectedness:

Evidently, globalisation is a complex concept that has become a household term, uncritically used by economists, politicians, journalists, researchers as well as the general public to explain almost anything and everything (Ball, 1998; Hirst & Thompson, 1999). It has often been associated with the explosion and speed of current communication technology (A. Little & A. Green, 2009). As an example, Google found approximately 13,300,000 matches to “globalisation” within 0.09 seconds on 3 August 2011.

Globalisation carries for some the threat of a homogenised world where nations and cultures are neutralised, and for others the hope for a more inclusive and fair world order. It can bring people together in peace and harmony, and on the
dark side, it can lead to encounters such as 9/11 and AIDS (Anleu, 1999; Raab, et al., 2008; World Bank, 2002).

The term globalisation in itself brings to mind an image of a borderless world. Information technology has created a virtual world where people across the globe can be in instant contact by the click of a computer key, and meet without leaving their home or office. Mass media brings the world into the living room. Modern, cheaper transportation makes it possible for more people to physically visit far away destinations. The movement of people creates more multicultural societies. All this suggests the potential for a rich interconnectedness that would not only enrich people’s lives but also would lead to further understanding and tolerance and thus eradicate “otherness” (Cheung & Chan, 2009; Rizvi & Lingard, 2000). However, consuming “global mass culture” in the form of US soaps, chatting with friends, admiring global heroes via satellite TV and the internet, or enjoying Chinese food, are enjoyable but superficial cultural practices that quickly change and do not change inherent values, nor does it lead to increased global awareness or committed global citizenship (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Sidhu & Matthews, 2005). Further, as Cullingford (2005) points out, knowledge does not equal understanding. In so-called multicultural societies, ethnic groups, (and expats), often stick together without mixing with local people or other groups. Touristing in foreign environments does not automatically mean being immersed in another culture. Knowledge may be gained but this activity does not necessarily lead to an increased understanding of the other. Possibly, experiencing a foreign culture through the familiar glasses of one’s own, may even cement prejudices – prejudices that are formed at a very young age. Children form clear attitudes about other nationalities by, for example, watching TV. An 8 year old boy in the UK says about the US: “They’re really rich and they can buy really good cars and stuff” (Cullingford, 2005, p. 25) and a 9 year old boy claims:

It’s good because there’s lots of places. It’s big. It’s got big houses. Big cars. Better houses, because more of them are bigger and they’ve got different styles. There’s better films that you can watch. There’s bigger playgrounds. Lots of things to do (Cullingford, 2005, p. 27).

On the other hand, a girl aged 9 says the following about a country clearly from another part of the world:
They’re terrorists there. I think they’re a bit like Arab people. I think their habits are different maybe, but I don’t really know. They wear sort of long sheets wrapped around their heads to keep the heat off them. I’m afraid of the people there (Cullingford, 2005, p. 29).

The part of globalisation resulting in inter-connectedness throughout the world by means of modern technology offers great potential, but the results depend on how it is used, to benefit the global community or nation state, or not (Henry, 1999).

2.1.4. Globalisation and the nation state.

Does globalisation lead to the weakening, or even vanishing of the nation state? While Reich (1992) believes in the demise of the nation states, many other scholars hold the opinion that the nation state will survive but in a changed capacity. The welfare state of the 1970s is no longer an ideal and state intervention has become regarded with suspicion in favour of privatisation, decentralisation and deregulation. Services that used to be state funded are now financed by “user pay” schemes in the name of choice; individualism and consumerism are at the top of the agenda. It is widely stated that the transnational corporations are depending on stable, but minimalist nation states to provide the optimal conditions of order and direction, social security cohesion and infrastructure for strong economic growth. The nation state takes the vital role of the developer and the efficient manager of economic policies that are favourable to the flow of global capital; it is the mediator between the global and the local. This became particularly crucial during the recent global financial crisis in 2008 when nation states had to strongly intervene and inject money into the economy, to save the global market from collapsing (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Grek, 2009; Henry, 1999; OECD, 2010b; Rizvi & Lingard, 2000, 2010; Zambeta, 2005). Zambeta (2005) points to an increased occurrence of nationalism and the growing occurrence of ethnocentrism, leading to states being divided into smaller units based on ethnic belonging and / or religious beliefs. She also warns of a “new nationalism” emerging in reaction to globalisation which, at the other end of the continuum, encourages xenophobia. Likewise in the Asian tiger Nations of Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan, the globalisation impact has been balanced by a counter reaction of strengthened nationalism. Conversely, recently formed, developing nation states such as Indonesia, consisting of 300 different
ethnic groups, strongly promote and rely on national feelings, ("Bhinneka tunggal ika", “Unity in diversity” ), to unite as one country (Dall, 2010b).

It is also claimed that the current global society has become too complex for national governments to administer; massive problems such as climate change must be addressed on a global level. The OECD (2009), for example, states that it has a primary goal to fund and develop research that leads to the development of sustainable growth. However, this could well be done by reverting to voluntary international cooperation between equal nation states and without the need for a global, neoliberal hegemony (Henry, 1999; Jones, 1998; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

2.1.5. Globalisation, developed and developing states.

Globalisation is also seen to accentuate the divide between rich and poor states. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) claim there has never before been such a gap between those who have and those who have not. Zambeta (2005) concurs and argues that globalisation is deepening already existing inequalities. Sidhu and Matthews (2005) point out that the gap between rich and poor has steadily widened, not only between countries but also within countries, consistent with the neo-liberal ideals of "growth first". Also the OECD (2009) raises concern over increased inequality, stating that income inequality has widened in 75% of OECD countries over the last two decades. Ball (1998) and Oliver (2005) maintain that globalisation has had the effect that mass production of goods has been relocated to less developed countries where cheap labour and unregulated working conditions can be found, and higher profit generated, while the capital remains disengaged and easily moved if the production conditions change. This view is sustained by Reich (1997) who exemplifies how companies successively have relocated their manufacturing from one country to the next, searching for ever lower wages. He also argues that workers in the developing country get employment and their increased purchasing power stimulates that country’s economy and consumers on the global market can buy the products at a cheaper price. The World Bank (2002) concurs with Reich, and cites differences in pay between developed and developing countries, for example, a worker earning $31 at home gets a rise to $278 by moving to the US, but sees it as evidence for the positive effects of labour mobility. Further, the World Bank claims that globalisation is generally leading to reduced poverty and reduced inequalities, while admitting there are exceptions, there are winners and losers and protection policies must be in place.
(World Bank, 2002). Even though theoretically, globalization can be mediated, it seems evident that currently greater economic and social polarization within and across countries is created.

2.1.6. A homogenised world culture.

Another issue of concern is whether globalisation is leading to homogenisation of cultures. Even though cultures have spread widely and influenced others for millennia, the speed and intensity that characterises today’s movement sets it apart and many fear a “McDonaldisation” of the world, where diversity is eroded in favour of Western (American) tastes, behaviours and attitudes (Oliver, 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 2000). On the other hand, Oliver (2005) states there is not a one-sided transfer of Western mass culture through electronic media to the developing world; on the contrary, globalisation is encouraging cultural hybridism. Further, it has made it possible for people to be aware of and engage in events across the globe and to become conscious of the possible implications for their own community. Globalisation, Oliver says, has enabled a diversity of groups, including minorities, to freely put forth their ideas through electronic media, thus sustaining a cultural richness of ideas and equalising power, thereby revitalising democracy. The World Bank concurs and maintains that there is great diversity between globalised countries (World Bank, 2002).

In summary, globalisation in itself is neither inherently good or bad, nor is it a predetermined juggernaut. Modern communication technologies bring the world together and create awareness about other societies and cultures. This may not translate into understanding and empathy, it may even at times cement prejudices, but the potential for genuine inter-connectedness is there. States are fragmenting into smaller ethnic or religious unities, while concurrently the financial and labour markets become increasingly borderless. The gap between rich and poor is widening, both between and across countries. Choices made now as to how to engage with these processes in developed as well as developing countries are crucial for a sustainable future (A. Little & A. Green, 2009; Zambeta, 2005).
2.1.7. The knowledge economy.

While the Keynesian / Fordist welfare state was based on mass production of goods; know how, services and ideas are central to the current market model, the “knowledge economy”. States continuously aim for an increased share of the global market and workers have to be competitive to sell their skills in the global arena (Ball, 1998; Cheung & Chan, 2009; A. Little & A. Green, 2009). A country’s long-term economic growth and prosperity therefore depends on how well the education system is aligned with market demands and how well it is preparing citizens for future study and work in a globalised economy. Youth is trained to meet society’s (the economy’s) need, which in turn makes it possible for them to survive in that particular society (Bempechat, et al., 2002; Takayama, 2008). Competitiveness in the global economy has led to competition in the educational area, since one is assumed to be based on the other. Education has become a commodity and is at present more closely tied to the economic system than ever before (Reynolds, Stringfield, Teddie, & Creemers, 2002). This leads on to the next part of this discussion; how education in particular is impacted by the globalisation processes.

2.2. Education and Globalisation.

2.2.1. The human capital theory and its critics.

An education model of social efficiency has become increasingly dominant to the detriment of the democratic equality ideal. The democratic model, which is prevalent even though it is implemented in various ways, focuses more on social and cultural needs than economic needs, and stresses the equal access to education and the need for society to foster democratic and socially skilled citizens as well as the rights of the individual to reach his / her optimal potential (Henry, 1999; Jones, 1998; Welch, 1998). The social efficiency model, on the other hand, is associated with the knowledge economy, which primarily aims to develop efficient educational systems that will produce workers who will increase productivity and thus generate economic growth. This theory is based on the belief that individuals, and education, can be seen as commodities in the production chain and just as raw material can be refined, resulting in value being added, so human capital can be “value added” by education (Henry, 1999; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Welch, 1998). This theory is linked with the belief that there is a singular world culture forming. In this view, the Western
educational system is deemed to be the best and therefore other nation states model theirs on the same, which is evidenced by, for example, curriculum studies that have shown primary school curricula to be basically identical across the world (Spring, 2008).

Critics of this theory claim that globalisation works in different ways. Post-colonialist theorists see the world divided into two unequal zones with rich states imposing their values and systems, including the theory of the knowledge economy and marketisation of education on poor states for their own benefit. Thus, in their view, the Western model of education is not spreading because of its merits but due to an unequal power balance and Western ideological postcolonial dominance (Spring, 2008). Culturalists, as termed by Spring, claim there are many educational ideas appearing in the global arena and that nation states borrow what they believe is the best from various models to fit their cultural context. They stress that there is not one optimal model, but multiple knowledges and multiple frameworks for schooling (A. Little & A. Green, 2009; Spring, 2008).

In addition, two other theories that try to explain the effect of globalisation on education are the Common World Educational Culture, CWEC, approach and the Globally Structured Agenda for Education, GSAE. The CWEC was developed at Stanford University and is built around the belief that there are (Western) universal values and norms which shape, and homogenise, the creation of nation states as well as their institutions, such as education systems. The CWEC proponents found, for example, that curricula across the world were unexplainably similar, regardless of the historical, cultural, religious or developmental context, and this confirmed in their view the existence of these universal patterns. World culture confers the idea of co-operation between autonomous nation states, eventually leading to globalisation. This is a process which can be related to the distinction made in section 2.1.1 between international co-operation and globalisation, even though both concepts imply extra-national forces in action. GSAE, on the other hand, proposes a paradigm shift; not one related to values, but to political and economical considerations. The changing character of the capitalist economy is changing the role of nation states, and transforming education systems globally by the power given to supra-national and trans-national bodies. Thus, a global economic agenda is at the root of global educational reform which then can be mediated at the local level (Dale, 2000; Moutsios, 2010).
2.2.2. Reification and efficiency.

Advocates of the human capital theory claim that schools should be managed like businesses; Spring (2008) even suggests a partnership between schools and businesses to give students an understanding of the ever-changing work environment. This can be seen to operate when reading material and software are provided by companies and used in schools. An example of co-operation between schools and business is the McDonald’s Maths Online program, targeting students in year 7 – 12, their maths teachers and their parents, and strongly promoted on Australian TV (Henry, 1999; McDonalds, 2010). In this model, schools are governed by the same market laws, with the view that successful, efficient schools attract students (parents) and flourish, while badly performing schools wither and disappear as the market regulates itself. “Successful and efficient” in this context means that students perform highly on standardised national tests and these outcomes are achieved at a minimum cost, resulting in “more for less”. (As nothing is efficient in its own right, efficiency has to be related to what goals are to be obtained. If the main goals are / were of another character, focusing on for example equity, equality or democratic and social skills, the measurement of efficiency would have to be entirely different). State schools are often seen as inefficient with private alternatives being more efficient and more cost effective, not taking into consideration that state schools cannot choose their students in a similar fashion to private schools. However, this has initiated competition between public and independent schools as well as between individual state schools, thus blurring the line between the two sectors in the name of plurality and choice. Critics of the human capital model, react to the utilitarian and instrumental view emanating from the primary focus on economic, measurable gains and goals. They argue that many other important education goals are lost, as they cannot as easily be quantified and standardised. Education, they believe, should be about ideas and arguments for alternative futures; how to usefully engage with the globalised context, to refocus on how to contribute to democratic nation building and how to also generate social and cultural, not only financial capital (Ham, 2008; Henry, 1999; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Welch, 1998).

The debate about efficiency in education is not new though. Welch (1998) relates how already in the 1860s it was suggested UK schools should be run like businesses and be accountable for results. Thus, standards were set for what should be attained by the students, who had to attend school 200 times per year before the
test could be taken. Teachers’ pay was linked to student attendance and their passing the exams, which led to examples of sick children being forced to school, cheating, and a narrowing of the curriculum taught, cramming and rote learning – already then teachers were teaching to the test. This discussion is mirrored today in Australia, with claims of cheating on the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in 2010 (ABC Online, 2010a, 2010b). Further, principals and teachers claim that the quest for measurable performance outcomes and economic efficiency leads to a utilitarian and narrowed curriculum. The potential for curricular diversity that is created by globalisation is not taken advantage of. Increased multiculturalism, people mobility and immigration call for curricula that educate global citizens, which is one of the qualities in demand in the knowledge society, thus a contradictory situation has transpired. Another highly valued skill in this context is information technology proficiency, which has not made a great impact on most curricula; possibly the reason may be found in the large financial investment required, or in system resistance due to teachers lacking the necessary skills (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Coulby, 2005). A narrowed curriculum is also changing the role of teachers, from being professionals to becoming learning production managers, a demotion in status also linked with modern technology; classroom processes used to be focused around the teacher, who was the expert and possessed unique knowledge that was not otherwise available, whereas today via the internet everyone has access to unlimited information. This has transformed the teacher to a facilitator who is “managing learning experiences” (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Henry, 1999; Oliver, 2005).

Education is affected by globalisation through decentralisation and privatisation, choice and accountability, testing and assessment (2002). Governments are under pressure to limit budgets and show efficiency with the use of tax payers’ money, thus central spending in areas such as education is being reduced; funding has been decentralised and governance has been transferred to local communities (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; A. Green, 1999; Grek, 2009). Privatisation and competition are also seen as ways of making education cost effective and at the same time providing parents and students with options for choice (Welch, 1998). However, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) refute the notion that private education delivery is more cost effective and argue that there is no evidence in support of this claim and that the issue of privatisation is an ideological one, built on
the neoliberal concept whereby education is seen as a private good and an investment for a better future with equal choices open to everyone. In response it is argued that choice is unequally distributed, and thus this "choice-and-competition" reform is benefitting the middle classes that are in possession of cultural and economic capital and will in effect lead to segregation within the education system based on social class, ethnicity and religious background (Ham, 2008; Reich, 1997).

It should be noted that the choice theory is not limited to the choice between public and private schools, but also encourages challenges between state schools that now are competing to attract students by way of speciality programs and league table rankings.

Efficiency has come to characterise the new epistemology, teamed with the key words "performance and accountability, assessment and testing". Efficiency is evaluated by performance related to cost efficiency. Performance in turn is assessed by testing students against various sets of goals. This focus on performance and achievement outcomes has led to the emergence of a virtual testing culture, both on a national and an international scale, This has also been termed “policy as numbers”, resulting in students as well as schools and education systems being compared and ranked in league tables, publicly discussed and published in the mass media, and “famed and shamed”. Quantification now defines progress in education. If a variable cannot be measured, no progress can be evidenced. Thus, education takes on an instrumental dimension. Where low performance is detected nationally, schools, as in principals and teachers are typically held accountable, whereas in international comparisons, national education systems and policies are scrutinised. Of major importance is then of course, who constructs these tests and sets the standards (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Dall, 2010b; Moutsios, 2010; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

Lifelong learning is another concept associated with the knowledge economy. It has been argued that schools can focus on general, basic skills if there is an anticipation that knowledge and skills need to be constantly broadened and updated to meet market requirements (Spring, 2008). The concept dates to the 18th century and the enlightenment, when reason and science were seen as the foundation for progress, and education (not schooling) was considered to be required on an ongoing basis, but for humanistic reasons. Later, industrialisation necessitated a furthering of workers’ knowledge and skills for the advancement of production.
Today, an increasing number of students go on to post-compulsory education; upper secondary school, vocational and tertiary education for the same reason, to become more attractive on the labour market. There are warnings though, that too many obtain too high a level of (formal) education, and that this “over educating” is leading to inflation in qualifications and over supply of graduates. Due to the rapid and constant changes in the labour market, particularly the explosion and advancement of information technology, ongoing training, updating and upgrading, is required to remain competitive and employable (A. Green, 1999; Reich, 1997; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

2.2.3. Accountability through international, comparative surveys.

The drive for efficiency and accountability has prompted the establishment of large scale international comparative surveys. They started as early as the 1960s but have become more frequent over time and their character has changed. The first studies were conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, the IEA, an organisation founded by education researchers. Their aim was to understand what educational processes bring about high academic achievement outcomes, by means of international surveys combined with qualitative tools such as interviews and observations. Test tasks were related to national curricula, thus students were assessed on what they were supposed to have learnt in school. There was a clear understanding of the cultural framework. The IEA surveys can be described in the context of international cooperation (Purves, 1987).

The OECD has become a major authority on the quality of educational systems, since the initiation of PISA, in 2000. PISA is based on the premise that a nations’ economic growth is largely dependent on the quality of their human capital, thus an expression of globalisation of education. Students are assessed not against their school curricula but against performance indicators defined by the OECD and their understanding of “how well young adults near the end of compulsory schooling are prepared to meet the challenges of today’s knowledge societies “and “the challenges of adult life in the real world” (Kirsch, et al., 2002, p. 3). PISA surveys are uniformly conducted in developed as well as developing countries, across cultures. The impact of PISA on education systems is discussed in chapter 3.
2.2.4. Globalisation and education in developing countries.

How is globalisation affecting education in developing countries? Education is affirmed as a human right. It is said to be contributing to peace and sustainable development, equalising, increasing national unity and social cohesion, reducing poverty through productivity growth and ensuring success in the globalising world society (Cusso & D'Amico, 2005; A. W. Little & A. Green, 2009; UNESCO, 2000; World Bank, 2002). Thus, various aid agencies have supported mass education campaigns, particularly focusing on primary school education, which have had positive results and have enabled enrolment numbers to steadily increase. However, there are also warnings about a one-sided focus to the detriment of secondary and tertiary education as higher level graduates are necessary for successful inclusion in the global economy. Another consideration is that enrolment is only the first step in the education process. To achieve results for change, there need to be qualified teachers, learning materials, adequate equipment and facilities. Particularly IT equipment and the surrounding technology such as broadband connectivity, are very costly, but to bridge the “digital gap” not only the hardware and software are required, but expertise in usage. There have been unfortunate examples of expensive equipment being packed away for the simple reason that no one knew how to operate it. At the same time, IT-technology opens unprecedented possibilities for increased equity through the spread of education to rural and remote areas (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Dall, 2010b; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).

Typically, curricula implemented in developed Western countries are transferred to the developing country context. This has been criticised as a covert measure to strengthen the dominance of rich countries over the poor, creating a global elite (Spring, 2008). Further, externally developed curricula, detached from local context, can turn out to be not only ineffective but to even endanger local cultures. There has been resistance from some indigenous cultures to adopt generic Western education prescriptions; they emphasize the different needs of the developing nations. The need is not only to produce skilled workers for the economy; it is also to enhance the freedom and responsibilities for societal direction and life choices that come with education. Thus, hybrid models, combining global and local are on the increase, as are epistemologies with a different perspective, particularly
the Freirian epistemology has had a deep impact on education policies in developing countries (Dorner & Gorman, 2006; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Spring, 2008; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).

To summarise this section, it can be said that globalisation is a complex concept, whose impact and consequences are highly contested. It is argued that the knowledge economy and human capital theory have impacted on education through decentralisation; privatisation and education “consumer” choice; accountability and assessment. A virtual testing culture has emerged to ensure transparent accountability. This new epistemology is aimed at greater efficiency in education systems, i.e. improved learning outcomes at a lesser cost. It will be argued in the following chapters that the effects can be diametrically opposite.

Another aspect of globalisation is mobility and increasingly multicultural societies and schools. Thus, there is a potential for educating students to become aware, understanding and accepting of other cultures and values. This seems to be a lost goal alongside others that cannot easily be quantified and standardised.

The OECD has become an authority on evaluation of education systems since the initiation of the PISA surveys, where students are assessed not against national curricula, but against performance indicators defined by the OECD as measuring what students need to know “in the real world”. Participating countries take the PISA results very seriously and are prone to follow ensuing policy recommendations at face value, to better their position in the global race. This supports a convergence of education policies and standardisation of curricula, which, however, can be filtered through and adapted to a national culture and context. This, particularly in relation to developing countries, will be discussed in chapters 5 and 6.
2.3. Reading literacy.

This discovery of yours [writing] will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it ... they will trust to the external written characters and not use of their own memories; you give your students not truth, but only the appearance of truth; they will read many things and will have learned nothing; they will therefore seem to know many things, when they are, for the most part, ignorant and hard to get along with, having the show of wisdom without the reality ... You would imagine that [written words] had intelligence, but if you want to know anything and put a question to them, they always say one thing over and over. And all these words, once they are written down, are bandied about equally among those who understand and those who have no interest in them, and they do not know to whom to speak and not to speak; if they are mistreated or abused ... they cannot defend themselves.

(Socrates in dialogue with Phaedrus, Sections 275e–277a, Plato, c365 BCE cited in Freebody, 2007, p. 8)

This very early discourse on the usefulness of reading literacy illustrates how differently the concept continues to be understood. In this section various meanings and definitions of reading literacy are explored, followed by a discussion of the importance and consequences of reading literacy in today’s society.

2.3.1. Definitions

Reading literacy may appear to be a concept easily and generally understood; commonly it would be interpreted as the skills to read and write (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005). However, in a wider context it is a deeply complex, historically constructed, multilayered and dynamic concept, that cannot be seen in isolation but has to be understood in relation to the surrounding social, political and cultural context (B. Green, Hodgens, & Luke, 1997; Ntiri, 2009).

Although there are many accepted definitions of reading literacy, the following concepts are considered to be of most significance for the present study as they provide a historical backdrop.

2.3.1.1. Reading as a purely cognitive concept: The Autonomous Model

The Church Law of 1686 in Sweden - Finland stated that every young person should be able to read, (but not write), placing particular emphasis on women. The stipulation for universal reading ability sprang from the Protestant Reformation and
was a means to instill Lutheran values and beliefs in ordinary people. Reading was taught by the church with the active involvement of the family, and the texts used were the Lutheran scripts, e.g. the Catechism. Annual exams were held and reading proficiency registered in the parish books. To have passed this test was a requirement for receiving the sacraments and for entering a Christian marriage, thus learning to read equaled both becoming a Christian and becoming a socially acceptable adult. These tests reveal that children never were faced with the challenge of reading new texts alone, or to explain the meaning of what was read. In many other countries, reading was taught as a means for religious instruction and praying and reading were often considered to be synonyms (Chartier, 2008; Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005; Gee, 1988; Linnakylä, 2004). In this context, the term reading relates to a purely cognitive concept, entailing word-level decoding and literal understanding (Sulkunen, 2007). Literal understanding, i.e. to the letter, originates from the Latin “littera” meaning letter of the alphabet (B. Green, et al., 1997; Online Dictionary, 2010). Logically, in French – and Swedish – the word for an illiterate – lacking the letters - is “analphabète”, without an alphabet. The term “literate” in the English language historically meant “to be familiar with literature”, “well educated” and “learned” before recently taking on the broader meaning of being well educated in a particular field such as being reading literate, computer literate, science literate, etc (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).

Literal comprehension implies a static relation between the text and the reader. The meaning of the text is not to be reflected on; the meaning is determinate, fixed in the text, waiting to be decoded by the reader - or her/his instructor. The purpose of teaching the common people to read in the 16th century was to enable them to read God’s will for themselves, but as the literacy promotion was inherently of a political and religious nature, the Church ministers would have assisted with the interpretation of Luther’s version. Many argue that the autonomous model, where literacy is seen as a technology, information processing, with universal attributes and consequences, independent of social context, therefore leaves the students without agency and perpetuates unequal power relations. It may have originated in the 16th century, but it still is an authentic theory, particularly in developing countries (Gee, 1988; Kalman, 2008; Maddox, 2007). But even in Australia, for example, up until the
1970s, reading, writing and “proper English” were the topics covered in schools (Edwards & Potts, 2008; B. Green, et al., 1997).

2.3.1.2. Reading literacy as a functional concept.

Towards the end on the 20th century, the concept of “functional literacy” was coined, initially referring to the relationship between literacy and economic development, efficiency and productivity, the framework for economic change, and as such was treated as a measurable variable in the economic equation. The conception evolved to encompass all activities that are important to a person in his particular life setting, thus the UNESCO definition of functional literacy is as follows:

A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community’s development (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).

This definition sets functional literacy apart from the cognitive autonomous model, as literacy here is seen not in isolation but in relation to a group and community.

Functional literacy conveys the notion that reading skills are required in a number of diverse everyday social situations that require different types of literacies, so there is interactive meaning making involved. Despite this, functionalists generally do not believe that the teaching of literacy needs to be varied, but rather that there can be one universal way of teaching the one set of skills that will fit all (Barton, 2007; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).

It should be noted that a person can be literate at the cognitive decoding level but functionally illiterate.

2.3.1.3. Socio-cultural model of reading literacy: New Literacy Studies and situated reading.

Many scholars reacted against the limitations of the autonomous approach to literacy and argued that literacy had to be situated in a context, a movement commonly
referred to as New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 1999; Gee, 1999; Street, 1984).

These socio-cultural advocates embrace a constructivist view; the meaning of a text is indeterminate, it is shaped by the active reader, by the reader’s purpose for reading and by where the reader is situated in a historical, social, political, economical and cultural context (B. Green, et al., 1997; Sulkunen, 2007). This all-encompassing context shapes literacies, and reading is understood as a dynamic social activity, which in turn generates social and political consequences (Maddox, 2007; Ntiri, 2009).

Literacy as social activity can be analysed and described in terms of literacy events and literacy practices. A literacy event is any activity that involves the written word, e.g. reading a book. Literacy practice entails how reading and writing is used and applied in a particular situation (Barton, 2007). A parent may be perusing the “My School” website and notices that the performance in reading at the child’s school is below average. This is a literacy event. The parent decides to hold the principal accountable – how the parent goes about this, who is contacted and how, and what actions are taken are literacy practices. A literacy event can be observed while literacy practices cannot, as they involve values and beliefs. Literacy practices are equally individual and shared processes (and social / interactive), thus connecting people in action. The socio-cultural approach to literacy depicts a dynamic interaction between society and literacy, each mutually shaping the other; literacy practices can empower people, by giving them agency they previously did not have (Ntiri, 2009; Sulkunen, 2007).

Barton (2007) gives a well-rounded précis of socio-cultural literacy theory when he coins the term “ecology of literacy” and defines this approach as:

…one which examines the social and mental embeddedness of human activities in a way that allows change. Instead of studying the separate skills which underlie reading and writing, it involves a shift to studying literacy, a set of social practices associated with particular symbol systems and their related technologies. To be literate is to be active, it is to be confident within these practices.
2.3.1.4. Reading as a transformative concept.

A particular perspective of the socio-cultural – new literacy paradigm emanates from Paulo Freire and his theory of transformative and critical literacy; literacy as the tool to become aware of and understand the surrounding society in order to act on it and transform it. Freire likens traditional education to a banking system; the teacher is the all knowing expert who “deposits” wisdom into the empty vessels (accounts) of the students; knowledge that is detached from their reality and without meaning to them. Instead, Freire believes education should be problem posing and reflection based, building on knowledge and experience students already have, a pedagogy created not for, but with the participants in a dialogue. Pedagogy is never neutral, it either sustains domination or liberation, literacy inevitably involves change. Freedom is never given but won. This is why literacy education is as much about reading the world as reading the word; it should give learners tools to question and challenge the society, and lead to a process that changes how people think and relate to each other. This theory, “literacy as freedom”, has greatly influenced educators throughout the world and has had a particular impact in the developing countries (Barton, 2007; Freire, 1996; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).

2.3.1.5. Multiple literacies.

In the present day, many argue there must be a paradigm shift in the perspective on literacy. Students, not only in developed countries, are surrounded by and familiar with the social practices of multiple literacies, e.g. new technologies such as computers and iPods, but also old ones like film and music, and through combinations creating rich communication through blogging, text messaging, podcasting, emailing etc. This multifaceted world is not represented in the classroom, partly due to a more limited view of what sort of literacy (“skills”, printed matter) should be taught in schools, partly because teachers are not yet trained to engage with multiple literacies (Cervetti, Damico, & Pearson, 2006; Tierney, Bond, & Bresler, 2006).
2.3.2. Definitions of reading literacy in international, comparative studies.

Reference is only made to definitions of reading literacy in this paragraph; other aspects, such as format, implementation and impact of international comparative surveys are discussed in Chapter 3.

More than 20 cross-national studies have been undertaken by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) from 1964 and onwards (Stromquist, 2005). The first major one was conducted in 1990-91. Reading literacy was there defined as the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society, or valued by the individual (Sulkunen, 2007).

Following on from this study was another IEA project. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Survey, PIRLS, is a trend study that started in 2001 to be conducted every 5 years, evaluating the reading literacy of 9-10 year old pupils, i.e. in most countries pupils in grade 4. Their definition includes the IEA one cited above, but is extended to evaluate young readers’ ability to construct meaning from a variety of texts and the purpose for reading is diversified to encompass “to learn”, “to participate in communities of readers” and “to enjoy”, in school and in everyday life (Mullis, Kennedy, Martin, & Sainsbury, 2006).

The third major study is the survey conducted by the OECD, titled the Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA. In this study the concept of reading literacy is further broadened to include not only the understanding and using, but also reflecting on and engaging with written texts, which takes it beyond the autonomous / functional position into the constructivist perspective of the reader being an active participant interacting with the text to create meaning. PISA acknowledges the individual’s need for literacy in order to achieve one’s personal goals and developing one's knowledge and potential, but also emphasizes the importance of literacy for the society as it enables active participation and promotes national growth and prosperity. Thus, reading literacy is required for private and public use, for work, school and lifelong learning. Literacy empowers citizens in modern societies with ever-increasing bureaucratic and legal institutions (Kirsch, et al., 2002; OECD, 2010f).

Comparing the above definitions of reading literacy, there is clearly a continuous broadening and deepening of the concept, progressing from a rather limited functional view held by the 1990 IEA study to the quite comprehensive
constructivist standpoint apparent in the PISA studies. Whether the PISA studies take an authentic socio-cultural stance, genuinely acknowledging reading literacy as situated in the students' various cultural contexts will be discussed in the following chapter, focussing on PISA.

The examples above serve to illustrate the intrinsic complexity of how reading literacy can be perceived. In developing countries, the definition often remains more limited. In Kenya for example, people who responded to a survey that they could read and write were considered literate and in Brazil anyone who had completed four years of schooling was considered functionally literate (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005). In developed countries there is an ongoing competition as to what model of reading literacy should take precedence. Drawing on the PISA definition cited above, it could be expected that a more complex theory would prevail, yet in the public debate the autonomous model is often supported (Barton, 2007). Ironically, the PISA rankings attract strong attention followed by calls for action if results are not meeting expectations with actions such as “going back to basics”. However, solely consolidating basic skills will not lead to PISA success, as high achievement in this survey stems from more sophisticated cognitive abilities.

2.3.3. The importance and consequences of reading literacy.

Reading literacy is commonly considered of utmost importance in today’s knowledge society, constituting the basis for individuals’ opportunities to prosper in professional and personal ways, as well as being a key factor in the economic development of whole nations. Literacy is recognised as a human right by the United Nations (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005) and it is a goal and a tool that has been seen to impact on factors such as income, employment, health, infant mortality, crime rates, levels of democracy and free speech (Suryadarma, 2008b). Additionally, literacy is reported to underpin democracy, social harmony and stability as well as to promote personal empowerment, self-esteem, creativity and enlightenment (Kalman, 2008; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005). Reading literacy underpins achievement in many other disciplines and is therefore a key factor in educational attainment and life success in “knowledge economy” countries. It is a key element in individuals' private and public life, in education and work, in lifelong learning and life fulfilment and for active and
informed citizenship in modern information societies (Alloway, Freebody, Gilbert, & Muspratt, 2002; Linnakylä, Välijärvi, & Arffman, 2007; OECD, 2001b; Suryadarma, 2008a).

Typically, assertions of literacy as context free and inherently transformative are associated with the autonomous model, where reading literacy is seen as one dependant, measurable variable among others, and cognitive literacy is seen as having cognitive consequences (Kalman, 2008). Adherents to the New Literacy Studies paradigm hold the opinion that reading literacy will not change the status quo. Just as reading literacy and literacy practices are situated, the consequences are too. Studies from developing countries report that becoming literate can be seen as a threat by other parts of the community and involves changes in social power relations. While literacy has given people agency and self-respect, it has not necessarily equalled more money (Kalman, 2008; Maddox, 2007). When the Swedes achieved universal literacy in the 1600s, it may have affected people’s social standing – or rather it did for those who failed – but it did not lead to economic, or other, progress; Sweden remained a very poor country for centuries to come. In no way does this challenge of the autonomous model mean that the significance of reading literacy is contested. What it does purport is an ecological viewpoint in relation to literacy as social practices, situated in a diverse range of cultural social contexts (Barton, 2007; Gee, 1988; Kalman, 2008; Maddox, 2007).

In conclusion of this chapter, it is suggested that reading literacy, and its importance and consequences, is a discourse that is far more complex than usually appreciated. The concept is so complex that the task of globally and fairly comparing and assessing students from totally divergent societies and cultures seems daunting, particularly in the light of PISA adopting a very broad, socio-cultural definition of what reading literacy encompasses. This subject matter will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: What PISA is, what PISA measures and the “PISA impact”.

3.0. Introduction.

In the previous chapter, the general context of this research project was described and it was stated that education today is affected by globalisation through decentralisation and privatisation, choice and accountability. Efficiency has come to characterise the new epistemology and its focus on performance and achievement outcomes has led to the emergence of a virtual testing culture, both on a national and an international scale. Of major importance is the question of who constructs these tests and sets the standards (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Dall, 2010b; Moutsios, 2010; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

Since the initiation of PISA, in 2000, the OECD has become a major authority on the quality of educational systems and proffered policy recommendations are typically implemented without reservations (Grek, 2009). As the PISA surveys formed the starting point for the present research project, PISA is the focus of this chapter. Background, aims and framework are described by the OECD and explored to provide a backdrop to the critical discussion about PISA’s impact on PISA impact on educational policies and systems and its possible global implications.

3.1. Background.

The OECD was founded in 1961 and from the start education was on the agenda. Initially, descriptive statistics were gathered on member countries’ education systems, but over time more comprehensive data were required, indicators that could be used in policy debates, which led to the creation of publications such as “Education at a Glance” and the focus switched from educational input to learning outcomes. At first, the OECD relied on data already available from international comparative studies such as the IEA surveys (rf. above 2.2.3 and 2.3.2.) but increasingly, data were gathered independently, and as a result PISA was founded in 1997. The first PISA survey was undertaken in 2000 and all but one of the OECD member states participated (Turkey, being the exception, has participated in subsequent studies) as well as four partner countries. In 2001 another 11 countries undertook the survey, using the identical test material. The number of nations taking
part in PISA is steadily growing so that in the latest cycle in 2009, some 70 countries were involved, making up 90% of the world economy (McGaw, 2008; OECD, 2010f).

3.2. The aims.

PISA can be understood as a collaborative, ambitious and innovative project conducted by countries consenting to compare the outcomes of their educational systems in an internationally accepted common framework. The surveys are conducted three-yearly, with the focus alternating between reading literacy, mathematical and scientific literacy (in 2003 problem solving was also included), which means that performance can be measured at a certain point in time and also compared over time. OECD emphasizes that great attention is paid to the construction of tests, and claims that they are, to the highest possible degree, culturally and socially unbiased. For example, all test items are unanimously agreed upon, and then tested in field trials prior to being included in the final PISA version and translation processes are rigorous (Kirsch, et al., 2002; McGaw, 2008).

PISA is based on the premise that a nation’s economic growth is largely dependent on the quality of their human capital, thus an expression of the globalisation of education. The aim of PISA is to define educational goals that, from the viewpoint of the OECD, are relevant for adults in the knowledge society, and to set standards and to evaluate how well education systems perform in comparison to each other with a view to isolate factors that contribute to, or hinder, high achievement outcomes, gender and social equity (OECD, 2001b, 2003a).

The innovative factor in the PISA surveys is that students are assessed not against their national school curricula, as, for example, in the aforementioned IEA surveys, but against “how well young adults near the end of compulsory schooling are prepared to meet the challenges of today’s knowledge societies and “the challenges of adult life in the real world” (Kirsch, et al., 2002, p. 3; OECD, 2001b, p. 14).

3.3. The PISA framework.

As discussed in chapter 2, reading literacy is a dynamic and situated concept and PISA has adopted a broad, socio-cultural definition. In 2000 it defined reading literacy as: “… understanding, using and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential and to participate in
society” (Kirsch, et al., 2002, p. 25). PISA 2009 (OECD, 2010f, p. 37) defines reading literacy as: “understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate in society”. This definition reflects the stance that the reader is active and interacting with text in various ways for different purposes, thus it requires a framework that is equally wide-ranging.

The design of the PISA 2000 reading literacy survey has been emulated in subsequent surveys, in order to allow comparisons between cycles and over time. As described by the OECD, the framework for the 2000 PISA survey in reading literacy was developed by a group of international reading experts, the Reading Functional Expert Group, who also had great influence on text selection, question design and marking guidelines. The suggested framework was circulated among the member states for comments. All participating countries were then invited to submit texts fitting the accepted framework. The detailed test development was contracted to an international consortium of research and development agencies in Australia and the Netherlands, who from the submitted material drafted 800 test questions, which were piloted in Australia and the Netherlands. After several rounds of consulting with participating countries, 372 items were selected for field trials and finally 141 were chosen for the main study. Not all students answered all questions. Rather, different students were given different versions of the test booklet with different combinations of test items. In addition to this, one questionnaire for students and one questionnaire for principals was constructed (McGaw, 2008; OECD, 2002). The framework for PISA 2009 was developed in a similar way with several rounds of consultations with participating countries, pilot studies and field trials in order to ensure that questions were selected that fitted the framework and covered a range of difficulty, and that the tasks had been judged, by all countries representatives, to be culturally appropriate and authentic, and to hold a reasonable level of interest and familiarity for 15 year old students (OECD, 2010f). Again, there was an additional survey for students and principals.

The 2009 reading literacy assessment was based around the main characteristics of text format, aspects and situations (OECD, 2010f). The key classifications differentiating text formats were continuous texts, exemplified by books and magazines; non-continuous texts such as charts and maps; mixed texts,
with both continuous and non-continuous elements, and multiple texts, i.e. texts that can be read independently but are related in topic (OECD, 2010f).

Three aspects of proficiency in reading literacy were evaluated; the ability to access and retrieve information (about 25% of questions related to this aspect); to integrate and interpret texts (about 50% of questions), and to reflect on and evaluate the content of a text (OECD, 2010f).

Four situations, or purposes, for reading were identified: educational, occupational, personal and public. Examples of texts used in an educational context could be textbooks used at school; texts relating to an occupational context and appropriate to 15 year old students could be job application forms; texts connected with the personal context could be reading for leisure and texts associated with the public context could be information about public events and time tables (Kirsch, et al., 2002; OECD, 2010f; Sulkunen, 2007).

Thus, the test items consisting of a mix of continuous and non-continuous, mixed and multiple texts, used in personal, public, occupational and educational contexts; and which fairly assessed students’ proficiency to access and retrieve, integrate and interpret, and reflect and evaluate information, were deemed to be wide-ranging enough to comprise an adequate representation of the PISA definition of reading literacy (OECD, 2010f).

![Figure 1. The PISA assessment framework. Source Anna Dall.](image)

A representative sample of students, aged between 15 years and 3 months and 16 years and 2 months, completed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire, with the
testing time lasting two hours. Consistent with previous surveys, different groups of students responded to various versions of the test instrument. Students also completed a background questionnaire, lasting 30 minutes, relating to, among other things, reading habits and attitudes (OECD, 2010f).

The response format was a mix of simple multiple choice questions, complex multiple choice, closed-constructed response tasks and open-constructed response tasks. This last category was the one requiring the most judgement on the part of the marker (OECD, 2010f).

The test items were ranged on a continuum of increasing difficulty. Results were reported on one composite scale with a mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100, and also on subscales specifically representing student outcomes on the four formats (continuous and non-continuous, mixed and multiple texts) and the three aspects (access and retrieve; integrate and interpret; reflect and evaluate). All scales were initially divided into five levels. In 2009, seven proficiency levels were introduced; level 6 representing highly sophisticated readers and level 1a and 1b extremely poor readers. To be able to actively, effectively and productively take part in life, students are considered to need reading literacy skills at level 2 or higher. To give a perspective, Finnish students are overrepresented at level 6 in comparison with the OECD average, while the majority of Indonesian students perform at level 1a (OECD, 2010f).

3.4. Discussion.

3.4.1. PISA positives

Since the inception of the PISA surveys in 2000, the OECD has become a major authority on what constitutes quality education systems. PISA is having an impact worldwide, and an increasing number of nations are taking part, not only OECD member states and other developed countries but also developing countries like Indonesia. Thus, in the last cycle, 65 states were involved in the 2009 survey and another nine countries took part in a second cycle in 2010, together representing 90 percent of the global economy (OECD, 2010f).

The PISA project was initiated by the OECD member countries to obtain data concerning the effectiveness of education systems; to provide stakeholders (students, parents, the public and policy-makers) with evidence of educational
success factors, and to provide an international perspective against which to evaluate national results. Thus, it is argued, the most valuable information is not found in the PISA league tables, even if they attract most of the general public interest, but in what further in-depth analyses of data can reveal to support changes in education policies. PISA results have shown, for example, that in some countries quality education and equity exist concurrently; there is very little difference between schools, socio-economic background factors can be moderated and gender gaps can be minimised – all features of successful education systems to be emulated by others. Another important finding is the negative correlation between countries’ GDP, spending on education and student performance. The cyclic nature of PISA will also offer the opportunity to monitor results over time and hence observe effects of implemented changes in education policies. One such example is Poland where a structural reform towards a more integrated, less selective, more decentralised system led to a substantial decrease in performance variance between schools, from 50.7% in PISA 2000 to 14.9% in PISA 2003, and concomitantly performance outcomes improved, for low-performing as well as for high achieving students. As all the databases are freely available, PISA provides ample opportunities for independent further research (Kirsch, et al., 2002; McGaw, 2008; OECD, 2007b, 2010f; Schleicher, 2009).

Notwithstanding the many positive aspects of the PISA surveys, there are also certain aspects that can be debated.

3.4.2. Effective education systems.

What characterises an effective education system? While nothing is effective or efficient in its own right, it has to be related to something, so globalised education efficiency has come to be evaluated by performance related to cost. Performance in turn is assessed by testing students against various sets of measurable goals. Thus, quantification now defines progress in education. If a variable cannot be measured, no progress can be evidenced. Education takes on an instrumental dimension defined by cognitive abilities that can be conveniently evaluated (Moutsios, 2010; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

PISA can be seen as an expression of this trend. In PISA terms, the qualities that prepare students to meet the challenges of today’s knowledge societies and the challenges of adult life in the real world are clearly competency in reading,
mathematical and scientific literacy and thus effective education systems are defined by how well students are performing in the PISA surveys. Few would argue that high levels of proficiency in these key subjects are essential for the growth of individuals as well as nations. Some would certainly argue against the proposition that they merit the sole focus to the detriment of less quantifiable knowledge and skills.

Educational goals are typically identified in national steering documents, and in most countries these documents strongly emphasise non-measurable goals related to the students’ personal, physical, mental and social development, naming academic performance as only one of a range of goals. This may well be regarded as politically correct rhetoric if classroom practices are predominantly concerned with academic performance, to better meet testing requirements. If successful schooling does equal fostering independent, socially skilled individuals who can actively participate in, and contribute to a democratic society, how can it be that studies such as the international civics survey “Citizenship and education in twenty-eight countries: civic knowledge and engagement at age fourteen” conducted by the IEA goes unnoticed and is virtually generally unknown (Dall, 2010b).

3.4.3. Educational needs in the knowledge society – the paradox.

The general acceptance of the human capital theory has led to a changed view of education and what it means to be educated and to learn. While previously having been a positive in itself, today educational value is measured by what competencies can benefit the individual and the society in the global competition. A different kind of person is said to be sought: a person skilled in communication (mother tongue), maths, science, problem solving; a person who is also information literate, globally minded, multilingual, inter culturally versed, mobile, adaptable, level-headed in crisis, flexible, creative with proper work attitudes and interpersonal skills, and a lifelong learner (Ball, 1998; Cheung & Chan, 2009; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Spring, 2008). Despite this, PISA measures exclusively the initial criteria: performance in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy (in 2003 problem solving was also included). The subsequent qualities mentioned, such as ‘adaptable’, ‘globally minded’ etc, are clearly concepts that are more difficult to measure on a standardised test and thus fall outside the PISA domain. PISA has in the process narrowed the scope of skills that are seen to be needed in the knowledge economy.
to mainly cognitive proficiencies of a pragmatic nature, measured against indicators set by the OECD (Grek, 2009). This means that teachers are teaching to a national curriculum, but their students are assessed, and compared to others, by OECD identified criteria. As the PISA surveys are taken very seriously by participating countries, disappointing results typically lead to a call for action and OECD policy recommendations implemented on the national level (Grek, 2009).

Another issue is whether PISA as an agent of globalisation, is pushing education policies to converge and schooling to become standardised and homogenised. There seems to be a general consensus that education policies are emanating increasingly from the same global education paradigm, but also that they are applied in different ways in different contexts. While certain defining variables are shared, countries respond in their unique ways based on historical, political, social, economic and cultural context and mediate implementation of the extraneous pressures for reform (Ball, 1998; Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Cheung & Chan, 2009; A. Green, 1999). On the other hand, Moutsios (2010) argues that globalisation processes are removing decision-making and deliberating democratic powers from the people to extra-national bodies, and despite local adaptation, education systems are being synchronised.

PISA is based on the premise that there is a positive correlation between education standards in core subjects (reading, mathematical and scientific literacy) and economic growth. However, this argument is largely contradicted by the very same PISA results. While (at the time of writing) the US is still ranking at the top level of global economic competitiveness, the PISA results have been rather poor, particularly in relation to money spent, while other countries such as Korea and Canada are exhibiting the converse profile with top PISA outcomes not matched by their economic performance. Sahlberg states that there “is no correlation between the quality of education and economic competitiveness” (OECD, 2004; Sahlberg, 2006a). This suggests that the PISA indicators of education qualities required for success in the global knowledge society may be too limited. There is one exception – since the PISA inception in 2000, Finland has been an overall PISA top achiever continuously and is concurrently a top-ranked competitive economy (Sahlberg, 2006a).

To meet demands for more abstract knowledge and skills, a paradigm shift in education may be required. The linear and static view developed in the industrial era
may need to be replaced by meta-cognitive and fluid processes that foster ingenuity and entrepreneurship. The knowledge economy values leadership and team-work, therefore academic, cognitive intelligence has to share the focus with emotional intelligence of intra-personal and inter-personal skills. A learning society has been called for where life-long learning is part of life, thus students need to develop a love of learning. This can only occur in a classroom where teachers and students feel safe, supported, encouraged to take risks and prepared to make mistakes, where attention is paid to the individual’s inherent talents (Sahlberg, 2006a; Sahlberg & Oldroyd, 2010).

In Bill Gates’ words: “training the workforce of tomorrow with the high schools of today is like trying to teach kids about today’s computers on a 50-year-old mainframe. It is the wrong tool for the times” (cited in Sahlberg, 2006a, p. 261).

Within the OECD’s Centre for Educational Research and Innovation a project titled Innovative Learning Environments, based on the same sentiments, aims to find strategies to transform schools in order to encourage deep learning and the innovative skills needed in the 21st century (OECD, 2011).

However, such higher order processes are not easily measured by standardised tests and thus do not fit into the current education efficiency model of transparent accountability and the PISA surveys, which highlights a paradox: A range of higher order processes are seen to be needed for individuals and nations to prosper in the future global knowledge society. Concurrently, PISA is evaluating an increasing number of education systems. Countries that obtain the highest achievement outcomes in the PISA surveys are judged to have world class education systems with students ready to meet real life challenges in the future global world. Thus, PISA governance implicitly indicates that curricula need to be focused (narrowed) and that increased standardised testing is necessary to monitor performance outcomes.
3.4.4. The testing culture.

Diagnostic and formative tests are commonly considered to be useful tools for the teacher to evaluate students’ progress, to give students and parents feedback and to develop teaching and learning strategies for individual students as well as a particular school class. What is discussed in the following however, is the increasing use of national and international, high stakes standardised tests.

Advocates of the testing culture claim that standardised testing is necessary for transparent accountability. This in turn is believed to help control what is happening in the classroom, “teacher proofing” the curriculum and lead to higher quality and equity (Bita, 2009; Luke & Woods, 2008). However, standardised testing has not been shown to improve performance, rather the opposite (Amrein & Berliner, 2003). Testing has been linked to an increase in student dropout rates, (even for students with higher academic achievement outcomes), student and teacher cheating and teachers leaving the profession. It creates a fear of failing, in teachers and students, effectively decreases motivation and breeds a dislike of schools and learning. Ironically, it effectively counteracts the goal of lifelong learning and a learning society, promoted by PISA, and others, as a cornerstone for the knowledge society (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Mitchell, Gerwin, Schuberth, Mancini, & Hofrichter, 2009; Peters & Oliver, 2009; Sahlberg, 2007). It should also be considered that test results show what students have gained at a superficial level, but not necessarily learned and understood at an abstract level. In short, improved test scores do not automatically result in better learning. Finally, tests do not automatically show the efficacy of the educational system – performance can be a result of activities outside of school such as private tutoring (Couture & Cheng, 2000; Sahlberg, 2007).

The pursuit of a more competitive education system and improved PISA rankings, as well as increased test scores on national standardised tests, motivate many countries to narrow and standardise curricula. Consequently, what is not tested is not valued and therefore not taught in the classroom (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Couture & Cheng, 2000). This is a process that some claim is also standardising the students as not enough attention can be paid to individual talents and potential, with the effect that many students feel they do not fit and leave school as soon as they can. Standardisation, it is claimed, destroys creativity and system innovation (Peters & Oliver, 2009; Sahlberg & Oldroyd, 2010).
The limited curriculum and a classroom culture with a test focus, is also changing, and diminishing, the role of teachers, from being professionals to becoming learning production managers, thus ‘teaching to the test’ with the aim of improving student ranking and excluding more challenging or worthwhile content and limiting the number of pedagogical strategies such as multi-modal and critical teaching. Consequently, there are highly competent teachers who experience a growing frustration over the imposed limitations to their teaching (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Couture & Cheng, 2000). Inversely, this “demotion” may have impacted on the status of teaching as a profession and therefore contributed to the reduced number of applications to teacher training programs and fewer applications from high performing students, that has occurred in many countries, and this in turn may seem to warrant “teacher proofing” and standardisation. However, systems that exhibit high quality and high equity are systems where teachers are expected, and allowed, to be pedagogical professionals, working in an informed and autonomous way, thus using diagnostic and formative tests rather than high stakes standardised tests (Luke & Woods, 2008). These matters will be discussed in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

3.4.5. PISA and global literacy.

Great importance is attributed to reading literacy all over the world; however, it is a concept that can be defined in various ways, and PISA has chosen a broad, socio-cultural viewpoint, where reading literacy is seen as “understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate in society” (OECD, 2010f, p. 37). This definition goes beyond the notion that reading literacy means “decoding written material and literal comprehension” (OECD, 2001b, p. 21). This constructivist position sees the reader as an active participant interacting with the text to create meaning, shaped by a purpose for reading and situated in a historical, social, political, economical and cultural context (B. Green, et al., 1997; Sulkunen, 2007). The socio-cultural approach to literacy depicts a dynamic inter-action between society and literacy, each mutually shaping the other; literacy practices can empower people by giving them agency they previously did not have (Ntiri, 2009; Sulkunen, 2007).

PISA has gone to great lengths to ensure that test questions are valid and relevant across countries, languages and cultures. Translation processes are
rigorous and all tasks included in the final test have been approved by participating countries. Markers of the tests are trained, and they are allowed to accept different interpretations of a text, thus acknowledging the concept that background factors may influence how students make meaning (Sulkunen, 2007). In PISA 2000, all participating countries were invited to rank the test questions on a scale of 1 to 5, as to how appropriate they were considered to be in relation to their country’s curriculum, culture, student interest, expected marking problems and so forth. Eighteen countries responded and these responses were later compared to the actual test results to establish whether the students performed better on the country’s preferred questions than on all items. This hypothesis was not confirmed. For only two countries was there a significant change in ranking. Norway was ranked in 13th place on all items and 10th on their preferred questions. Korea ranked number 3 on all items and number 9 on its preferred questions, which means that the Korean students achieved lower outcomes on their preferred questions (McGaw, 2008; OECD, 2001b).

Problematically, there is no exploration of the meaning of the concept ‘culture’ in PISA, and this makes a scholarly discussion difficult (Nardi, 2008). Following Hofstede (2005) culture is a mental program for patterns of thinking, feeling and acting which is learned and specific to a particular group of people, expressed as symbols, heroes, rituals and values. Education is a cultural process and as such is embedded in, and a reflection of, a particular culture as culture permeates all social activity. No educational system can, nor aspires to be culturally neutral – quite the opposite as it is through education that cultural values and beliefs are transmitted in the socialisation process of children (Hoffman, 1999; Masemann, 1976; Purves, 1987; Reinikainen, 2007; Torney-Purta & Schwille, 1986). Planel (1997) argues that school effectiveness cannot and should not be discussed without taking the cultural context into consideration. She suggests that student achievement is greatly informed by national cultural values and that a framework of cultural understanding is essential to increased validity of cross-national educational research.

Conversely, PISA claims to provide evaluations of competencies significant to adult life in the real world, that are relevant and valid across countries and cultures, thus inferring that there is a reduced, “de-cultured” neutral, global literacy concept (OECD, 2001b, p. 27). Consequently, a 15 year old boy in rural Kalimantan, who can only attend school sporadically because he is needed for work at home, where he
has no access to written material, is considered to have the same reading literacy needs as the 15 year old attending an elite private school in Australia, or New York City, with an extensive selection of books at home and modern technology at his fingertips. Similarly, how can a test example such as discussing graffiti (OECD, 2001b, p. 38) make sense to a 15 year old girl in Singapore where graffiti is seen as vandalism and punishable by up to three years in jail or eight strokes of the cane (Kolesnikov-Jessop, 2010)? It is emphasised that PISA aims to evaluate education systems, not individuals, but at the same time it claims that test items should be generally authentic to students (Sulkunen, 2007). On the other hand, the PISA surveys illustrate what standards the OECD deem to be required in developed economies. Indonesia aspires to become part of the global economy. Thus, taking part in PISA surveys will reveal what skills students need to attain, at least in reading literacy, mathematics and science, to rise to the challenge. This will be further explored in chapter 5.

3.4.6. In conclusion.

The OECD has become an authority on evaluation of education systems since the inception of the comprehensive and rigorous PISA surveys in the year 2000. Results from subsequent surveys have been eagerly awaited, and recommendations generally implemented.

The aim of PISA is to define educational goals that are relevant in the knowledge society, to set standards and to evaluate how well education systems perform in comparison to each other with a view to identify factors that contribute to, or hinder, high achievement outcomes, gender and social equity. A massive amount of data is gathered and is freely available to researchers. Numerous analyses are published, besides the main reports detailing the results of each PISA cycle. It is unfortunate that all this material is overshadowed by the general focus on overall country rankings.

PISA tests skills in reading literacy, mathematics and science. Because of the impact of PISA, effective education systems have become synonymous with high PISA scores, thus marginalising other educational goals relating to students’ personal, physical, emotional and spiritual development that are not as easily quantifiable.
Many educational theorists warn against a single-minded focus on literacies, no matter how valuable they may be. This points to a paradox; PISA sets the standards for world class effective education systems and at the same time implicitly excludes a number of intra-personal and inter-personal, difficult-to-measure skills thought to be of utmost importance in the future global society.

PISA recommends that further qualitative studies be undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of the surveys’ quantitative data. However, the practical impact of the PISA surveys seems to be an intensified testing culture.

PISA claims to have cross-cultural validity that cannot be logically supported. Even though, at the present time, the literacy needs of 15 year old students seem to be very different between cultures, and between highly developed and developing countries, PISA sets the standard for what is required in regards to reading literacy skills in a knowledge economy. As developing countries such as Indonesia aspire to be part of the globalised economy, it may well be that a global literacy notion will be accepted, one measured by a one-size-fits-all yardstick, despite an apparent misfit with other cultural contexts.
Chapter 4: Methodology and methods.

4.0. Introduction.

In this chapter the Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theoretical framework is discussed in detail and situated within an epistemological context. The choice of methodology is rationalised, the choice of methods is justified and the innovative survey concept, Symbolic Dialogue, is described. Hereafter the data gathering process is explained and finally, difficulties encountered are described.

4.1. Theoretical framework.

4.1.1. Preamble.

The present study deals with phenomena on a wide scale and at many levels and requires an equally flexible and wide-ranging theoretical framework. Bronfenbrenner's (bio)ecological systems theory provides this. The intricate inter-relationship between all the factors of education at the various layers that impact on a student's development is easily and clearly illustrated in his models.

4.1.2. A paradigm shift - from a positivist to an interpretevist research paradigm.

The positivist paradigm, based on the belief that there is an inherent, objective, accurate and cross-cultural truth that can be discovered, has underpinned Western science through the ages. Physics in particular was regarded as the quintessence of science. Through the lens of replicable testing, science could determine the nature of reality, as opposed to reality as it is experienced, perceived or represented by humans. The lived world provides inexact and subjective perceptions that cannot necessarily be proven and therefore does not form the basis for scientific discourses. The properties of genuine knowledge on the other hand, are existing in reality and can be measured and counted, thus the positivist world is a quantifiable world. This perspective was embraced not only by natural and physical sciences but also disciplines such as philosophy and its subdiscipline psychology, which was elevated to a separate discipline in the late 1800s. Behavioural psychology in particular became central to educational research, leading to an adoption and implementation in educational research of positivist, quantitative, statistical testing methods in order to emulate the revered natural sciences. Thus, when Bronfenbrenner published his
classic book “The ecology of human development” in 1979, influenced by phenomenology, his theories were both novel and controversial (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Crotty, 1998; Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 2006; LeCompte, 1990; Popkewitz, 1990).

He described contemporary developmental psychology research as “the study of the strange behavior (sic) in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible period of time” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 19, 2005b, p. 95). He argued that even though the paradigm of physical sciences is highly regarded by researchers within the psychological field, it is neither appropriate nor valid, as physical and psychological studies cannot be compared. It is, for example, totally appropriate to research falling objects in a totally controlled situation to discover the laws of gravity. In contrast, human beings cannot exist in a social vacuum; they interact with their world and respond in different ways depending on the context. To take a practical example relevant to this study, the positivist theoretical perspective posits that instruments such as achievement tests are context neutral and hold environmental generalisability, thus they are valid irrespective of cultural, societal, social, economical and other surrounding circumstances. From Bronfenbrenner’s perspective all expressions of human development must be related to the context in which they occur, and “Any assessment of the cognitive competence of an individual or group must be interpreted in the light of the culture or subculture in which the person was brought up” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005c, p. 128). Bronfenbrenner asserts that human developmental studies should be carried out not in laboratories as was the norm, but in an ecologically valid natural context and findings be analysed against the backdrop of all surrounding ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner proposed that the processes that make human beings human vary by place and time. Development is affected by the person’s inherent qualities and ongoing, everyday interaction with the direct environment; the impact of more peripheral societal influences; significant experiences occurring over a lifetime as well as the historical era the person is living in - development is intertwined with the particular context where it is taking place (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993). Thus, Bronfenbrenner introduced a novel and groundbreaking holistic view of human ontogeny. While previously professionals such as psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, pedagogues, physicians, economists and political scientists had been working separately, studying one separate aspect influencing human development, all
these perspectives could now be integrated in the unified theory of human ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 2005f).

It should also be mentioned that Bronfenbrenner not only developed original theories that he operationalised into research models, but he also took part in practical and political implementation. Working in various societies he had become aware of the powerful impact of public policies, in the way they hinder or help human development. He therefore took a very active part in trying to change, improve and put into practice policies that would influence for the better the lives of children and families, particularly in the United States. He was, for example, a key person in the Head Start project, initiated by President Johnson in 1965 as part of the “War on Poverty” campaign, which is still running. It is an initiative to give children from poor communities a fairer chance by preparing them, and their families, for the start of schooling by providing educational, health, nutritional, social and other services. The involvement of the whole family has been seen as critical. Being active himself in policy development led Bronfenbrenner to the conclusion that such participation by researchers is essential for the advancement of human development studies (Bronfenbrenner, 1994b). To make human beings not only human but better functioning, more fulfilled and productive humans there must be a functional integration and interplay between science and public policy. In this he was inspired by the Soviet psychologist Leontiev, who he has quoted saying:

> It seems to me that American researchers are constantly seeking to explain how the child came to be what he is; we in the U.S.S.R. are striving to discover not how the child came to be what he is but how he can become what he not yet is (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 40).

Thus, one of the very early objectives for the use of the (bio)ecological model was to move research away from “verification” models that simply replicated and verified previous findings, towards a discovery mode, and “transforming experiments” with a view to provide scientific research data as a platform for new, improved, effective social policies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994b).

Bronfenbrenner was influenced by Kurt Lewin, who emphasised the connection and interrelationship between the person and his environment, and the importance of identifying contextual forces that either promote or hinder development.
of any kind. In Lewin’s terms, environment does not only refer to the physical external space but as much to the person’s mind space, his phenomenological field, his inner world of imagination and “unreality”, as people are motivated to act by what they perceive and accept as reality (Bronfenbrenner, 2005e; Lewin, 1943, 1951; Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939).

Vygotsky is another scholar who has inspired Bronfenbrenner. Vygotsky moved away from the belief that learning is a generic process of the individual, which was endorsed by Piaget among others, and claimed that learning is a sociocultural and sociohistorical process, embedded in culture and mediated by the current social environment. He was seen as the founder of social constructivism. Two of Vygotsky’s premises were of particular interest to Bronfenbrenner. One was his theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which in brief depicts the gap between what a learner already can accomplish by himself and what could potentially be achieved with assistance from one or several more knowledgeable or proficient others. The ZPD is the zone of learning. The learner gradually internalises new and progressively more complex concepts and skills through social interaction with parents, teachers, peers, or others. When tasks can be independently mastered, the challenge may be raised. However, this potential development is defined and limited by what resources and opportunities are available to the individual in a certain culture at a certain time, what Vygotsky calls the sociohistorical evolution of the mind (Bronfenbrenner, 2005c; Grandin, 2006; Krause, Bochner, & Duchesne, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978).

4.1.3. The development of Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical framework.

In 1979, Bronfenbrenner published his seminal book “The Ecology of Human Development”, in which he described his ecological systems theory and presented his first model of human ecological development:
As illustrated in figure 2 above, the ecological environment is perceived by Bronfenbrenner as a system of interconnected structures, nested within each other like a Russian doll. The innermost layer is called the microsystem and refers to the individual’s immediate environment and face-to-face relations, such as with a parent at home or a teacher in the classroom. The second system is the mesosystem which comprises interrelations between two or more microsystems, for example, between home, school and peer group. The third system, the exosystem, refers to the influence on the student by activities in settings where the student does not actively, personally take part and over which the student has no control, e.g. decisions by the school board or at a parent’s work place. The most distal system is the macrosystem, involving overarching structures of cultural beliefs and customs, and macro institutions such as the government (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner continued to develop his model till his death in 2005. The first model, the 1979 ecological model, focused on the context of human development and even though the dynamic interrelationship between the person and the context was always included, the model did not elaborate on the individual’s inherent qualities (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). Thus, his original 1979 definition of the ecology of human development read:
The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21).

Bronfenbrenner gradually expanded on the ecological model by firstly including the bio/psycho/social properties of the individual human being and then gradually shifting the focus from the environment to the interactive proximal processes, everyday, repeated actions and interactions between the person and the environment. This expanded model is illustrated in figure 3 below. These interactions explain, for example, why a process may work, or not, in a particular situation depending on the characteristics of the particular person or the particular context (Bronfenbrenner, 1995b, 2005c). The defining properties of this bioecological theory were formulated as follows:

Proposition 1:

Especially in its early phases, but also throughout the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex, reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 797).

Examples of proximal processes are child–child play, reading, athletic activities and learning new skills.

Proposition 2:

The form, power, content and direction of the proximal processes effecting (sic) development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person, the environment – both immediate and more remote
– in which the processes are taking place, the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration and the social continuities and changes occurring over time through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 798).


The above two propositions illustrate Bronfenbrenner’s expanded approach to the study of the ecology of human development. In the 1979 model, the emphasis was exclusively on the context. In this model bioecological theory evolved, in which there is an added focus on the personal characteristics of the developing person as well as the characteristics of the people in the immediate environment, called the "significant others", (Bronfenbrenner, 1995b, p. 638) and on how these personal qualities may influence the proximal processes. Thus, human development is a dynamic process driven jointly by the person and the environment. The proximal processes, the “engines” that drive development, (Bronfenbrenner, 1995b, p. 638) are affected by the person’s inherent qualities and by the environmental context in which they take place. The time factor, which was hardly mentioned initially, is now seen as a fifth system, the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1995b; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Proposition 1 above posits that human development takes place through social interaction with significant others and engagement in progressively more demanding activities and tasks. The personal attributes that Bronfenbrenner believes most likely to affect the power and direction of these proximal processes of development are
called developmental instigative characteristics. He has identified four kinds. The first type is referred to as personal stimulus qualities, personal characteristics that invite or inhibit a reaction from the environment ("personality"). For example, in blunt terms, the well-behaved student would elicit a different response from the teacher than the more challenging student. The second, selective responsivity signifies the personal activity level and propensity to explore and engage with the surroundings - some students are extrovert, enjoying group work, others are more introvert and like to work by themselves. The third, structuring proclivities relate to goals and motivation, the inclination to undertake and persist with increasingly complex tasks - certain students cherish a challenge and are not afraid to make mistakes while others prefer to stay in the comfort zone. Finally, directive beliefs concern the individual’s sense of agency in relation to the environment. Some students are convinced that with proper effort they can achieve well, others believe they do not have the ability. It needs to be noted that personal characteristics do not determine the individual's development, there is always an interplay between the persona and a specific environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 2005c). The same applies to the impact of biological resources - genetically inherited qualities, such as musicality, or the inclination and ability to learn languages, represent latent potentials, that in an opportune environment may be actualised through proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Ceci, 2006).

Thus, the person at the centre of the model, who previously remained anonymous, is now being identified and embedded within the individual's particular set of nested systems, all transected by the axis of time. Accordingly, the ecological model has been transformed into the bioecological model, where development is seen as a joint function of the person and the environment. This theoretical framework has been operationalised in the Process – Person – Context – Time (PPCT) research model. It offers a wide variety of research designs. These should aim at presenting interactive rather than additive effects, not only contrasting data from several systems, but finding the processes that explain the results as well as variances due to personal or contextual factors (Bronfenbrenner, 2005d).
4.2. The contextual systems will now be discussed in more detail.

4.2.1. The microsystem

In the 1979 ecological model, the microsystem was defined as follows:

A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22).

Just as Bronfenbrenner thought he had initially not paid sufficient attention to the particular characteristics pertaining to the developing person, he believed he had equally neglected to stress the influence of the varying characteristics of the people in the surrounding microsystem, the significant others, so this addition was made in 1992:

A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical and material features and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief (Bronfenbrenner, 2005c, p. 148).

In the 1994 definition, the transition from the ecological model to the PPCT model is concluded and made clear by the explicit reference to proximal processes:

A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994a).

This definition is influenced both by Vygotsky’s ZPD as well as his theory of the sociohistorical evolution of the mind. Thus, the individuals’ potential for optimal development is limited by available human and other resources in, for example, the home or the classroom, which means that the microsystems are defined and limited by the macrosystem they are embedded within.
The microsystem is the locus of proximal processes of human development. Central to the microsystem definition is that the individual, with particular personal characteristics, is an active participant in relating to the immediate environment, including significant others with their particular personal characteristics. A keyword that was never changed by Bronfenbrenner is *experience*; it is just as important to the researcher to ask how the reality is experienced by the individual, as to ask how it can be objectively described. As the other participants in the microsystem also perceive their reality, maybe in a variety of ways, it is easy to appreciate reciprocal potential challenges that may influence the development process. These interactive effects may result in different individual outcomes, depending on personal characteristics, despite similar environmental background conditions and conversely, people with comparable personal make-ups may exhibit a variety of developmental outcomes due to their environmental exposure. To understand the course and consequences of development, the underlying, interacting processes need to be understood (Bronfenbrenner, 2005d).

The proximal processes are often referred to as the engines of development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005a). For them to have an effect, they need to occur regularly, over time; reading a bedtime story to your child every night will foster such processes, every now and then it will not. Bronfenbrenner was deeply concerned with the development of some aspects of the American society, causing, for example, increasingly hectic and unstable conditions, particularly in the family setting but also in the schools, peer groups and neighbourhoods. This was one of the reasons why he stressed the importance of research in discovery mode and active participation in the formulation and implementation of social policies, as described above. Proximal processes also need to be of gradually increasing complexity. They are not unidirectional, but involve reciprocity. Thus, when the interaction is taking place, not with a person, but with an object or symbol, the individual’s imagination or desire for exploration must be stimulated in response (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). It appears though that children initiating and engaging in conversation with adults benefit more than children who are just given pedagogic toys to play with (Tudge, Odero, Hogan, & Etz, 2003). Interestingly, the second strongest factor thought to underpin the Finnish students’ outstanding results in reading literacy in the PISA 2000 study, was the fact that they engaged in cultural communication, discussing political,
social and cultural issues with their families more often than others (Välijärvi, Linnakylä, Kupari, Reinikainen, & Arffman, 2002).

![Diagram of microsystems]

**Figure 4. The microsystem. Source: Luke Mahnken, 2011.**

The microsystem aspects in the three countries explored in the present study are students’ relations with parents, teachers and peers and how these relations are seen to invite, permit or inhibit the students’ development in the learning environment, affecting classroom climate as well as reading engagement, as graphically illustrated in figure 4 above.

4.2.2. The Mesosystem

**Original definition:**

The mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person (e.g., the relations between home and school, school and workplace). In other words, a mesosystem is a system of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005c, p. 148).

In 1993 this definition was changed:

A mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person. Special attention is
focused on the synergistic effects created by the interaction of developmentally instigative or inhibitory features and processes present in each setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 22).

What has to be established initially is what kind of mesosystem is in place and the power and nature of the interaction and communication. The quality and character of the mesosystem are influenced by what beliefs and expectations prevail in one microsystem in regards to the other(s) (Bronfenbrenner, 2005c). A teacher may, for example, believe that a parent is not interested in his child’s schooling, as he never turns up for meetings, not knowing that he works evenings. A mother may dislike her daughter’s new sullen friend, not knowing that her parents are divorcing. It could be assumed, that the more communication there is within the mesosystem and the more the values are aligned, for example, in regards to the importance of reading, the better the achievement outcomes will be.

![Image of the mesosystem](image)

**Figure 5. The mesosystem. Source: Luke Mahnken, 2011.**

As shown in figure 5 above, relations between parents and teachers / school, and the synergy of these relations will be explored in the mesosystem sections in the following data analysis chapters.
4.2.3. The exosystem

This definition has remained without changes:

The exosystem encompasses the linkage and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not ordinarily contain the developing person, but in which events occur that influence processes within the immediate setting that does contain that person (e.g., for a child, the relation between the home and the parent’s workplace; for a parent, the relation between the school and the neighborhood (sic) group) (Bronfenbrenner, 2005c, p. 148).

To give only one example, research has shown that workers in job situations where there is more self-direction not only became more independent in other life situations, but they also gained increased cognitive competence and changed their values and beliefs in relation to, for example, child upbringing. These behavioural and attitudinal changes did not stay with the individual, but spread to other members of the family (Bronfenbrenner, 1995b).

There are a variety of possible relevant exosystem settings. A student’s favourite teacher is moving because his wife got a job somewhere else. The school board may decide to change the rules for scholarships. Mass media may report very negatively about a particular school, or subject. As the systems are interrelated, what happens in the exosystem will affect meso- and microsystems. An example scenario could be a daughter waiting for her mother to pick her up from school. The mother has recently lost her job and the ensuing money problems have led to alcohol abuse. Thus, the mother turns up drunk and gets into an argument with the teacher, embarrassing the daughter in front of all her friends. The police are called, social welfare intervenes, the daughter is placed in foster care and the mother is committed to rehabilitation. This chain of events may also have an impact on the macrosystem, resulting in a change in social policies in the event of unemployment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005e).
The aspect of the exosystem that will be discussed in the following data analysis chapters is the decentralisation of education, as illustrated in figure 6. This reform has influenced processes in the education culture in all of the three participating countries; to a lesser degree in Finland, to a major extent in Indonesia and Sweden.

4.2.4. The macrosystem.

Bronfenbrenner’s decision to expand on the intrapersonal characteristics, paradoxically also brought about a deepened and expanded definition of the macrosystem (additions italicised by Bronfenbrenner himself):

The macrosystem consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso- and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other broader social context, with particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in each of these systems. The macrosystem may be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or other broader social context (Bronfenbrenner, 2005c, pp. 149-150).

The reason the term “macrosystem” is used instead of the existing well known terms “culture” and “subculture” is that while a culture or subculture would
always qualify as a macrosystem, the reverse would not automatically apply – socio-economic groups, family types and even neighbourhoods are examples of macrosystems that would not typically be called cultures or subcultures (Bronfenbrenner, 2005c).

This definition of the overarching macrosystem ties in with the evolved definition of the microsystem. It is based on Vygotsky’s theory that a person’s development is defined by what opportunities are available in a particular culture, at a particular time. Predominant cultural values and beliefs will affect how the person is treated, the nature of interactions that will take place and what developmental potentials will be open to the person. Bronfenbrenner stresses the need for a researcher to understand the critical importance of underlying developmentally instigative belief systems existing in that time and place (Bronfenbrenner, 2005c; Elliott & Tudge, 2007). An example would be to assume that children in developing countries have fewer opportunities to achieve academic mastery than children in developed countries. However, the macrosystem can be not only a culture but also a subculture. Therefore, members of a particular subculture can master skills valued in this specific context that are not transferrable to a wider cultural context. Bronfenbrenner cites studies of how such diverse groups as shoppers in the US, bookmakers in the US, and street children in Brazil were able to perform highly sophisticated and advanced mathematical operations when the problems were relating to their everyday world context. These results were not matched at all when tests of equal degree of difficulty were used, involving tasks that were not contextualised or when standard IQ tests were employed (Bronfenbrenner, 2005b, 2005c).

The macrosystem acts as a blueprint for the more proximal systems. Concurrently, the dynamics move in the other direction. Development is propelled by the proximal processes in the microsystem, influenced by the systems in which it is embedded, but also influencing these systems by processes powered by the particular resources and characteristics of the person and his significant others. Thus, the human being is at the same time a creator and a product of culture. However, the systems are not always in alignment. After the fall of the Soviet Union many education consultants and academics from Western Europe and the US visited Russia promoting educational reforms, projects that were also embraced by organisations such as the World Bank and the US International Agency. This led to changes in the
legislation to accommodate “Westernised” pedagogy and more democratic classroom practices, featuring, for example, individual student agency and choice. In reality however, not much changed, as there was not a corresponding change in the microsystem. Teachers’ skills and attitudes remained unchanged and they mainly continued to teach the way they were used to; the proximal processes in the classroom remained the same. The macro- and the microsystems were not aligned (Elliott & Tudge, 2007).

![Figure 7. The macrosystem. Source: Luke Mahnken, 2011.](image)

As clarified in figure 7 above, the macrosystem factors explored in the following chapters are Education policies, Education system, Teacher training, Historical impact, Cultural values and Cultural homogeneity/heterogeneity. Together, they are deemed to synthesise the education cultures in Finland, Sweden and Indonesia.

4.2.5. The chronosystem:

In the original model, time was hardly mentioned at all, but over time Bronfenbrenner paid increasingly more attention to this aspect so that in the PPCT research model, it is one of the main factors. The time factor refers to changes or consistency over time
in the environment as well as the person, through the person’s lifetime and during the historical era in which the person is living (Bronfenbrenner, 1994a).

Time can be related to a person’s chronological age and personal development over time (micro time). It can be linked to ecological transitions, meaning events that have great impact on a person’s ensuing development, such as commencement at school, graduation and moving. It can also be used as a factor in trans-generational studies, comparing the experiences of 15 year old students today and a cohort 50 years ago, reflecting the different historical contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005d).

Proximal processes need to take place regularly over a long period to take effect. Bronfenbrenner was highly concerned that the way US society was developing, family-, peer-, school-, work- and financial circumstances often would not be conducive to providing stability, consistency and predictability over time, which is more important than, for example, socio economic status for children’s development. This flux would naturally also affect the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

At the macrolevel, the time factor can relate to historical events and the effect on people at various stages of their lives. After the Soviet collapse, rapid changes affected the whole society but it affected various groups in various ways. Western influence was apparent and substantial, particularly in the consumer area. Russian youth changed their school uniforms for US sweatshirts and sneakers. But the loss of cultural and historical values led to growing alienation and anxiety among the young, expressed in, for example, drug abuse, violence and crime as well as a change in attitudes and values. Students from year six to 12 were surveyed first in 1982 and later in 1997 (six years after the communist collapse). In the first round, students responded that it was important for them to find “a job where I can be useful” or “to be as creative as possible” and “to be competent and moral” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005g, p. 232). In comparison, in 1997, examples of their main concerns were “...the importance of money, status and connections...” and “having resources and advantages” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005g, p. 232) This increasing loss of moral values in the young is creating great concern in older generations (Bronfenbrenner, 2005g, p. 232; Elliott & Tudge, 2007).

Consistency and a long-term perspective are considered to underpin successful educational systems (Laukkanen, 2008). Thus, the chronosystem is
clearly relevant for the present study. However, it has not been separated out and studied in isolation, but integrated into the analysis of other systems.

4.3. The use of Bronfenbrenner’s model in the present study.

Bronfenbrenner’s model continually evolved over decades until his death in 2005. He was a prolific writer and authored hundreds of publications. The major changes have been described above to demonstrate this process. However, doing this also illustrates the complexity of the framework. Thus, studies claiming to be based on Bronfenbrenner’s model are sometimes referring to the 1979 ecological framework, or are sometimes limited to certain aspects of the final PPCT version and sometimes do utilize the complete PPCT model. Therefore, it is very important to define if, how, and to what extent, the PPCT model will be used in a research project (Tudge, et al., 2009). The present study explores factors underpinning 15 year old students’ performance in reading literacy in Sweden, Finland and Indonesia. In summary, Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological framework is implemented in the following way:

Process: Proximal processes are studied in the reading habits of students, parents and teachers as well as communication patterns between the student and parents / teachers.

Person: Students’ (as well as parents’ and teachers’) belief systems and attitudes in relation to schooling and reading literacy are explored. Gender and language group are other characteristics available.

Context: All Bronfenbrenner’s systems are analysed. The Chronosystem is integrated in other systems.

Time: The study is not longitudinal. The time factor is discussed in relation to consistency and change in education policies.

4.4. The research paradigm

Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory is embedded in an interpretivist / phenomenological theoretical framework, founded on the constructivist epistemology. As illustrated in figure 8 below, these are two of four elements in the research process (Crotty, 1998).
A well defined research topic is at the heart of the research process. The direction of the ensuing exploration depends on two interrelated aspects. On the one hand, the theoretical framework, that is to say the world view, the lens through which the issue is understood and will be examined, which in turn would be informed by a particular epistemology, a theory of knowledge. On the other hand, the researcher must make a choice of methods deemed to be the most appropriate for the collection of data required to answer the specific research question(s). This methods selection process is informed by a methodology, a strategy for how to go about finding, or creating knowledge, which in turn is justified by the theoretical framework and the epistemology (Crotty, 1998).

Objectivism, constructionism and subjectivism are the main epistemologies. Common theoretical perspectives are positivism, interpretivism, as expressed in symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and hermeneutics, feminism and critical theory. Survey research, ethnography, grounded theory and discourse analysis are examples of methodology. Methods finally, include questionnaires, interviews, observations, statistical analysis and document analysis to name just a few (Crotty, 1998, p. 5).

While there are certain combinations that would be contradictory, for example, linking the epistemology of objectivism with the theoretical framework of phenomenology, or coupling the theoretical framework of positivism with the methodology of ethnography, there is currently a multitude of typical possible groupings. However, what is of great importance is to ascertain that there is a tight connection and congruency between all the four elements finally chosen (Crotty, 1998; Tudge, et al., 2009).

Traditionally objectivist / positivist theory has been tied to a quantitative/statistical methodology with a nomothetic aim and the constructivist / interpretative approach connected to qualitative methodology and an idiographic aim. This view is still supported by many researchers. Walter (2006, p. 35), for example, even goes so far as to designate quantitative and qualitative methodologies as theories or general
paradigms. Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) claim that positivist research is synonymous with quantitative research, and constructivist with qualitative.

Thus, initially the positivist paradigm was dominant. The emergence of interpretative alternatives instigated an ongoing debate about which paradigm should take precedence, and their differences were seen as irreconcilable. This stance has certainly changed and at present a constructive discussion about methodology is, for the most part, perceived as enriching for scientific work at large, as well as a safeguard against the creation of a different, but equally rigid, dominant paradigm. Moreover, the two paradigms are now considered to be both reconcilable and complementary. Cross-paradigmatic research projects, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies for increased depth and breadth are commonplace (Crotty, 1998; Dasen & Mishra, 2000; Gall, et al., 2007; Guba, 1990; LeCompte, 1990; Popkewitz, 1990).

4.5. The present research project.

The present study is cross-national and comparative. It is embedded in Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory, accordingly the epistemology is constructivist and the theoretical framework is interpretivist / phenomenological. The methodology is phenomenological research. The data gathering is divided into two parts. In the first part, the method used is online surveys / questionnaires. The ensuing analysis of obtained data highlighted three conundrums that warranted further, in-depth exploration. This problematisation is described in the second part of this chapter, where data already in hand was elaborated and expanded on using document analysis and case study methods such as class observations and interviews. Hence this is an example of mixed-methods research.

4.6. Structure of the remainder of this chapter.

First a synopsis of the constructivist / interpretivist / phenomenological theoretical perspective is given and its relevance to the present study is validated. The choice of methodology is rationalised. This is followed by an overview of the specific features of comparative educational research. After this, the choice of methods is justified, and the innovative survey concept, Symbolic Dialogue, is described. Hereafter, practical details of the data gathering are explained and finally, difficulties encountered are explained.
4.6.1. A constructivist / interpretivist / phenomenological paradigm.

As has been stated above, constructivist epistemology suggests that there is no objective truth; meaning is constructed by the individual engaging and interacting with the world. Thus, all reality is socially constructed. However, it may be constructed differently by different people, therefore it is also relative. What makes sense and becomes normative is relative to the historical, political and cultural context (Crotty, 1998; Gall, et al., 2007; Lincoln, 1990).

Closely related to this theory of knowledge, the constructivist epistemology is the theoretical framework of interpretivism. This is a school of thought generally linked to Max Weber (1864 – 1920) who claimed that social science should focus on “Verstehen”, understanding, as opposed to “Erklären”, explaining, which was considered to typify the natural sciences. While Weber embraced empirical knowledge, more recent researchers have tended to adopt other methods, claimed to better fit social sciences. Thus, the interpretivist researcher understands society by studying how people interrelate and interact, based on their interpretations of their reality (Crotty, 1998; Walter, 2006).

Phenomenology is a particular aspect of interpretivism, aimed at seeing things as they “really” are instead of accepting, and interpreting, an existing cultural perspective. By attempting to break loose from prevailing cultural perceptions, the researcher can experience phenomena in a more authentic way and arrive at a renewed, thicker, fresher understanding of the world (Gall, et al., 2007). This often entails the questioning of generally accepted beliefs, by illustrating how judgements and thoughts underpinning a certain, established meaning may contribute to continued power imbalance, thus originally phenomenology was a critical methodology (Crotty, 1998). Nowadays though, phenomenology is often described as a theoretical perspective that without discrimination interprets the world through the participant’s eyes (Crotty, 1998; Cuff, et al., 2006). While another interpretivist approach, symbolic interactionism, aims at doing exactly that, to describe and experience the world in someone else’s shoes, phenomenology endeavours to explore the world from a first person perspective. So, initially phenomenology took a critical stance, and also arguably an objectivist, or empirical viewpoint, in so far as it was aspiring to directly engage with the objects / phenomena in the world, rather than through another subject. These features may or may not be part of current phenomenological research. This objective notion relates back to the concept of
“intentionality”, which refers to the interrelationship between the individual and his world, the interaction between subject and object, where one cannot exist without the other, a perspective embraced by, for example, the existentialist philosophy (Crotty, 1998).

4.6.2. Bronfenbrenner and phenomenology.

Bronfenbrenner refers in his 1979 book to a number of phenomenological scholars that have influenced him in the development of the ecological systems theory, but emphasizes the importance of Kurt Lewin and his field theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this model Lewin proposes that there are various topological fields; there is a life space that consists of an individual, or a group, and his/their psychological environment as it is perceived by them (the psychological field). When analysing this field, all factors directly influencing the particular person / group under study, contemporaneously at a given time, work interdependently and should be taken into consideration. Outside of this field, there is a boundary zone that may affect the life space, and more distally a variety of processes that do not affect the individual / group at this particular time. From this theory Lewin infers that “how reality is perceived” is more important than how it can be “objectively” described. A teacher, for example, must realise that to describe a student “objectively” he actually has to only consider facts making up that student’s life space in his psychological field at the time. To try to substitute this for what is in the teacher’s mind, a more logical, sensible, realistic, pragmatic viewpoint, would not only be subjective but incorrect and would hinder the instigation of an effective teaching and learning process (Lewin, 1951).

Lewin’s theories can be traced back to the phenomenological concept of intentionality and the dynamic interrelationship between the individual and his perceived environment. It is also evident that Bronfenbrenner used the Lewinian field theory as a basis for his increasingly complex (bio)ecological systems models. In the definition of the microsystem, the individual’s experience of his environment is emphasized, and Bronfenbrenner points out the phenomenological dimensions of the mesosystem (attitudes and perceptions operating between the microsystems), which would be relevant also for the exo- and macrosystems. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner defined validity in ecological research as: “... the extent to which the environment experienced by the subjects in a scientific investigation has the
properties it is supposed or assumed to have by the investigator” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 29). Thus, again he emphasises the importance of the phenomenological theoretical framework in ecological research.

4.6.3. An ecological, phenomenological paradigm for development in context.

According to the ecological paradigm the human being at any point in time is a product of the joint effects of the person’s individual characteristics and his environment over his life course so far. These factors were often treated in research as separate entities, functioning independently and thus generating results that would simply be added together. However, Lewin was an initiate of the phenomenologically inspired Gestalt therapy tradition, which proposed that a dynamic whole is different from the sum of its parts and various developmental outcomes would be brought about as a function of the interaction between the person and the environment. Lewin consequently made a distinction between two types of research paradigms. One was the Aristotelian paradigm, described as class theoretical and law bound, acontextual with a linear framework, often termed positivist and quantitative, based on statistical procedures and a belief in a homogenised world, where the same physical laws govern all processes, thus explaining what works under what conditions. The Galilean paradigm on the other hand, commonly characterised as interpretive and contextual, aimed at understanding the dynamics that caused certain relationships, looking at the whole situation and interacting forces, thus exploring the why and how of the underlying process. Lewin believed (already in 1931) that the Galilean paradigm would become dominant in psychological research. Bronfenbrenner held the opinion that the Aristotelian paradigm, which he calls class theoretical, normally would frame studies of initial explorations into new areas, which then would be followed by more complex designs. He expressed disappointment in his later years that this had not (yet) happened. Martin & Sugarman concur, having reviewed a number of research projects on teaching, and finding that on the whole they were all based on an Aristotelian concept, even though many of the researchers express an ambition or intention to use a more complex paradigm (Bronfenbrenner, 2005c; Lewin, 1935, 1951; Martin & Sugarman, 1993).
4.6.4. Research models in this ecological context.

Anchored in the above research paradigms defined by Lewin, Bronfenbrenner outlined a series of research models.

The most uncomplicated are the class theoretical models. The “social address model” contrasts environmental factors such as socioeconomic groups, family size, urban or country living, thus producing comparisons of individuals developing in different geographical and social contexts. A common example would be the exploration of the relationship between a student’s socioeconomic background and academic performance; certain correlations would be located but no well founded theories of underlying causal processes could (should) be suggested. There is of course the temptation to do so regardless, which is why tenuous correlations may be put forward and appears as robust. A study may, for example, find a correlation between the standard of school buildings and facilities and student achievement, thus suggesting that older, inferior school standards mediate lower student achievement, even though these schools were located mainly in low socioeconomic areas. However, the advancement of computer technology and statistical methodology that can handle a larger number of data and variables has seen the social address model evolving into a sociological niche model, in which particularly favourable or unfavourable milieus could be identified. The “personal attributes model” similarly looks at how individual biological and physical characteristics such as age and gender influence development at a later stage, again in a linear, acontextual way (Bronfenbrenner, 2005d).

The next research model is still classified as a class theoretical model but exhibits increased complexity as in the person – context model, into which the social address and the personal attributes models are interwoven. It provides the opportunity to illustrate that “the dynamic whole is different to the sum of its parts”, and confirms both Lewin’s and Bronfenbrenner’s belief that the development of an individual is a joint function of the person’s characteristics and the environment. The dynamic interplay will create combinations and outcomes that would be impossible to predict by analysing each variable separately. However useful this research paradigm is, the underpinning process is still unspecified (Bronfenbrenner, 2005d).

The most complex model, Process – Person – Context – Time, PPCT, has been comprehensively described in previous sections. In addition, it can be said that Bronfenbrenner stipulates a model design that provides systematic information in
regards to the context, the participant’s personal characteristics and the process for development. Furthermore, the analysis must take into consideration the possibility of moderating and mediating factors. The mediators instigate, or underpin a causal process and explain how or why another factor is affecting the outcome, while the moderators affect the potency and direction of processes. Bronfenbrenner gives the example of poverty which can be a mediating factor, initiating a downward spiral which in turn can be moderated, positively or negatively, by a family member obtaining or losing employment and income (Bronfenbrenner, 2005d, p. 78). Another illustration could be student achievement, a process that is mediated by parental involvement, which is in turn is moderated by, for example, socioeconomic status and educational background.

4.6.5. Application of Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical framework in research.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theories have framed a multitude of research projects, in a variety of disciplines, including education. One notable example of its use in educational research was undertaken at the University of Manitoba, Centre for Research in Youth, Science Teaching and Learning (CRYSTAL) in Canada. During the period 2005 – 2011, 17 varied educational research projects were conducted, adopting Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theoretical framework and confirming its value in educational research and development work (Lewthwaite, 2011). Another example is the Growing up in Australia, Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, conducted in cooperation between the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This large and broad, multidisciplinary study, explored a variety of policy questions, including educational ones and based on Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model (Rogers, Blakemore, Shipley, & Hutchinson, 2009). Yet another example comes from Miller and Cunningham’s study which identified Bronfenbrenner’s theory as being of particular value in research on the classroom environment (Miller & Cunningham, 2003). There are also a number of examples of the use of Bronfenbrenners theory in doctoral studies. A significant educational study is Helen Boon’s (2006) thesis “Students at-risk : a bioecological investigation” in which she compared and contrasted “typical” students, students at-risk of dropping out of school and resilient students, who beat the odds of their background. A similar mesosystem study, exploring how combined home and school
factors related to academic achievement, was conducted by Marchant, Paulson and Rothlisberg (2001). The influence of attitudes towards gender on teaching practices of Pakistani kindergarten teachers (Pardhan, 2009) and the influence of peer culture on college students’ academic achievement (Renn & Arnold, 2003) are a other examples of research projects based on Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model.

4.6.6. To this point.

The present research project, as illustrated in figure 9, is based on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, which is grounded in a constructivist epistemology and adopts an interpretative / phenomenological theoretical perspective. There are, (as described in sections 4.7.1 – 4.7.3) a broad range of understandings of phenomenology. In this study a phenomenological approach is understood as paying attention to how research participants, including the researcher, perceive, experience and make sense of their world. The position of the researcher in this study is not to try and distance herself from the studied situation, as would typically happen in positivist science, but to locate herself amongst and alongside participants to gain insider perspectives and greater understanding of the processes through interactions. Traditionally, phenomenological approaches have been strongly linked with qualitative methods, such as open-ended in-depth interviews. However, this study also includes quantitative data gathered.

The study is also located in the field of comparative education, the main features of which are outlined below.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 9. Research paradigm of the present study. Source: Anna Dall, 2011.**

4.7. Comparative education.

The term “comparative education” was coined in 1817 by a French scholar, Marc-Antoine Jullien. He adhered to the positivist paradigm, and consequently aimed at establishing laws governing education outcomes by studying the nature and impact of other education systems, using systematic surveys. He aspired to define features
characterising “best practice”. These findings would be stored in international databases with a view to support policy decisions and establish effective education systems (Crossley, 2000; Crossley & Watson, 2009; Epstein, 2008). This approach is still, two centuries later, not only clearly evident in positivist based research, but furthermore is gaining increasing influence through the large international, comparative surveys of cognitive performance, such as IEA and PISA - previously discussed in chapter 2 and 3 (Epstein, 2008; King, 2000).

As in other research fields, eventually a corresponding interpretivist, socio-cultural paradigm emerged, whose origin was attributed to the British scholar, Michael Sadler (Crossley & Watson, 2009; Crossley & Vulliamy, 1984; Epstein, 2008). This approach conceptualised comparative education within a framework of cultural sensitivity, relating educational practices and perspectives to the surrounding political, economical, cultural, social and temporal context (the parallel with Bronfenbrenner’s theories is apparent). This contributed to a holistic, multidisciplinary research focus. It illustrated how comparative studies can contribute to a greater understanding of other educational cultures and systems, and in the process develop a greater understanding of one’s own. It also drew attention to the dangers of policy borrowing without cautious cross-cultural analysis (Broadfoot, 2000; Crossley, 2000; Crossley & Watson, 2009; Grant, 2000; Noah, 1984; Troman & Jeffrey, 2007).

Thus, the same division of epistemologies and methodologies is, naturally, as present in comparative education research as in other research fields; the nomothetic, quantitative, positivist stance is contrasted with the idiographic, qualitative constructivist perspective. While this used to be seen as “the great divide”, many researchers now believe that rift can be bridged, for mutual, complementary benefits (Broadfoot, 2000; Crossley & Watson, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Ragin, 2006). Large-scale, quantitative international surveys such as PISA can, for example, point to factors that appear to universally underpin high achievement outcomes, and these factors can then be studied using qualitative methods to understand underlying processes (Schleicher, 2009). Mixed method projects attempt to draw on the advantages of each paradigm to arrive at a richer and deeper end product (Broadfoot, 2000; Crossley & Watson, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Ragin, 2006; Yin, 2009). Most researchers, although identifying with one of the epistemological orientations, nowadays appreciate that other approaches are valid and that there is
no single path to the “holy grail” (Marginson & Mollis, 2001). Importantly, it is the underpinning theoretical perspective, the main drive of the project that defines a study as quantitative or qualitative, as methods can be used interchangeably (Vulliamy, 2004).

The present study compares different education cultures. Finnish and Indonesian education contexts are contrasted in chapter 5. In chapter 7, the comparison is between two groups within the same country; Swedish speaking and Finnish speaking students in Finland. In chapter 6, the changes in the Swedish context are analysed and compared over time. This study is an example of how comparative research can frame analyses of complexities in diverse contexts and identify issues that would have remained unnoticed in an examination of a single situation.


The main methods used in this research project are surveys/questionnaires, document analysis, and qualitative methods such as class observations, class discussions and interviews. This choice of methods will be justified in this section.

As previously pointed out, the research questions were initially stated in a deliberately vague and unspecified manner, to illustrate the aim, to explore phenomena on a wide scale and at many levels, but still leaving all options open for how they should be problematised and operationalised:

- Why are the Finnish 15-year old students out-performing students in all other countries, obtaining the overall world-wide number one position in subsequent PISA surveys?
- Why are the Finnish students so much more proficient than their neighbours, the Swedes, when the two countries have a shared history and are generally very similar?
- Why are students from such diverse backgrounds as Finland, Sweden and Australia all performing significantly above the OECD average in reading literacy? Are there common variables?
- Is it possible to define some underlying factors of the Finnish, Swedish and Australian high achievement in reading literacy? Is it possible to apply some
of the learnings gained from these comparisons to a developing cultural context such as Indonesia?

Later, the PISA 2009 survey established that while the overall positions for the Finnish and Indonesian remained largely unchanged, a significant drop in student performance had occurred in Sweden. Additionally, at this stage, Australia had been excluded from the study due to paucity of data. Therefore, the research questions were reformulated:

- Why do Finnish students consistently attain top achievement outcomes in PISA surveys in reading literacy?
- What Finnish “success “strategies” can be transposed and implemented in developing countries such as Indonesia to improve outcomes in reading literacy?
- How can the significant drop in performance in Sweden be explained?
- How can the difference in performance between Swedish-speaking Finns and Finnish-speaking Finns in Finland be rationalised?

Thus, in order to obtain an optimally broad and diverse range of indicators, providing information about the education culture in the three countries, in the process contrasting and comparing them, an innovative, interactive, online survey methodology was employed, namely Symbolic Dialogue. This is a concept, facilitated by the Fast Forum technique, developed by a US not-for-profit organisation, the Forum Foundation.

It should be stressed that the Forum Foundation has developed a range of other concepts and techniques for civilization building and citizenship skills. However, in this context the focus is on the Symbolic Dialogue as that is the survey method used in the present study (Spady & Kirby, 2002).


Symbolic Dialogue online survey instrument is based on the belief of the founders’, Spady and Kirby that human beings develop through interaction and interpersonal being. Thus, the purpose is to empower people at all levels of society, by offering
them the opportunity to communicate simultaneously and effectively, without meeting physically. Particular value has been placed on supporting youth in their development through the crucially formative years of transition from adolescence to adulthood. Influenced by Erik Erikson, a leading psychologist, and his theory on psycho-social development, the approach emphasises the necessity to give teenagers space and time for reflection and debate, to find their “self” and their interpretation of meaning in the world, without being judged (Krause, et al., 2003; Spady & Kirby, 2002). Another attribute of this method, is its affinity to the Socratic teaching method, which means that the teacher is not so much imparting information to the students but rather asking them questions, in order to get them to actively reflect themselves and come to their own conclusions - a dynamic and quite phenomenological process, enhancing and strengthening students’ creative and intellectual abilities. Learning will be deepened when feedback is received from others and differing conclusions or viewpoints can be discussed. Symbolic Dialogue has proven to be a useful model in the implementation of these processes in schools (This Socratic approach was also Bronfenbrenner’s favoured classroom strategy; Bronfenbrenner, 1995a; Spady & Kirby, 2002).

Therefore, the use of Symbolic Dialogue method made it possible for participating students to potentially learn about other education cultures and get a new perspective on their own attitudes and values.

4.9.2. Symbolic Dialogue – the process.

Typically, a topic is initially discussed in smaller groups, after which the participants complete anonymous online opinionnaires (questionnaires) that are submitted to the Forum Foundation. Results are compiled, returned and discussed in the group (results are shown for the whole group, not individuals). New opinionnaires may sometimes be submitted after this. The opinionnaires from the smaller group are also contrasted against the aggregated data from the larger group, and discussed, which helps the participants to become aware of their own beliefs and attitudes as well as those of others.

The small group discussion constitutes the core value of the Symbolic Dialogue. Many people find it hard to voice their opinions in meetings with a large number of people, but are comfortable to take part in small group interactions. Thus, the aggregated data found in the profiles represent many small group discussions fused into one (Spady & Kirby, 2002).
4.9.3. The Symbolic Dialogue process and the present research project.

It was previously stated that the chosen methodology for this project was phenomenological research methodology, understood as a way of interpreting how the participants (students, parents and teachers) and the researcher herself, make sense of particular phenomena. In this instance these phenomena could be experiences and attitudes relating to the value and purpose of schooling, reading engagement and reading habits, interaction patterns with teachers and parents, to name a few. The symbolic dialogue fits this methodology well, as it is based on learning approaches closely aligned with phenomenology. Further, it is argued, the interactive processes between participants and researcher help to gain a deeper understanding, sets Symbolic Dialogue distinctly apart from a traditional quantitative survey instrument and makes it a perfect fit.

4.10. Data gathering.


Data were gathered through document analysis and surveys, followed by interviews, class discussions and classroom observations.

The document analysis: The present study stemmed from an analysis of the PISA survey in 2000, in which the Finnish students outperformed all others and the Indonesian students were found at the other end of the spectrum. The most common level for achievement was for Finnish students level 4 (out of 5) and for Indonesian students level 1. At this point in time, the Swedish and Australian students performed significantly above the OECD average (OECD, 2003b). Document analysis has been used consistently throughout the project as an important source of evidence. In particular the focus on PISA and other international, large scale, educational surveys, provided depth and validity to data obtained in this study.

Surveys: The student opinionnaire (questionnaire) consisted of 56 multiple choice questions and took approximately 30 minutes to complete online. The parent survey comprised 55 questions and the teacher instrument 57 items. The survey instrument can be found in Appendix 1, 2 and 3 (Symbolic Dialogue opinionnaires, online in Finland and Sweden, hard copy in Indonesia). As mentioned previously, the surveys covered a wide range of questions, in order to establish similarities and
differences between the different education cultures. Clusters covered were, for example, attitudes to education, school, studying, ambition and persistence; student-teacher-parent relations, teaching strategies; reading habits and engagement; appreciation of the mother tongue subject and attitudes to various components thereof; appreciation of teachers and satisfaction with the standard of teaching and education. Many questions were identical in the three surveys; some were specific for the student, parent and/or teacher survey(s).

*Qualitative methods:* To explore, clarify and substantiate the survey data, qualitative methods such as classroom discussions, observations and interviews with students, parents and teachers were implemented.

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to generate data, and triangulated, in order to facilitate an in-depth and accurate analysis. This mixed method comparative approach lends itself to a more integrated discussion and analysis of data in chapters 5, 6 and 7. Rather than address data emanating from disparate sources in separate chapters, the final chapters of this thesis elaborate on thematic issues arising from analysis of all data. This approach enables key issues to be highlighted and give greater clarification of the arguments under discussion. To this end chapter 5 uses the Bronfenbrenner framework to undertake a comparative analysis of cultural factors underpinning reading literacy in Finland and Indonesia from the perspective of educational culture. Chapter 6 explores the changing Swedish education culture and chapter 7 elaborates on the differences evident in attitudes between Swedish speaking and Finnish speaking students in Finland and the possible links to differences in performance in reading literacy.

4.10.2. Participants.

Participants in the project consisted of students, their parents and mother tongue teachers in eight school classes in Sweden, 10 classes in Indonesia, five classes in the Swedish speaking part of Finland, and five classes in the Finnish speaking part of Finland. For practical reasons, this was a convenience sample. The researcher was living in Australia, exploring education cultures in Finland, Sweden and Indonesia. Even though the opportunity to do work for USC International made it possible for her to go to Sweden and Finland on several occasions, there was still considerable cost
associated with living expenses and travel in these countries. Therefore, schools in Sweden were chosen in the Stockholm region, where she has family. In the Swedish speaking part of Finland, sample schools were chosen in the two main areas of Finland where Swedish is spoken. Four of the five schools in the Finnish speaking part of Finland were located to Jyväskylä, the reason being that assistance with translations and data collection was given by the Institute for Educational Research at Jyväskylä University. Finally, in Indonesia, schools in Mataram, Lombok were chosen for the sample, as USC (and particularly the researcher's main supervisor) has close relations and longstanding cooperation with the University of Mataram. However, despite this a reasonably similar composition was attained between countries. All of the samples included representation from the national or state capital as well as from more rural areas.

Table 1. Participating schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Schools in the capital</th>
<th>Suburban schools</th>
<th>Rural schools</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden, Stockholm area</td>
<td>1 (Stockholm CBD)</td>
<td>4 (Stockholm suburbs)</td>
<td>3 (rural area closest to Stockholm)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish-speaking part of Finland</td>
<td>1 (Helsinki CBD)</td>
<td>1 (Helsinki suburb)</td>
<td>3 (Ostrobothnia)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish-speaking part of Finland</td>
<td>1 (Helsinki)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (Jyväskylä)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lombok, Indonesia</td>
<td>5 (Mataram)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (outside Mataram)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Sweden, the Swedish Association of School Principals and Directors of Education (of which the researcher is a former member) assisted in the process of finding schools interested in participating in the project.

In Finland, the Institute of Educational Research, Jyväskylä University supported the researcher in contacting schools, translating survey instruments into Finnish and assisting in the actual research process. Staff, mainly senior researcher Dr Sari Sulkunen, accompanied the researcher to school meetings initially and also
organized the follow-up meetings. That was the reason for four out of the five schools in the Finnish speaking part of Finland being located in Jyväskylä. In regards to the Swedish speaking part of Finland, schools were chosen in the capital Helsinki and in a coastal, Western area named Österbotten (Ostrobothnia) where the majority of Swedish speakers live.

In Lombok, Mataram University was already in an established co-operative relationship with the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC). The Language Centre and the Centre for Educational Development, CED, were instrumental in contacting schools. Staff from CED, Drs Lalu Azra’s Gazali, MPd, also assisted in the practical implementation as described below.

4.10.3. Data process of data gathering.

The first step in the Symbolic Dialogue data gathering process involved emailing information about the project to schools (in Indonesia information was given personally). When this invitation was accepted, the schools informed students and parents and obtained their consent for their participation. Then, whenever possible, the researcher visited the school to introduce herself and meet the students face-to-face, to present the project more in depth and to discuss with the participating students and teachers why it would be interesting and beneficial for them to take part.

In January 2008, 10 schools in Lombok were approached. Initial contact and appointments for meetings were made by staff at the Mataram University. Then the researcher, mostly accompanied by one of her supervisors – Dr Phillip Mahnken, an expert on Indonesian language and culture – and staff from Mataram University visited schools and met with the principal, and in most cases teachers of Indonesian as well as English and other staff members. The welcome was always very warm, and enthusiasm as well as great interest to take part in the project was unfailingly conveyed.

In February 2008, 10 schools in Sweden were invited to participate. All expressed interest in the study and accepted to take part. Later, two of the schools dropped out due to administrative difficulties to obtain signed consent forms from students and parents. At this stage, the Human Ethics Research Committee (HREC) at USC, expressed concern about the magnitude of the project, so these schools were not replaced.
In March 2008, five schools in the Swedish-speaking part of Finland and five schools in the Finnish-speaking part of Finland were contacted, and they all agreed to participate.

(Schools were approached and data were gathered in Australia from October 2008 to June 2009).

The next step was for the students to complete the anonymous online surveys (in Indonesia hard copies were distributed). Generally, the mother tongue teacher took the class to the computer lab and let them complete it during class time. Parents and teachers were given a link that enabled them to access their surveys online and complete them anonymously at any time.

On completion, the online opinionnaires (questionnaires) were submitted to the Forum Foundation and the Fast Forum technology compiled and returned a report to the researcher instantly. These data profiles could be sorted by demographic variables such as country, school, gender and language spoken at home.

In Sweden and the Swedish-speaking part of Finland, the surveys were completed in May 2008.

In the Finnish-speaking part of Finland completion took place from September to November 2008; this was a later date due to the translation of the instrument into Finnish.

In Indonesia, the surveys were done in May – June 2009. The process here was slightly different. For practical reasons, hard copies of the questionnaires were used instead of online surveys, which made the data gathering process more complex. Instead of easily emailing the links to the online surveys to the teachers, with data returned electronically and reports generated automatically, paper copies had to be printed, distributed to all schools and picked up on completion. The researcher was assisted in this work by staff from the Centre for Educational Development at Mataram University -Drs Lalu Azra’i Gazali, MPd – who also supervised students when they completed the questionnaires to make sure they were individually filled in, not taken out of the classroom, and that there were no inappropriate discussions or instructions from teachers or others. Finally, the researcher had to manually enter all data from the 800 questionnaires into online instruments.

The profiles were analysed and results returned to the schools for students and teachers to evaluate and discuss. In most cases the researcher returned to personally lead these workshops. Normally the researcher started by presenting overall results.
Then questions or areas for which the profile of the particular school, or country, were distinctly dissimilar to others, were highlighted for scrutiny. Students were divided into small groups and assigned a particular topic to discuss; each group handed in written summaries of the group discussion. These were finally discussed with the entire class. This had a dual purpose. Firstly, to give new understandings and knowledge about other cultures and attitudes as well as new perspectives on how they themselves think, act, teach, study and learn. Secondly, the researcher herself could, through the direct interaction, obtain more in-depth information to help understand and explain particularly intriguing findings.

The researcher visited all Swedish-speaking schools in Finland and the one Finnish-speaking school in Helsinki participating in the study, in February 2009. She also went to seven out of the eight participating schools in Sweden in March 2009.

Staff from the Institute of Educational Research at the Jyväskylä University – Senior researcher Dr Sari Sulkunen – visited three of the four Finnish-speaking schools in the Jyväskylä area in May 2009, using the same format for follow-up as the researcher herself, thus providing the researcher with minutes in writing from small group discussions in the various classes.

Follow-up discussions in Indonesia were organised differently. Two bigger meetings were held in October 2009, one for the city schools and one for the country schools. Principals plus three representatives each for students, parents and teachers from every school were present. The format for proceedings were the same as in other countries; an initial presentation by the researcher, followed by small group discussion, written documentation and big group summing up.

Additional information was gained from class observations, discussions and interviews. This qualitative data was obtained on the researcher’s personal visits to the Swedish, Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking schools in Finland in 2008 – 2009 as detailed above. A special trip was undertaken to Indonesia / Lombok in January 2010 to obtain qualitative data.

Document studies and analyses, particularly of PISA and other large scale, international educational surveys, were conducted throughout the project, to triangulate data gathered in the present study, and thus add breadth and depth to the findings. Other examples of documents analysed are national steering documents relating to education policy, government regulations regarding the education system and national surveys on a variety of educational concerns.
Table 2. Summary of data collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Location and time of collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>January 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>February 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>March 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Students, parents, teachers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>May 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish speaking part of Finland</td>
<td>May 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish speaking part of Finland</td>
<td>Sept-Nov 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>May-June 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative data gathering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss speaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of Finland plus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish speaking school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Helsinki</td>
<td>Feb 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining Finnish speaking schools</td>
<td>May 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>March 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Oct 2009 and Jan 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td>All locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feb 2007 – Nov 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.11. Initial interpretation of themes.

In line with Bronfenbrenner’s conceptual framework, the education cultures were to be holistically analysed, that is on the macrolevel, exolevel, mesolevel and microlevel. The macrolevel (education policies, education system, teacher training, historical impact, cultural values and cultural homogeneity/heterogeneity), and the exolevel (decentralisation of education) were largely explored through document analysis. The mesolevel (reciprocal relations between family and school) and the microlevel (the student’s direct interactions with family, school and peers) were investigated through document analysis and data gathered directly from students, parents, teachers and principals through surveys, class discussions, observations and interviews.

Data was initially gathered through surveys. As discussed in section 4.8, the instrument intentionally covered a large number of areas, with a view to identify significant similarities and differences’ between the participating countries. Online generated responses were instantly reported back to the researcher. The anonymous answers were sorted per school and country. When all surveys were completed, the researcher entered all data from the various student groups, that is Swedish students, Swedish speaking students in Finland, Finnish speaking students in Finland and Indonesian students, into a table, to enable comparisons, question by question, between them. In this manner, areas of discrepancies were easily and clearly identified. These were the areas that were further analysed and explored through the qualitative methods of classroom discussions, observations and interviews.

Through this process major themes of interest became evident. The data analysis will be discussed in the next chapters, chapters 5, 6 and 7. However, it should be noted that there were quite a number of topics that would merit further study, but only three themes were considered to be of substantial and broad interest and to the research questions and therefore selected for in-depth analysis.

Chapter 5 compares the Finnish and Indonesian education cultures. Clearly, there are large differences in most aspects between the two countries. However, this research project sprang from the PISA surveys, in which context Finland and Indonesia are indeed treated on equal terms, and moreover, Indonesia does aspire to become an equal contestant in the global economy. Therefore, the objective is to
analyse and contrast the two countries’ historical backgrounds and their present contexts with a view to find feasible strategies that can be implemented in order to improve reading literacy performance in Indonesia.

In the PISA 2000 study, the Swedish students were performing significantly above the OECD average. In PISA 2009, there had been a significant decline in achievement and the Swedes were now attaining merely average scores. Chapter 6 analyses changes in the Swedish education culture over two decades, with a view to explain the decline in equality and equity.

Chapter 7 looks at the intra-national differences in achievement and attitudes in Finland, between the Swedish speaking and Finnish speaking students. This is a long-standing concern, particularly in the Swedish speaking part of Finland. Thus, when the survey findings from the present study were presented and discussed, many teachers and principals hoped for continued exploration. Furthermore, in comparative research, the nation state has normally been the unit of analysis and intra-national studies have been rare, so such a study would fill a gap (Broadfoot, 2000; Crossley, 2000).


4.12.1. Ethics.

The need for signed consent forms from all participants: students, parents and teachers, created huge difficulties. In some instances it made schools decline to participate in the project, due to the administrative workload involved. In others it made schools withdraw as the teachers were unable to get the forms signed and returned. When the researcher checked electronically submitted responses against received consent forms, there were discrepancies in many cases. As all responses were anonymous, it was impossible to identify which students or parents had completed the survey without signed consent; it was only possible to identify what school they came from. Thus, there was great concern that all data from those particular schools would have to be excluded. Therefore, it was an immense relief when the Human Research Ethics Committee, HREC, granted a waiver of the need for consent forms for anonymous online surveys.

Australian Human Ethics Research regulations cannot be disputed, either by researchers or participants, in the Australian context. However, there were many
negative reactions to them being enforced in Sweden and Finland, where research rules are very different. Not only the administration of the consent form, but also the content in the Research Information Sheet (2 pages, appendix 4) that had to be included, were questioned. Often a cover letter had to be attached by the school to explain to parents why the information was so lengthy and why it was worded the way it was. For example, the need to include an express mention that follow-up counselling would be provided if needed was met with incredulity, seeing this was, after all, information about an online survey exploring reading literacy.

Another example concerned overseas ethics regulations. In Sweden and Finland the principal has the supreme right to allow or deny a researcher to do work in his / her school. No other permit is needed. Official evidence of this custom had to be developed and provided to the HREC.

In short, many questioned the appropriateness, even legality, of imposing Australian ethics regulations in a foreign country with totally different cultural and ethical perspectives.


Initially, the aim was to have 10 participating schools in each country. However, in response to the HREC questioning the “magnitude of the project”, the number was reduced. Thus, only five schools were required in Queensland. Two independent schools were approached and instantly accepted the invitation. Three state schools agreed to take part, but two had long delays in the implementation, the third dropped out, and it proved extremely difficult to find a replacement. However, student responses were finally received from the five schools, but parent responses emanated from only one (independent) school, and just two of the five teachers completed the teacher survey, despite numerous reminders. Due to this paucity of data, the Australian context was excluded from the study.

4.12.3. Particular difficulties relating to cross-national comparative studies.

The present study was extensive, complex and costly. The three countries involved were geographically far apart. Even though some qualitative data gathering, such as interviews, can be conducted using electronic devices, a whole other level of insight can be obtained by personal interactions and observations. This was made possible
by combining research trips with work for the University of the Sunshine Coast. Nevertheless, the researcher’s personal financial expenses were considerable.

Surveys had to be translated from English into Swedish, Finnish and Indonesian. Even though great care was taken to ensure consistency, the possibility remains that there is a difference in the significance of certain words between languages.

The study covered substantial content, made use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods in four locations, all of which called for a lengthy, time consuming research process.

4.13. Limitations of the present study.

Qualitative data is necessarily limited to the context within which it is generated. However, effort has been made to triangulate data from other studies as well as with various sources of qualitative data obtained through classroom observations and interviews, to increase validity and reliability.

The researcher could communicate with all students in their language except for Finnish speaking students. Therefore, an interpreter had to assist and this increases the risk of misunderstandings. Some interviews in Finland were undertaken in English and the same reservation is valid, as this was not the participants’ mother tongue.

The moderate sample size and convenience sampling limit the generalisability of findings.
Chapter 5.

5.0. Introduction.

This chapter analyses, compares and contrasts the Finnish and Indonesian education cultures, through the prism of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theoretical framework, described in chapter 4. The four systems are detailed and the discussion alternates between Finland and Indonesia. The macrosystem is itemised in relation to education culture, to include education policies, education system, teacher training, historical impact, cultural values and cultural homogeneity/heterogeneity. The exosystem is taken to involve decentralisation of education. The mesosystem is defined as parent – teacher relations, and the microsystem is limited to relations between the student and parent(s), teachers and peers. Each section concludes with a contrasting summary. The Bronfenbrenner model makes it possible to break down education cultures and enables cultural comparisons of education beyond the commonly used model in which only education systems are analysed. This chapter argues that the main reason for outstanding Finnish achievement outcomes is a total alignment of all systems. Consensus on education policies lead to consistent, long term planning. Education and reading are valued throughout society. Teaching enjoys high status and therefore attracts the brightest candidates who are put through long and challenging training, to become trusted by all stakeholders. It is also argued that, despite the common and current belief in global educational solutions, illustrated by e.g. the PISA studies, there are few aspects of the Finnish educational culture that can be easily and immediately transferred to Indonesia, where the cycle of low teacher and student performance needs to be broken by quality training, generating teachers with a professional identity, who are trusted by society.

The PISA surveys constituted the starting point for the present study. They claim to be cross-culturally valid, and have consistently confirmed the Finnish students to be top performers in all areas, including reading literacy, and relegated Indonesian students to the bottom of the spectrum. Swedish and Australian students’
performance was also initially significantly above the OECD average (OECD, 2001b). Therefore, one of the original research questions was why students from such different cultures were achieving highly – would there be a common denominator that could be transposed to a totally different culture such as the Indonesian context? However, in PISA 2009, where results from the first survey in 2000 could be compared with results obtained in 2009, Sweden and Australia were two of only four countries where achievement outcomes had significantly fallen over this period (OECD, 2010f). Therefore, the focus of the research study has consequently been on Finland and Indonesia. In PISA 2009, students were ranked in relation to seven levels of proficiency in reading literacy; from the top level 6 to the lowest level 1b. Level two was considered the baseline for reading skills enabling students to be active and productive in society, functionally literate. The results showed Shanghai (China) ranking number 1 with a score of 556 points. Korea was ranked second on 539 points and Finland third on 536 points, however there was no statistically significant difference between these two countries. The Indonesian average score was 402 and level 1a was the most common highest level of performance whereas less than 5% of Finnish students are found at this level.

It may be appropriate to point out that as this study explores the Finnish and Indonesian contexts specifically, it does not in any way aspire to cover other general findings from the extensive field of school effectiveness and school improvement research. Further, there are other studies that have looked at best practice; the most well known may be the McKinsey report (Barber & Moursesh, 2007) and “Why not the best schools” (Caldwell & Harris, 2008). There is even one paper that compares the educational culture in Finland and Australia / Victoria (Harris, 2006). However, as the theoretical frameworks are different from the Bronfenbrenner model used in the present study, their research structure and analysis also pursue different directions and foci.

5.1. Data gathering.

In Finland, 10 schools in total participated. Data from the five Swedish speaking schools will be discussed in chapter 7. This chapter considers responses from the five Finnish speaking schools; 103 students, 32 parents and five teachers completed the online survey. In Indonesia, 10 schools participated; 395 students, 400 parents and 11 teachers filled out the printed questionnaires. The substantially greater
number of responses from Indonesia was due to twice as many schools, bigger classes and a 100% response rate from students as well as parents. A number of classroom observations and interviews were conducted in each country. The data gathering process has been described in detail in section 4.10.

5.2. The Macrosystem.

According to Bronfenbrenner, the macro system is the blueprint for more proximal systems. It involves the overarching cultural values and beliefs, macro institutions such as a National Board of Education, national frameworks and steering documents. Thus the macrosystem shapes a person's development by defining what opportunities are available to him in a particular culture, at a particular time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005c, p. 230).

To enable the full nature of each national macrosystem to be apprehended the historical impact, education policies, education systems, cultural values, teacher training and cultural homogeneity / heterogeneity will be detailed, alternating from Finland to Indonesia.

5.3. Historical impact.

5.3.1. Finland

For 700 years, Finland was part of Sweden, till 1809 when it was annexed by Russia. Naturally, the Swedish impact has been significant and social and economic contacts have remained close. Even though the Swedish speakers nowadays form a minority of the population, Finland is still, formally, a bilingual country with both Finnish and Swedish holding the status of official national languages. Thus all services, including education at all levels, must be provided in both languages (Fellman, 2008). The differences in attitudes and achievement outcomes between Swedish and Finnish speaking students will be analysed in Chapter 7.

When Finland became part of Russia in 1809, it still contained a degree of autonomy, particularly in regards to legislation and economic matters (Fellman, 2008). Nevertheless, the impact of Russian culture was evident throughout society and Simola claims that “Finnish culture still incorporates a meaningful element of the authoritarian, obedient and collectivist mentality” (2005, p. 457). Furthermore, being a country wedged between the Eastern communist block and the Western market economies required constant caution, diplomacy and impartiality (Simola, 2005).
On the other hand, a sense of national identity and unity was created whilst being under Russian rule, that led to national folklore and literature in the Finnish language emerging and flourishing (Linnakylä, 2004). Following the Russian revolution, Finland proclaimed independence in 1917. Violent conflicts ensued between the radical left, “the Reds” and the conservatives, “the Whites”, culminating in a civil war. After only three months the Whites emerged as winners, at the enormous cost of 40,000 people being killed, (three quarters of them “Reds”), not only in battle but to an even larger degree in executions and in the prison camps where 80,000 people were interned. In addition to this human sacrifice came severe economic decline, and failed harvests that caused a famine. This historic period has left a lasting scar in the Finnish national memory (Fellman, 2008; Simola, 2005).

On the way to reconciliation, Finland was again at war only two decades later. A Soviet offensive started the “Winter War” 1939 – 40 which was followed by the “Continuation War” 1941 – 44, ending in a Finnish defeat. Not counting the loss of human lives, strategic land areas were surrendered to the Soviet Union and war indemnities had to be paid over years to come (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006; Fellman, 2008).

Thus the Finns have endured hardship in the form of wars and famines, unparalleled by, for example, their Nordic neighbours. This traumatic history, coupled with the precariousness of its geo-political position, may have had a unifying effect on the people, demonstrating the need for consensus solutions and instilling in the Finns what is known as “sisu”, the quality of perseverance against all odds (Simola, 2005).

This may also be the reason that Finland remained a poor, agrarian society later than most other countries, and still in the 1950s half of the population worked within the agricultural sector. At this stage though, determined growth and development policies were implemented with a view to turning Finland into a more modern and prosperous economy (Patomäki, 2003). Urho Kekkonen, initially serving as Prime Minister, before being elected President in 1956 and remaining in office until 1981, asked whether the country had “the forbearance it will take to become rich” (Fellman, 2008, p. 175). Clearly this question was answered with a consensual yes, as in the following decades Finland made a giant leap and transformed into one of the world’s most advanced technological societies as well as
one of the most competitive economies, a process that was facilitated by changes to the education policies (Patomäki, 2003; Sahlberg, 2007).

5.3.2. Indonesia.

“Bhinneka tunggal ika” (“Unity in diversity”)

5.3.2.1. Pre 1998

For centuries, Indonesia has attracted foreign interest, due to its strategic position and abundant natural resources. Hindu and Buddhist influences have left lasting imprints. The impact of the Muslims that followed was even greater, as Indonesia today is the world’s largest Muslim country. The Europeans arrived in the early 1500s, lured by the lucrative spice trade. The Dutch soon took control of what they called the East Indies, which led to 350 years of domination and exploitation from 1595 to 1945 (Ricklefs, 2001).

At the end of World War II, Indonesia’s independence was proclaimed but it took another five years of revolutionary fighting, primarily against the Dutch, but also against internal forces that either did not want independence, or did not want to be governed under Sukarno, before the independent Republic of Indonesia was recognised. The charismatic Sukarno was elected as the first president and was ardent for unity-in-freedom. Sukarno had initially cautioned against a Western type of democracy and argued for a system more suited to Indonesian traditions. He stated that for a parliamentary system to work, there needs to be a certain level of literacy and prosperity, prerequisites not present in Indonesia. Thus, after an initial experiment with a Western type of parliamentary democracy, Sukarno introduced “Guided Democracy”. This was a system, he maintained, more appropriate to Indonesian conditions, mirroring the village traditions of consensus, as opposed to majority decision making and reflecting the Indonesian preference for harmony over conflict. However, there were numerous uprisings throughout the country and a dwindling economy, leading to continued and increasing chaos in all areas with social, political and economic structures about to collapse. Despite this, many Indonesians found it impossible to envisage a future without Sukarno (Elson, 2008; Lamoureux, 2003; Legge, 1964; Ricklefs, 2001; Sumintono, 2009; Vatikiotis, 1998). In 1966, Suharto acceded to power after a traumatic coup and counter-coup. He
introduced the “New Order”, focusing on economic development and growth, a project that met with success and the general standard of living improved dramatically but at the price of personal freedom. Suharto believed in a strong state that would further development based on order, harmony and balance, even if strongly enforced. He also believed there was a uniquely Indonesian spirit and culture that called for uniquely Indonesian policies. Stability and unity through conformity and commitment were the driving forces for development – notions that were largely welcomed after the chaotic Sukarno era and even the diminished human rights was considered a necessary and fair price to pay for the increasingly higher standard of living. It has often been suggested that the traditional hierarchical, paternal culture with a respect for authority contributed to the longevity of the New Order (Elson, 2008; Lamoureux, 2003; Legge, 1964; Ricklefs, 2001; Sumintono, 2009; Vatikiotis, 1998).

Ironically, Suharto’s success became his downfall. Higher standards of living with better education and global interconnectedness disseminated new attitudes. Major factors in his downfall were the collapse of the economy and incessant complaints about nepotism and corruption. Thus Suharto was forced to step down in 1998 and was succeeded by his vice president Habibie. Over the 50 odd years since independence, Indonesia had experienced only two presidents. Now there was a quick succession of three presidents over six years, until Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was elected president in the first direct election in 2004, and later re-elected in 2009 (Elson, 2008; Lamoureux, 2003; Legge, 1964; Ricklefs, 2001; Sumintono, 2009; Vatikiotis, 1998).

5.3.2.2. Post 1998

Suharto left Indonesia in turmoil. There was a vacuum that needed to be filled with new and different content. The collapse of the previously strong economy had to be addressed. Separatist movements in Papua, Aceh and East Timor had been harshly repressed under Suharto, and a solution needed to be found. There was widespread social violence. The people’s belief in the legitimacy of the government was eroded. Basically, the sense of what it meant to be Indonesian, and the future direction of the nation needed to be redefined. Many felt that since independence, so much violence, and so much suffering had been endured without getting closer to the founding aspirations (Elson, 2008; Ricklefs, 2001).
The very first action was to amend the 1945 constitution, to limit the power of the president, requiring the president as well as the members of parliament to be directly elected. This in itself illustrates a paradigm shift, where the top-to-bottom rule is replaced by an interactive process, where the leaders listen to the people and are guided by their preferences, an organic process creating a new Indonesian identity (Elson, 2008). Indonesia is now the world’s third largest democracy, with decentralised governance and a thriving economy, but it is still handicapped by a low educational and skills base (Australian Government - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2010).

5.4. Education Policies

5.4.1. Finland

Already in the 1500s, literacy started to spread as it was a requirement after the Protestant reformation that everyone should be able to read the Bible, an obligation that was formalised in the 1686 Church Law. The Church took responsibility for the testing of reading ability, and competence was noted in the Church registers. The teaching however, was shared between the Church and the family. This was a tradition that prevailed. After independence, Finland wrote into law the right for all children from the age of seven to receive six years of schooling, but children were still expected to be able to read when starting school. It was considered a waste of resources to send illiterate children to school (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005; Linnakylä, 2004).

For many years the school system was divided into two parallel tracks. At the age of 10 - 12 students were separated into two groups. A minority of the most able students were selected for the grammar school, an academic stream preparing for further studies, while the rest continued in the folk school, a more practical – vocational stream (Aho, et al., 2006; Sahlberg, 2006b). The theory that an education system not only reflects the society in which it functions, but also shapes its future development by optimising the individual’s potential, became a recurrent theme in the 1960s debates. Education was considered the way out of inequality and poverty (for individuals as well as for the whole nation that was battling to pay its war indemnities to the Soviet Union) and the country thus prepared for a transformative leap from a backwards agrarian society to an industrialised welfare state. The parallel system was considered a relic of a bygone class society. Therefore, to build
a new inclusive, social-democratic welfare state, founded on equality and equity, required drastic changes to the education system, and a compulsory, nine-year comprehensive school was proposed. This was a model that through strong central control and public funding, guaranteed all children throughout the country equal access to equivalent quality education within a common school system and following a common curriculum, regardless of the student’s socio-economic background or personal abilities (Aho, et al., 2006; Linnakylä, 2004; R. Rinne, 2000; Saarivirta, 2008; Sahlberg, 2007).

The change from a tracking system to a comprehensive system would dramatically alter the classroom context. Instead of academically homogenous groups of students, there would be great heterogeneity, requiring a different pedagogy and philosophy. However, equity and equality were not to be obtained at the sacrifice of standards; on the contrary it was stressed that the reform also aimed at improving overall achievement levels. In order to successfully implement such large changes, the teacher training program needed to be upgraded and a new, common curriculum had to be designed. It should be noted that Finnish teachers were deeply involved in all aspects of the reform process. This can be contrasted with the comparable situation in Russia previously described (see section 4.2.4) where changes that were made to the education policies at the macro level were never implemented at the micro level, because the teachers had not been involved, and therefore neither accepted nor understood how to operationalise the suggested changes (Aho, et al., 2006). It can also be contrasted to the processes in Indonesia, described below.

The effective implementation of such a paradigm shift relied on support from all stakeholders. Initially, the propositions drew fierce criticism from, for example, the media, some politicians, parents and privately run grammar schools that feared academic standards would be lowered and that gifted students in particular would suffer. Therefore, an all-inclusive consultation process was launched and ultimately a broad consensus was achieved between all stakeholders: educators, politicians, trade unions, the business sector, corporate leaders and the public, in regards to goals and means. The reforms were passed in the 1970s by the Finnish Parliament endorsed by general agreement and support (Aho, et al., 2006; Saarivirta, 2008; Sahlberg, 2006a).
There certainly have been later adjustments to the reforms agreed on in the 1970s, changes that have sometimes been seen as policy moves to the political right, even if they have been implemented in consensus. The most important change has been the decentralisation of funding allocation and curriculum implementation from the macro to the exo level, which some even consider a paradigm shift. This will be discussed below in the exo system context (Johannesson, Lindblad, & Simola, 2002; Simola, Rinne, & Kivirauma, 2002).

Neoliberalism and globalisation have had a major impact on education debate and policies world-wide, as discussed in Chapter 2. Finland is no exception. There is now, for example, a limited right for parents to choose what school they would prefer for their children, that is, if there is capacity left when all local children have been enrolled, children from other areas can be accepted (Risto Rinne, Kivirauma, & Simola, 2002).

There is also a very limited right to open private schools, but so far few are in existence. However, in the Development Plan for Education and Research for 2007–2012 the Ministry of Education acknowledges private alternatives:

The premise in basic education is a uniform comprehensive school and a system of municipal schools supplemented by private schools. A diverse range of municipal and private schools enables families to choose the most suitable education for their child. The role of private schools is to enhance the pluralism of the Finnish education system and to give parents an active role in school selection. The number of private schools has stabilised in Finland. Less than 3% of pupils in basic education are taught in private basic schools (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 31).

Since the introduction of the comprehensive school, it has been synonymous with “public and uniform”, and students went to the high school located closest to where they lived. Thus wordings such as “enables families to choose the most suitable...” and “give parents an active role...” illustrate a significant turnaround in perspective (Risto Rinne, et al., 2002).

However, in comparison to other countries, the impact of globalisation of education and neoliberal policies has been very modest in Finland. Rinne (2000), for example, attributes this to the Nordic / Finnish welfare tradition as well as the Finnish history of resilience and the ensuing Finnish mindset of caution and trust in
one’s own knowledge base, rather than hastily adopting external trends. This also supports the hypothesis posited in chapter 2, that the effects of globalisation can be filtered through and modified by a cultural context.

Long term vision, commitment and perseverance precede long-term high educational outcomes (Laukkanen, 2008; Linnakylä, et al., 2007). This view is also stressed by the OECD Secretary-General, Angel Gurría, in the foreword to the PISA 2009 results (OECD, 2010e, p. 5). He states that education policies need to “be aligned across all aspects of the system, they need to be coherent over sustained periods of time, and they need to be consistently implemented”. In conclusion, Finnish education policies are characterised by sustainability and stability, consensus and consistency. Rather than resorting to frequent and contradictory changes in policy for short-term political reasons, the Finns have built on what has been achieved so far and made incremental changes in keeping with the long term direction. Broad political, cultural and societal consensus combined with gradual changes to steering documents, have provided a stable school environment, conducive to the achievement of high educational outcomes. After the initial reform, there was no education revolution but education evolution (Aho, et al., 2006; Halinen & Järvinen, 2008; Saarivirta, 2008; Välijärvi, et al., 2002).

5.4.2. Indonesia:

Prior to independence there was very limited access to education and the majority of Indonesians never underwent any schooling (Bjork, 2005). When Indonesia attained independence in 1945, the literacy rate was 6% (Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006).

Upon independence, education became a matter of priority. Sukarno was aware that education was a powerful tool for obtaining unity and equality. A new egalitarian education system was put in place. A single model of schooling was to be implemented throughout Indonesia for all children regardless of background. All children should be offered six years of primary education, free of charge. Bahasa Indonesia was the language of instruction. Thus the number of schools, and students, rapidly increased (Bjork, 2005; Ricklefs, 2001; Sumintono, 2009).

During the Guided Democracy period, the direction of education changed towards more emphasis on character building, national and social awareness, rather than independent thinking and academic achievement. The teachers, being civil
servants, were required to undergo training seminars in Pancasila, the state ideology encompassing five moral principles: belief in one supreme God, (deliberately thus phrased to include all faiths), humanitarianism, national unity, democracy, and social justice. Later they also had to support the government Golkar party. They were assessed and valued by attendance at the flag ceremonies and loyally following superiors’ directives without objection rather than their academic performance – traits that have been carried forward. Bjork, for example, found in his studies in the late 90s that it was more important to teachers to attend the flag raising ceremony than to attend their classes (Bjork, 2005; Sumintono, 2009).

The enormity of the task of building a new education system from scratch must be stressed. There were hardly any teachers, hardly any teacher trainers, and hardly any instruction materials. Thus the adults instructing the children were, in the best scenario, being trained themselves. Anyone with a junior secondary education, for example, was allowed to teach during the day and attend their own classes at night. The one year of training led to a certificate. Finances were also scarce, thus contributions were sought from parents, often regardless of their capacity to pay. This effectively hindered children from getting their lawful education, a situation that is still current (Bjork, 2005; Dall, 2010b; Sumintono, 2009).

During the New Order, the highly improved economy made substantial expansion possible. The president declared that there should be a primary school in every village, as a means to nation building. Thus there was an explosion of schools, but many were basic. Infrastructure was improved, and a campaign promoting the value of schooling was very successful, which led to 90% of boys and girls aged 7 – 12 attending school in 1990 (Marion, 2002). However, teachers were recruited in an emergency manner, were still poorly educated, so the quality of education still declined. Therefore, when the examination system was changed, so that students were assessed at the local level, 98 – 100% were passed regardless of actual performance to validate the success of the education system (Sumintono, 2009). Every student had Pancasila instruction for two hours per week. For a long time basic literacy and moral character building were the main objectives of education. The schools were expected transmit the right ideology, view of history and values to the students. In the 1990s efforts were made to broaden the scope, raise the standards and keep students in school for longer. Students were now required to complete nine years of schooling. These efforts met with difficulties; the outputs
from longer-term education were not seen to match the investment and families opted to keep their children at home to support the family. The quality of education remained deficient (Bessell, 2007; Bjork, 2005; Sumintono, 2009; Weston, 2008)

In the post-Suharto era, there has been a dramatic turn around as Indonesia prepares to become part of the global society. From the extremely centralised education system there has now been a drastic shift to local governance. This is a result of several international and national surveys and reports recommending School Based Management, SBM, tied to a new, competency based curriculum and new approaches to teaching and learning as a means to improve the dismal quality of Indonesian education. For these reforms to work there has to be a change in educators’ and teachers’ attitudes. From unquestioningly following instructions, they are now expected to be creative and take responsibility. The recent Teachers’ Law states that all teachers now require at least a Bachelor’s Degree, a reform that is hoped to raise teaching standards (Bessell, 2007; Bjork, 2005; Raihani, 2007; Sumintono, 2009; Weston, 2008). These matters will be discussed further under Teacher Training and the Exosystem.
5.5. Education system

5.5.1. Finland.

![Diagram of the Finnish education system]


The Finnish education system is based on the keywords: quality, efficiency, equity and internationalisation (The Finnish National Board of Education, 2007). By way of inclusion, all students are given the same opportunity to quality education, regardless of gender, social, cultural or geographical background. Initially, equal opportunities related to providing the physical possibility for all students to attend school; nowadays, the concept refers more to pedagogical aspects. Every student, including students with special needs, should be supported by expert pedagogical strategies to perform at their optimum (Linnakylä, et al., 2007).
Children can start preschool at the age of six years; 93% of all children take advantage of that opportunity. School starts at the age of 7. Typically, a student would attend the closest school to where they live and stay with the same group of students, following the same curriculum, for 9 years (Linnakylä, 2004).

The government decides what core subjects should be taught and the minimum number of hours. Generally, students in years 1 – 6 study the same subjects, but to what extent may vary due to local decisions. In years 7 – 9 there may also be elective subjects. According to the OECD, Finnish students spend less hours in school than any other students within the OECD countries (OECD, 2007a; The Finnish National Board of Education, 2010a).

The National Board of Education is responsible for the core curriculum where goals and core content of each subject are set out as well as principles for student assessment, special needs education, student welfare and educational guidance. Based on these guidelines, the local curriculum is defined and elaborated (Linnakylä, 2004; The Finnish National Board of Education, 2010a).

The core subjects taught to all pupils in the basic education syllabus are the mother tongue and literature (Finnish or Swedish), the other official language, one foreign language, environmental studies, civics, religion or ethics, history, social studies, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, physical education, music, art and crafts, and home economics. There are also cross-curricular themes to be taught, international education, consumer education, traffic education, family education, health education, information technology skills, communication skills, environmental issues and entrepreneurship. Guidance counselling must also be provided for students. In addition, optional subjects are taught, which are determined by local authorities and schools (Linnakylä, 2004; The Finnish National Board of Education, 2010a).

Support for special needs is an integral part of the Finnish pedagogical philosophy of equal opportunities for all to learn. There are a number of forms of assistance. However, the policy is for special education to be integrative and inclusive. Thus there are particular strategies incorporated into teacher training. Most commonly the child receives additional help, individually, or in a small group, (remedial teaching,) by teacher assistants / special needs teachers, integrated into the normal class, but when needed the child is given special needs education parallel to his/her normal schooling by a special needs teacher. In extreme cases the
child is given special needs education in a special needs education class, given his/her individual educational plan (Harris, 2006; Linnakylä, et al., 2007; The Finnish National Board of Education, 2007).

Remedial teaching and special support is offered to a comparatively large part of the student body over the nine years of basic education. Very early in primary education, extra support is given particularly to students with literacy difficulties, as skills in this area are essential for further growth. Students that fall behind in the early years have progressively smaller chances of recovering later, if there is no early intervention. In the academic year 2009/2010, 8.5% of Finnish students in the comprehensive school received full time special needs education and 23.3% received part-time special education (Linnakylä, 2007; Statistics Finland, 2011).

Schooling is free of charge, including not only the teaching, but also educational materials, a warm lunch, transportation when needed, health care, study and career guidance, counseling services, remedial teaching and, as mentioned above, special needs support. The first six years of schooling are taught by class teachers and years 7 – 9 by subject teachers. This educational policy that provides everything that is associated with schooling for free, ensures that students are free to follow their preferred study and career paths based on their own interests and abilities rather than being limited by their parents’ situation in life (Harris, 2006; Linnakylä, 2004).

Figure 11. Lunch in a Finnish school. Source: Anna Dall, 2008.
Class sizes in Finland are typically small compared to international standards. In PISA 2006, 45.2% of the classes surveyed contained 16 – 20 students, compared to the OECD average of 15.7% (OECD, 2007b). Reducing class sizes has been the one strategy that most OECD countries have tried in recent times. However, research queries whether there is any correlation between small class sizes and higher performance, except possibly for students in their very first school years and for students from families with a low educational background. From 112 studies only 9 found a positive relationship (Andersson, 2007; Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 11). In Finland it has been possible to combine small class sizes with rigorous teacher selection and quality. In other countries it would be a question of what to prioritize – smaller classes demand more teachers; in many cases that would mean a less selective system and lower standards as opposed to bigger classes and teachers of a higher standard. In fact, high performing countries like Korea and Singapore have increased class sizes in order to be able to sustain higher teacher quality. Hanushek suggests that reduced class size should be implemented not uniformly, but selectively. He argues that smaller classes are effective under certain circumstances, but not generally (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Hanushek, 1997; Uljens, 2009).

This philosophy of non-selective education, providing all students with the same comprehensive schooling has borne fruit, as Finland has consistently obtained high mean scores and a narrow distribution of scores in the PISA surveys. The low differences between schools indicate that students get the same quality education regardless of what school they attend. The gap between highest and lowest performing students has consistently been among the smallest of the OECD countries. Even the lowest performing Finnish students obtain achievement outcomes higher than the OECD average. Countries with highly stratified, selective systems on the other hand, show lower performance and the largest differences between schools. Thus the Finnish system succeeds in combining equity and quality. It also has an educational philosophy advocating educational equality through lifelong learning (Harris, 2006; Linnakylä, 2004; Linnakylä, et al., 2007; OECD, 2005, 2007b).
Every Indonesian child has the same right to free, basic education, including children with special needs. It is compulsory for children between the ages of 7 to 15 to attend school. The education system in Indonesia is still based on the Pancasila and the 1945 constitution, where the universal right to education is affirmed. It is also
stated that every Indonesian should adhere to a religious belief (free of choice). Therefore, the main objectives of education as set out in the National Education System Act of 2003 are to instil religious and moral values in students as well as to develop their intellectual capacities and to cultivate democratic beliefs. It is important to notice that fostering democratic attitudes is considered one of the main priorities, clearly marking the shift from the previous authoritarian era (Indonesian National Ministry of Education, 2010; Raihani, 2007). In the present study, half of the parents, a third of students and nine out of 11 teachers agreed that it is just as important for schools to foster democratic and socially skilled students as giving them academic subject knowledge and skills.

There is a single education system in Indonesia, encompassing two tracks. Secular schools are overseen by the Ministry of National Education, MoNE, with decentralised governance, and Muslim schools, *madrasah* and *pesantren*, are under centralised governance by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, MoRA. Naturally, the goals for the two tracks differ, and the division in governance makes them operate independently. While 90% of the Islamic schools are run by private foundations, 93% of secular primary schools are state schools; at lower secondary school level this has dropped to 56%. PISA 2009 reports that one third of 15 year old students in Indonesia go to schools that are privately managed, and 95% attend schools where the principal reports competing with at least one other school for student enrolments. All schools are required to teach the National Curriculum, but in the secular schools religion is one subject among others. In the Muslim schools, Islam is the foundation and they are allowed to add extra hours for other religious subjects, and sometimes a considerable amount of hours is added. Pre-school education can be offered to children aged 5-6. PISA 2009 states that less than 25% of Indonesian students reported that they had taken part in pre-primary education for more than a year. Primary school starts from age seven and there are six years of compulsory primary school, three years of (formally) compulsory lower secondary school, LSS, and three years of upper secondary school, USS, divided into one academic stream and one vocational (Arze del Granado, Fengler, Ragatz, & Yavuz, 2007; OECD, 2010e; Sumintono, 2009; Suryadarma, Suryahadi, Sumarto, & Rogers, 2006; Weston, 2008; Zuhdi, 2006).

Enrolment rates vary greatly throughout Indonesia. Data on enrolment rates vary as well. It is often claimed that Indonesia has obtained 100% primary school
enrolment. On the other hand, when enrolment is divided into gross and net, there are discrepancies. Gross enrolment measures all students enrolled in, for example, years 1-6 divided by the number of students in the corresponding age group, i.e. 7-12, which means that students who are over-age due to grade repetition are also included, and enrolment rates of over 100% can be obtained. Net enrolment shows the number of students aged 7-12, enrolled in yr 1-6 in relation to the total number of the population aged 7-12 years. Thus net enrolment in primary school by province in 2006 was below 100% but exceeded 90% in all but three provinces: Irian Jaya Barat (now Papua Barat), Papua and Riau (Weston, 2008, p. 12). The differences between provinces become even greater in relation to enrolment in junior and senior secondary school; 41% in Papua are enrolled in LSS compared to 77% in Yogyakarta, and at USS level 20% in Sulawesi Barat compared to 62% in Yogyakarta. A child from a poor family has 20% lower chance of attending LSS (Arz del Granado, et al., 2007, p. 3). 50% of the poorest quintile of students complete LSS compared to 80% of the richest (Weston, 2008, p. 16). It should be noted that enrolment does not equal attendance or completion.

There are national exams at the end of years 6, 9 and 12. PISA 2009 reports that achievement data are widely used in Indonesia to allocate instructional resources (OECD, 2010e). The assessment has been brought back to the national level, to guarantee fairness (Sumintono, 2009). These are also the crucial points for students to drop out of school. As stated previously, education in Indonesia is formally free, but schools have the right to charge fees. There is also the added cost of uniforms, school books and other materials as well as the loss of potential extra support for the family that influences the decision of sending a child to school or not. Although cost is the main reason for many children not continuing on to lower secondary school, results on the national exam in year six is another contributing factor. Girls and children from Muslim families are also less likely to continue, as are children not living close to a school. Finally, the more employment opportunities there are, the more likely it is that the student will drop out (Suryadarma, Suryahadi, & Sumarto, 2006). To improve chances for children from poor families to continue their schooling, the School Operation Assistance (BOS) program was introduced in 2005; that, in some cases, has made schools abolish fees (Bessell, 2007).

Thus, there are millions of Indonesian school-aged children not attending school, as well as older people not having had the opportunity to go to school. For
that reason, there is an out-of-school program, sometimes called sekolah terbuka, open schools, offering, under more flexible conditions, a Packet A, which is equivalent to the primary school curriculum, and Packet B, which equals lower secondary school. More recently a Packet C, senior secondary school, has been introduced (Jalal, 2001; Weston, 2008).

State and private schools, secular and religious schools, all are to teach the national curriculum set out by the Ministry of National Education. At lower secondary school level, which is the level studied in the present research project, the following subjects are included: religion, civics, Indonesian, mathematics, science, social science, art and culture, physical education and sport, vocational skills and locally decided content (Indonesian National Ministry of Education, 2010).

While there were no questions in the surveys in the present research project directly relating to the curriculum, it was often discussed at meetings in Indonesia. Teachers as well as parents said there had been too many changes to the curriculum too often and that there were too many mandatory subjects included. Repeatedly, it was mentioned that there should be more non-academic content such as information regarding moral conduct, drugs and criminality. There should be a balanced and equal appreciation between intellectual achievement and the development of the student’s attitudes and behaviour.

While students in Finland receive a similar amount of hours per week in the language of instruction (i.e. Finnish or Swedish), the number of hours of Indonesian instruction varies greatly between schools in Indonesia. The average class size is 34 (OECD, 2010e).

5.6. Cultural Values

5.6.1. Finland:

Education is highly valued in Finland. It is considered a means to improve individuals’ lives and each student has a right to succeed and reach their individual optimum. Finns are in general also very content with the way the comprehensive school is working and feel confident that schools are successful in providing relevant knowledge and skills, particularly in all cognitive areas. They are less assured that affective goals such as strengthening self confidence and fostering social skills are
achieved, something that also has been observed in PISA studies. In a Nordic comparative study of attitudes to basic schooling, the Finns were clearly more positive towards the outcomes of their comprehensive school systems than respondents in the other countries (Linnakylä, 2004; Nordic Ministerial Council, 2001; Saarivirta, 2008).

Reading is also traditionally highly valued in Finland. As far back as 1542 the Finnish church reformer Mikael Agricola wrote the first ABC book in Finnish, as reading literacy was a prerequisite for social acceptance. The Church Law of 1686 stated that every young person should be able to read. This led to a literate nation and a nation of readers (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005; Linnakylä, 2004). Finns, for example, proportionately visit libraries and read more books than any other nation (Aho, et al., 2006). Further, the circulation of newspapers and publishing of books proportionately is the highest in the European Union (Linnakylä, 2004).

5.6.2. Indonesia

Indonesia ranks as one of the most corrupt countries in the world (Transparency International, 2009). A study comparing a sample of 50 countries, ranging from high- to low economies, found a significant negative correlation between corruption and educational achievement (Huang, 2008). In another study, Mataram, the area where the present project is conducted, ranked the second most corrupt of the 32 Indonesian districts surveyed. That study also found that increased public spending had no effect on quality of education or school enrolment in highly corrupt areas (Suryadarma, 2008b). Clearly, combating corruption is one very efficient way of improving education performance.

The traditionally authoritarian and collectivist structure of Indonesian society that many have considered explanatory of Indonesian development, has previously been pointed out. A patriarchal societal structure established over centuries, was followed by an oppressive colonial hegemony extending over more than three centuries and thereafter succeeded by two despotic regimes. Naturally, in such top-down power structures, behavioural traits that are rewarded are obedience, conformity and subordination. Thus Indonesians were conditioned not to value a mindset of independence or critical thinking. This became particularly evident under the New Order. In the effort to unite the multitude of ethnic and religious groups, a strong state, national cohesion and allegiance to the state was to be the cement
between the bricks. No critical opposition was allowed in politics or in most social institutions. This policy was implemented harshly and heavy-handedly at the price of many civil liberties. Diverging attitudes would lead to serious repercussions, and therefore many Indonesians developed a strong self-censoring mechanism. As a consequence of this ingrained respect, deference (and often fear) for authority, the legitimacy of the ruler, the boss, and the family head is not questioned and instructions are uncritically carried out (Bjork, 2003, 2004). It can be hypothesised, that this situation, strong power combined with a lack of transparency, also lies at the root of the rampant corruption.

Analysing Indonesia in terms of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions sheds further light on the matter (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In Hofstede’s cultural dimensions model, Indonesia is ranked as a highly collectivist country with strong power distance (Finland is the opposite). This would explain why inequalities based on power relations are acceptable and corruption is more likely. The loyalty belongs to the extended family, the in-group, the “we”. (both Sukarno and Suharto referred to themselves as benevolent fathers of the Indonesian family). Teachers are respected and education is teacher-centred. Maintaining harmony, avoiding confrontation and maintaining face are of utmost importance, therefore a request is rarely turned down with a blunt “no” even if there is no intention of it ever being granted, and a “yes” with a smile does not always mean “yes, I agree” – experiences that can be puzzling to visitors to Indonesia. This may assist us to appreciate the reasons for Sukarno’s unwavering passion for unity-in-freedom and consensus decision making. Further, people in collectivist countries tend to be oral societies and generally read fewer books and newspapers, which is consistent with the situation in Indonesia (Dunbar, 1991; Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Lamoureux, 2003).

This highlights the caution needed in implementation of cross-cultural policy borrowing. There is ample research on policy transfer as an aspect of globalisation, but fewer comparative studies are concerned with analysing policy borrowing from the viewpoint of the receiving stakeholders, in order to understand why they accept and expect a global solution to solve their local problems. One explanation offered is “externalisation”; if a policy is borrowed from another context, the reform is justified and legitimised (this may be the case even when the policy is contested in the context of origin). It is also important to study how a policy transferred from one
location to another is recontextualised, or decontextualised, to fit local conditions, or not (Schriewer, 2006; Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000). This contextual framework helps explain the chaos that developed with the introduction of Western style democracy, without any recontextualisation to the Indonesian context, at the time of independence. A current example of policy borrowing is decentralisation of education and school-based management. It is a concept that is internationally widespread and favoured by the World Bank, among others, as a means to facilitate improved achievement outcomes in Indonesia. However, again, this is (an imposed) policy borrowing that has been neither decontextualised nor recontextualised. Thus this reform is based on the expectation of a total turnaround in Indonesian governance, which traditionally has been strongly centralised. It will face challenges such as requiring educators and teachers to drastically change their attitudes and role perceptions, deeply rooted in a culture at odds with this new policy, and for them to obtain substantial new knowledge and skills. This will be further discussed in section 5.2 on the exosystem.

5.6.3. Valuing education:

It seems safe to assume that if a society does not value education, there will not be an effective education system. It has been established in several surveys cited above, that the Finns do value education highly and that their system is effective. Thus, it is not surprising that 91% of the Finnish parents in the present study said they believed their high school education in general was of a very high standard. However, 66% of Indonesian parents held the same opinion regarding their own education system. This may be interpreted as an expression of the Indonesian desire to be polite, not criticise their superiors and not disturb the harmony. But it also has to be remembered that almost half of the parents in Indonesia have not completed lower secondary schooling (ref. subsection5.11.3.). Even though the number of schools and the number of enrolled students have grown, there has been a constant lack of teachers in general and trained teachers in particular. It also must be remembered that Lombok is one of the least privileged provinces in Indonesia regarding education and health, and suffering a higher rate of poverty and illiteracy (Albrecht, 2005). Thus, compared to their own schooling, parents may well argue that the standards currently are high. There is a difference between the two
language groups; while 76% of Sasak parents, commonly farmers with less education, believe the schooling standards are high, only 58% of parents speaking Bahasa Indonesia agree. It is also doubtful how much ordinary people know about the comparative standard of Indonesian education. When googling “PISA Indonesia” on 28 April 2011, there were two hits relating to the PISA surveys, (following were numerous references to the Kafe Pisa in Jakarta); these two were OECD summaries of Indonesia’s participation in PISA 2006 and 2009. The only information available was the name of the National Project Manager and the two Indonesian representatives on the PISA Governing Board. There was no national report and no links to newspaper articles. Searching the magazine “Kompas” written in Indonesian, it only offers information about the Kafe Pisa. In the Jakarta Post, published in English, there is one communication of opinion on 15 December 2010, shortly after the PISA 2009 release, expressing surprise about the low performance by Indonesian students, and relating that the Finnish success is due to the country’s homogeneity and the simplicity of the language. The writer was a history teacher at an international school. In personal communication with educators as well as others, the PISA surveys were very rarely a known entity.

Similarly, 60% of Indonesian parents believed that most students today leave school with an adequate level of reading literacy. This can be compared with the PISA 2009 evaluation of Indonesian students that more than 50% are not functionally literate. There are significant differences between the language groups though; 70% of the Indonesian speakers are satisfied with standards contrasted to 43% of the Sasaks. This may seem contradictory to the discussion above, where Sasak parents demonstrate a higher belief in the existing education system than Indonesian speakers, but can be explained by the fact that Bahasa Indonesia is the language of instruction, which for the Sasak children would be equivalent to learning not only new content but also new content using a new language. Thus this is an area where Sasak parents have direct experience of being in an unfavourable position. The PISA surveys are also conducted using the official language of instruction, which may affect the Indonesian scores. According to PISA 2009 (OECD, 2010d), 32% of Indonesian students speak a language other than Indonesian at home, thus the results should in reality be compared to a country with 32% immigrant children. It would be of great interest to separate out the PISA test scores from students who speak Indonesian at home to establish their level of reading
proficiency compared to others. In the present study more than half of the students spoke another language at home, mainly Sasak.

However, at the same time about half of the parents expressed the opinion that the standard of education was higher when they went to school and that the standard of reading literacy was higher in their school days. In personal communication it was suggested that many parents believe schooling used to be better because there was more nurturing involved, more of an orientation towards developing students’ moral and ethical conduct, instead of the current stressful, one-sided pressure on students to just pass academic exams. This fits with the emphasis on morals that were prevalent during the Sukarno and Suharto eras. This attitude also fits with the classical Greek ideal, “where morality and good conduct were seen as much more important than learning” (Straume, 2011, p. 230). In meetings with parents they often stressed that the development of good attitudes were as important as the academic progress, and should be equally reported back to the parents. Some parents conveyed disillusion with the current system as they saw no changes in the students even though facilities and equipment were much improved. As to the academic standards of reading literacy, it must also be remembered that as the education system expands, more students from lower socio-economic groups attain higher levels of education, therefore the average results do not easily improve. Actually, in the OECD countries, test scores in international surveys have remained very much unchanged over decades despite increased spending (Carnoy, 2004).

It can be noted that on average 22% of Indonesian parents agree that reading literacy is more important for girls than for boys; that is 13% of Indonesian speaking parents and 34% of Sasaks, which indicates that traditional gender roles are still very much alive in the Sasak culture. In Finland 0% of parents agreed. In this context it can also be pointed out that most parent surveys were completed by the mothers, 75% in Finland, for example, but in Indonesia only 30% of respondents were mothers.

However, even though 60% of Indonesian parents on average (70% Indonesian speakers and 43% Sasak speakers) believe students leave school with an adequate level of reading literacy, still 96% have the opinion that Indonesian instruction needs to be improved (no difference between language groups). The percentage in Finland is 34%. Based on personal communication, this is interpreted
as an awareness that even though the teaching of Indonesian has improved, there is still a long way to go to reach optimal levels.

In the present research study it was found that in today’s society, success is obtainable without good school results. 78% of the Finnish students and 81% of their parents agreed with that, while in Indonesia only 37% of students and 31% of parents (25% Indonesian speakers and 37% Sasak speakers) concurred. In discussions with students in Finland, some argued that success can be many things, not necessarily a professional career requiring higher education. While other studies have confirmed both students’ and parents’ appreciation of education (sections 1.4.1 and 1.4.3), this outcome may indicate a more relaxed attitude and less pressure on academic achievement. In Indonesia on the other hand, parents are often forced to and willing to make sacrifices to enable their children to attend school for as long as possible, in order to give them an opportunity to access what they see as a better life. Therefore, they put pressure on the schools as well as the students. (It has to be remembered that parents who believed less in the value of education may have let their children drop out of school prior to the final year of lower secondary school, constituting the focus group for this study). As will be detailed below, Indonesian principals largely feel they are under constant stress for students at their school to achieve highly, while the principals in Finland report the least pressure of all. In discussions in Indonesia it was often pointed out that exam failures sometimes had the most tragic consequences. This will be explored further below. The finding that more Sasak speaking parents agreed that one can be successful in life without being good at school, may be because they themselves have less education and may believe that there is no need for it in order to work the land. The children are often required to help support the family and therefore drop out early as there may be no financial benefits from extra years of schooling.

The view of not considering schooling necessary for life success may also be sublimation for not being able to afford it. Muji’s story is only one of many. When Muji went to primary school she got up at 4.30am to walk two kilometres to get to school. Later she had to walk for two hours to get to lower secondary school. After school she tended to cattle until it was time to help cook dinner. She was top of her class and wanted to go on studying. However, her family could not afford the school fee, 2 800 000 Indonesian Rupiahs, currently (2011) approximately 300 Australian dollars, which did not include uniform, books or an additional monthly fee. She said
she cried for a week when she understood she had to drop out of school at the age of 15. She moved from her family in Java to avoid being married off and went to Bali to start work as a house maid, earning about AUD 30 per month. She still hopes though that at some stage in the future she will be able to continue her studies ("Mujiati: Bali Housemaid," 2010). Ironically, Muji in a way is one of the lucky ones as she could at least complete lower secondary school.

5.7. Teacher Training

5.7.1. Finland:

As education is highly valued in Finland, so are teachers. The teaching career is one of the most popular choices for high school graduates. Only 10% of applicants to the class teacher programme are accepted, thus attracting the brightest candidates (Välijärvi, Nummenmaa, & Sojakka, 2007). In personal communication it was conveyed that in 2010 in Helsinki, 120 students of 1578 applicants were accepted into class teacher training (7.6%) and 15 out of 380 were accepted to the special needs teacher training (personal communication with Heidi Harju-Luukkainen on 15 February 2011). All teachers must obtain a Masters Degree. Becoming a primary school teacher has the same social standing as becoming a lawyer or a medical doctor (Välijärvi, et al., 2002; Välijärvi, et al., 2007). This professionalism has given birth to a “culture of trust”, simply meaning that the Finns are confident that the highly proficient teachers, in cooperation with principals, parents and the local community, are able to educate their children in an optimal way. This also means that the teachers are trusted to evaluate and assess learning without any national, standardised tests (Aho, et al., 2006; Sahlberg, 2007). However, the culture of trust can only work in a society free of corruption, and according to Transparency International 2009, Finland is one of the least corrupt countries in the world (Sahlberg, 2007; Transparency International, 2009).

In Finland the class teacher works in years 1 – 6. The five-year-long Masters training program is divided between studies in multidisciplinary educational science and content studies of subjects included in the curriculum for years 1 – 6 (Linnakylä, 2004).
Specialist subject teachers teach one or more subjects in grades 7-9. For subject teachers, pedagogy can be part of their degree or studied separately and their studies may take 5-6 years (The Finnish National Board of Education, 2010c).

Special needs teachers obtain a Masters degree in Education with special pedagogy as the main subject. The special pedagogy module can also be added separately to another complete degree (Linnakylä, 2004).

According to the present study, 72% of students in Finland attest to respecting their teachers, 62% believe their parents do, and 91% of parents concur. Thus, the Finnish students expressed the least respect for teachers of all students in the survey. This could be an indication that the respect for teachers in Finland is decreasing, even though teaching is one of the most popular choices for students leaving high school and the competition to be accepted into teacher training programs is fierce. Alternatively, it could be an example of what previously was referred to as a Finnish tendency not to be overly positive (Haapasalo, Välimaa, & Kannas, 2010).

In regards to teacher training, 65% of parents and 4 out of 5 teachers in Finland agree that there is a need for improvement. In light of what has been previously discussed in regards to teacher–student relations, and from personal communication, this probably does not refer to subject and content knowledge, nor pedagogical skills as such, but rather a need for deeper understanding of teenagers and their world today as well as possibly the need for improved skills to communicate with the students.

5.7.2. Indonesia:

The quality of teachers is crucial. Many reports have demonstrated the importance of having the best teachers; the most well known study probably being the McKinsey report, which stated that the quality of an education system can never surpass the quality of its teachers (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 13). As related above, teacher quality has been a longstanding concern in Indonesia. To manage the explosion in the number of schools during the New Order, teachers had to be recruited without considering their level of training or competence. They were also poorly paid in comparison to neighbouring countries (Bessell, 2007; Bjork, 2005). The situation has not improved with many teachers not mastering the basic concepts of the subjects they are teaching and lacking pedagogical skills (Weston, 2008). Since
2005, however, teachers are by law required to have at least four years of post-secondary education, hands-on classroom teaching practice and a teaching certificate showing proficiency in four competencies: pedagogical, professional, personal and social. The goal is that all teachers should be certified by 2015. Teachers who become fully qualified will double their salary (in remote areas it will triple) and on top of that teachers will receive a functional allowance. This is a system-wide reform, affecting every school and teacher in Indonesia (Sumintono, 2009; World Bank, 2007). It is hoped that linking the increased remuneration with raised quality standards will lead to improved student outcomes. However, there are also some reservations. According to the Director General of the Association for Improved Educational Standards and Educators (Peningkatan Mutu Pendidikan dan Tenaga Kependidikan), only 41.7% of all Indonesian teachers so far held the required Bachelor degree (S1) in 2008 (Wijayanto, 2008). Another concern raised is that the increased cost of teacher salaries may lead to decreased spending in other education areas. Further, universities in Indonesia are ranked as low performing, even compared to other universities in the region, so higher formal qualifications will not necessarily automatically generate higher quality teaching and improved student outcomes; a negative correlation has been found in one study (Suryadarma et al., 2006). In addition, the certification process has already been watered down to speed up the process and has been shown to be fraught with fraud; fake documents have been submitted in the portfolio (Sugiharto, 2009; Suryadarma, Suryahadi, Sumarto, et al., 2006; Weston, 2008; World Bank, 2007). This was clearly illustrated in the present study. The intention was to hand out certificates to the Bahasa Indonesia teachers in the participating classes and to the school principals. However, the list of people who had supposedly helped in one way or another and therefore also should be given a certificate became very long indeed.

95% of Indonesian students in the present study say they respect most of their teachers, and 97% believe their parents respect most of their teachers (no significant difference between language groups). 94% of Sasak parents agree but slightly less of the Indonesian speaking parents agree (88%).

In Indonesia, teachers can be respected while at the same time there is an unmistakable awareness that the standards of teacher training need to be improved, as 93% of parents and all teachers expressed this opinion. The problem with unqualified teachers has been a longstanding one which the law on raised
requirements for certified teachers is aiming to remedy. In meetings, parents also pointed out that globalisation and Indonesia’s aspirations to take part in this process, poses new and higher demands on teachers. However, it is revealing that students, when asked about their preferred future career, not once mentioned teaching.

5.8. Cultural homogeneity / heterogeneity

5.8.1. Finland:

So far Finland has been a country of great cultural homogeneity. History has left it an bilingual country with both Finnish and Swedish being official national languages and each group is entitled to receive instruction in their own language with equal resources from pre-school to university. However, the Swedish speaking Finns constitute a minority group of only 6%. The significant difference in responses from Swedish and Finnish speaking students is the subject of a specific analysis in chapter 7. Other very small minority groups are the Samis in Lapland and the Romanis. Non-native students, even though growing in number, still make up only 3% (OECD, 2010d, p. 80). However, this situation is slowly changing, as the number of immigrant students, especially from Russia and Estonia, is slowly increasing. Possibly, this will pose new challenges to the Finnish goal of equal opportunities for all to learn. However, cultural homogeneity does not necessarily facilitate high achievement, even though it is often referred to as a factor underpinning the Finnish success. Multicultural, heterogeneous immigrant countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada are also top performers in the PISA reading literacy surveys and exhibit minimal outcome differences between immigrant and native students (Aho, et al., 2006; Linnakyla, Malin, & Taube, 2004; Linnakylä, et al., 2007; OECD, 2006; Välijärvi, et al., 2002).

5.8.2 Indonesia:

Indonesia is the world’s fourth most populous country, with approximately 238 million inhabitants in 2010 (Statistics Indonesia, 2010). The large majority of the population is Muslim, but there are also smaller groups of Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and others. Although half of the people living in Java are Javanese and Sundanese, there are almost 600 other ethnic groups across the archipelago with distinctive cultures and languages. Bahasa Indonesia was introduced as a national language to
unify the diverse population and is the language of instruction in schools. However, many students still speak another language at home; 32% of the students participating in PISA 2009 did so (OECD, 2010d), as well as 53% of the Lombok students in the present study.

5.9. Summary of the Macro System.

Both Finland and Indonesia have been under foreign rule and had to fight for their independence.

The Finns were able to instigate long-term educational planning and consistency in implementation built on consensus, reached through wide ranging negotiations with all stakeholders. In Indonesia, consensus was for a long time reached by authoritarian and totalitarian measures, stemming from centuries of paternalist tradition.

Both Finland and Indonesia considered education to be the way out of poverty and inequality. Both countries have, nominally, adopted single, comprehensive educational systems, with nine years of compulsory schooling. However, in Finland, basically all schools are state schools, while in Indonesia there is a mix of state schools, religious schools and other independent schools. Secular schools are overseen by the Ministry of Education and Islamic schools by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This division in government has led to the two tracks operating independently, each one guided by their own distinct overarching goals. In Finland schooling is free, including books, a cooked lunch, medical and dental care, social and career guidance and transport if needed. Special and immediate attention is paid to students who show signs of falling behind. There is great equity, i.e. very small differences between schools. In Indonesia there are still school fees of various degrees to be paid, which often excludes students from poor families, particularly barring them from continuing to lower secondary school. Thus there are millions of school-aged children not even attending school. There is low equity and low equality. Often students from poor families, who obtain low results in the year six exam, are not accepted to further studies by a state school but have to, if finances permit, attend a private school of lower quality. More affluent families who can pay higher school fees can choose a highly reputable school.

In Finland there is no great competition between schools through the years of compulsory schooling. There are no national, standardised tests, but the individual
teacher is trusted with assessment. There seems to be a more holistic attitude, valuing all qualities in a student, not only academic achievement. The education culture in Indonesia is competitive and test-oriented, with particular focus on the high stakes national exams. Many parents in the present study expressed concern about this situation and advocated a broader scope of evaluation and appreciation.

The impact of globalisation has in both countries led to a shift from highly centralised to local governance.

Finland is traditionally a country of readers, while Indonesia embraces an oral culture.

Many of the Indonesian students do not speak the language of instruction, Indonesian, at home. In the present study, 53% of students spoke a local language, mainly Sasak, which clearly must affect achievement outcomes. Logically, the Sasak parents are particularly unsatisfied with the level of reading literacy students obtain in school.

Teachers in Finland are highly valued; their status is high, the competition to get accepted into teacher training is severe and only the brightest and most motivated candidates are accepted. They are extremely highly qualified, used to working autonomously and take great pride in their professional identity as pedagogical experts. In Indonesia, for decades education has been seen as a tool for unification and nation building and has had a focus on moral character building. Teachers are civil servants, traditionally rewarded for loyalty and obedience to the state and to their superiors. Teacher training has been inferior and content knowledge as well as pedagogical skills are often lacking. Basically, all parents and teachers agreed in the present study that there was a need for improvement of the teacher training program, despite the present certification push. Recent legislation has raised formal requirements for teacher qualifications. However, whether this will remain a nominal change or translate into improved proficiency levels can be questioned as standards of tertiary education are equally low. Already the certification process has been watered down and fraught with fraud and corruption. Studies have shown a significant negative correlation between corruption and achievement outcomes thus combating corruption would be an effective way of improving performance. Efforts are certainly made but this is not an easy task, Indonesia being one of the world’s most corrupt countries.
5.10. The Exosystem:

5.10.1. Introduction:

The exosystem encompasses the linkage and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not ordinarily contain the developing person, but in which events occur that influence processes within the immediate setting that does contain that person (Bronfenbrenner, 2005c, p. 148).

Examples of exosystems are parents’ social networks, parents’ workplace, a teacher’s home life et cetera.

However, the aspect of the exosystem that will be discussed here is the functioning of decentralised governance of education in Finland and Indonesia. The reason for this is that the efficient implementation of decentralisation policies greatly impact on school performance and student achievement outcomes.

As discussed in Chapter 2, education is affected by globalisation and neoliberalism by way of decentralisation and privatisation, choice and accountability, testing and assessment (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). Decentralisation of education governance is implemented throughout the world, in developed as well as developing countries. Generally, what is implied is a transfer of power from one level to a lower level, but as to what issues, to what extent and to what level, has to be defined in each case (Sumintono, 2009). One common reason for decentralisation is that governments are under pressure to limit budgets and show efficiency with the use of taxpayers’ money, thus central spending in areas such as education is being reduced; funding has been decentralised and governance has been transferred to local communities (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; A. Green, 1999; Grek, 2009). Other proponents have pointed to the variety of local needs and argued that only local decision makers would know how to effectively use funds and implement local curricula, in the process mediating improved achievement outcomes as well as lower attrition rates. Decentralisation has been considered a way of broadening democratic involvement in the decision process and increasing commitment to local schooling as well as to dispersing tension between disparate regions within a nation state (Bjork, 2004; Sumintono, 2009). It has been suggested as a means for conflict management
and saving the central government from making unpopular decisions (Risto Rinne, et al., 2002; Weiler, 1989). Even though the decentralisation process largely has been considered a positive in developed and developing countries alike, cautions have also been voiced, particularly relating to equality and equity issues, which will be discussed further in the following sub section (Bjork, 2004; Prud'homme, 1995).

In the remainder of this section concerning the exosystem, decentralisation will be examined in relation to school funding, local curriculum implementation, school choice, and accountability.

5.10.2. Finland:

When the comprehensive school was introduced in the 1970s, all aspects of education were under strong central governance in order to ensure that an equal system encompassing regional and social equality was consistently implemented throughout the country. There were detailed rules about teaching methods, text books had to be approved by the national Board of Education, and schools were regularly inspected. Over time there was a shift towards centralised steering with localised implementation and certain powers were devolved in the 80s and 90, purportedly for reasons of equity. When the comprehensive school system was first implemented, equity was understood as an equal access to education. Later this evolved into an equal right for all children to obtain a successful education, tailored to their individual needs, and to fulfil this aim, decentralisation of governance was considered essential. The highly qualified school leaders and teachers also requested more independence – responsibility requires authority (Aho, et al., 2006; Halinen & Järvinen, 2008; Linnakylä, 2004).

Others believe the shift in governance was motivated by financial reasons. Bureaucracies are expensive and Finland was hit extremely hard by the economic depression in the early 1990s; unemployment, for example, increased from 3% to almost 20%. This economic crisis, coupled with Finland becoming a member of the European Union, was seen to create a greater susceptibility to neo-liberal concepts such as decentralisation. Hard economic decisions like the prioritising of necessary cuts of up to 20% of the per pupil cost, were transferred to the local level, to be solved in a way that each and every municipality considered practical. Despite decreased spending, the achievement outcomes of Finnish students continued to improve (Aho, et al., 2006; R. Rinne, 2000; Risto Rinne, et al., 2002).
There is a single system of education, a nine-year comprehensive school. All education is publicly funded - currently 66% of calculated costs for basic schooling are covered by the municipalities and the government transfers the remaining 34%. The municipalities can decide if, and to what extent, they want to delegate the budgetary responsibilities to schools (Finnish National Board of Education; Eurydice Unit, 2010; The Finnish National Board of Education, 2010b).

The National Board of Education is responsible for the core curriculum which includes core subjects and minimum teaching hours; goals and core content of each subject are set out as well as principles for student assessment, special needs education, student welfare and educational guidance. During the first six years, subjects taught are the same, but focus on particular subjects can vary between schools due to the flexible time allocation. In learning the mother tongue, for example, the minimum number of hours per week, for years 3-5 is 14. This could mean that one municipality decides to allocate five hours per week to year three, five hours per week to year four and four hours per week to year five, a total of 14 hours. Another municipality may theoretically allocate six hours per week to year three, four hours per week to year four and five, also a total of 14 hours. Some wealthier municipalities may also decide to add to the minimum requirements, and, for example, allocate one extra hour per week, i.e. 15 hours per week for years 3-5 and decide to divide them evenly, i.e. five hours per week in each grade. During years 7 - 9, there are also elective subject options (Linnakylä, 2004; The Finnish National Board of Education, 2010b).

Within the framework of the national core curriculum, local school based curricula are designed in order to meet the local and diverse needs of a heterogeneous group of students. Everyone has the right to become a successful student, thus the curriculum must be broad, valuing individual growth and creativity as well as knowledge and skills. Further, there must be early detection and intervention in regards to special needs, particularly literacy and numeracy problems. A diversity of pedagogical strategies is also required. The current core curriculum, implemented in 2006, stresses the active role of the student, but the teachers can choose what instructional methods and text books to use to reach the goals of the curriculum (Aho, et al., 2006; Halinen & Järvinen, 2008; Linnakylä, 2004; Savolainen, 2009).
The decentralisation and introduction of school based curricula has led to schools profiling themselves and attracting students from outside their regular catchment area. However, students living close to a school have to be offered a place before other students can be accepted (Linnakylä, 2004; The Finnish National Board of Education, 2010b).

Decentralisation is normally coupled with a system of nationwide, standardised tests. In Finland there are no such tests whatsoever. The Finns are confident that the highly proficient teachers are able to educate their children in an optimal way, previously referred to as the Culture of Trust. This also means that the teachers are trusted to independently evaluate and assess learning - students are certainly tested, but assessed in relation to their individual progress not against rigid norms or other students. Assessment is considered a tool in the learning process. Students are also encouraged to self evaluate their progress. Further, teachers, schools and municipalities are required to annually evaluate their performance. There are also samples of schools tested for quality control. Advocates of the testing culture may criticize this “intelligent accountability” as being not sufficiently transparent; however, the Finns believe this system generates not only higher performance, but also broader and more genuine learning outcomes (Aho, et al., 2006; Risto Rinne, et al., 2002; Sahlberg, 2006a, 2007; Sahlberg & Oldroyd, 2010).

There have been concerns raised about the long term effects of decentralisation. Local curricula and the profiling of schools, competing with each other to attract students, can lead to some schools being considered “good” and others “bad”. “Good” schools would attract better teachers and more high achieving students, thus increasing differences between schools in regards to opportunities as well as achievement - a paradoxical negation of the equality aims that guided the introduction of the comprehensive school. So far this has not eventuated to a large extent in Finland. However, national assessments have shown increased differences between schools and students, findings that were confirmed in the latest PISA survey where the correlation between socio-economic background and performance in reading literacy had slightly increased. Although these changes were very small and should not be dramatised - the equity in Finland is still higher than in most other countries – so neither should they be ignored (Linnakylä, 2004; OECD, 2010c; R. Rinne, 2000).
5.10.3. Indonesia

When Indonesia attained independence in 1945, the literacy rate was 6% (Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006). Both Sukarno and Suharto considered education essential in the building of the nation, and a massive effort was put in particularly during the 1970s and 80s. However, there was a serious shortage of qualified teachers and few people who knew how to run schools, thus an education system had to be built from scratch. Due to the large amount of unqualified educators, the system was extremely centralised and top-down governed, “teacher proofed”, with detailed rules and regulations for teachers to follow. This was a role that teachers were used to and comfortable with. They were trained to be first and foremost public servants with the duty of implementing government policies, which in this case meant making sure that students learnt to embrace the Indonesian “family” and Pancasila, rather than seeing themselves as teachers with a responsibility for their students’ academic development (Bjork, 2003, 2004, 2005; Sumintono, 2009). Thus, even though participation in schooling in Indonesia has increased immensely, achievement outcomes and functional literacy levels are still low. In PISA, level 2 is considered a base line for active and effective participation in modern life; however, more than 50% of Indonesian students currently perform below this level, with level 1a being the most common highest level of proficiency (OECD, 2010f, p. 52).

Indonesia was extremely hard hit by the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, leading to mass unemployment and gigantic inflation. This in turn initiated public anger and demonstrations to such a degree that eventually Suharto was forced to step down. Particularly students, who had grown up taking economic development for granted, were now calling for a democratic society, together with regional leaders demanding autonomy. Decentralisation was seen as part of that process as it would involve people at the local level in the decision-making process. It would also save money in the state budget and shift responsibility for funding together with many hard economic decisions to local authorities which, according to the neo-liberal economic theory, would increase efficient use of resources (Bjork, 2005; Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006; Sumintono, 2009).

Concurrently, international aid organisations, particularly the World Bank, pushed for decentralisation and school based management as a means to improve Indonesian students’ dismal academic performance. Thus the system had to be turned upside down, and all partakers, at all levels, were required to re-evaluate their
roles and responsibilities. The decentralisation process involved two main areas; funding and curriculum design (Behrman, Deolalikar, & Soon, 2002; Bjork, 2005; Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006).

With decentralisation, the local governments became responsible for providing education, even though the central government still contributes financially, thus funding comes from a variety of sources. Natural resource revenues are shared between the local and central governments, but to a hugely varying degree, between 15% and 80% is reallocated to the district level, which naturally creates regional imbalances with areas rich in natural resources benefiting strongly. There is also a general funds allocation, dana alokasi umum, DAU, based on the population and size of an area as well as on income levels and the existence of natural resources, and funding for particular purposes, such as education, dana alokasi khusus, DAK. Therefore, the financial basis for provision of education varied enormously between schools and areas, leading to great inequity (Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006; Suharyo, 2006). Both DAU and DAK are transferred to the districts, for them to use as they see fit without any obligation to report how the money has been spent. Thus there is a lack of transparency and accountability, creating increased vulnerability to corrupt practices. Costs for schooling increased after decentralisation, in some cases as much as six times. Taking this into consideration as well as the vast differences between regions, it has been argued that the decentralised system has increased inequity and further barred poor and rural students from their rightful education (Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006; Suryadarma, 2008b; Toi, 2010). Vagueness in the formulation of the steering documents, thus not providing clear guidelines, and the ignorance and unpreparedness of local administrators and politicians have also been considered reasons underpinning inconsistencies and inefficiencies in implementation as well as misallocation and misuse of resources. While central authorities initiated and promoted decentralisation, there was no follow up regarding if and how the policies were translated into local practice (Bjork, 2004; Sumintono, 2009; Weston, 2008).

To better the situation, particularly for children from poor families, in 2005 the government introduced the BOS, bantuan operasional sekolah, funding to cover schools’ operational costs. It has in some cases been used to exempt children from less well off homes from paying fees, but most families have benefitted equally. BOS was also intended to support school based management, as a means to increased
community involvement as well as transparency and accountability. Therefore, schools that want to be part of the scheme are required to provide detailed school budgets followed by accounts showing money has been spent in accordance with stated guidelines. Many schools have found this a difficult and daunting task due to inexperience. Often costs also had to be tweaked to fit in with what was allowed under the guidelines. As neither the budget nor the accounting report were generally circulated to teachers and parents, accountability and transparency remained low (Suharyo, 2006). The Suharyo report was compiled shortly after the inception of BOS. But the situation seems to be largely unchanged (Fitriah, 2010). The introduction of BOS, and the increasing amounts, led in some instances to the impression that schooling now should be free of cost (Fitriah, 2010; Suharyo, 2006).

Formally, fees for public primary schools were abolished already in 1977 and for lower secondary schools in 1994 (Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006). However, MoNE research has shown that the amount of money allocated to schools is insufficient to cover operational costs. At primary school level, schools receive 400,000 rupiah per student compared to an estimated need of 1,800,000, and at lower secondary school level the allocation is 575,000 against the estimated need of 2,700,000. Large amounts have also been siphoned off due to corruption (Fitriah, 2010, pp. 77-78).

Nevertheless, some local governments decided to discontinue their financial contributions to schools, as they were under the impression that BOS governmental funding now should cover all necessary expenses. Thus, in some schools where fees were abolished, there was concern that the quality of education would be lowered, as, for example, extracurricular activities had to be cancelled for financial reasons (Fitriah, 2010). However, in PISA 2009 Indonesian principals reported an abundance of extracurricular activities offered by schools, with the three most frequent ones being sporting teams or sporting activities, offered by 96% of schools (Finland 71%); volunteering or service activities 91% (Finland 34%); and art club or art activities 65% (Finland 33%). The three most frequent options in Finland were collaboration with the local library 82% (Indonesia 30%); band, orchestra, choir 77% (Indonesia 52%); and collaboration with the local newspaper 74% (Indonesia 40%). Interestingly, only 9% of schools in Finland offer a book club compared to a reported 15% in Indonesia (OECD, 2010a, school questionnaire, Q13). In short, cost and quality of education in Indonesia still largely depends on how much local...
authorities and businesses as well as families are prepared to, and sometimes allowed to contribute (Fitriah, 2010; Suharyo, 2006).

School facilities impact on student performance; only 44% of primary school classrooms meet the minimum standards set by the Ministry of National Education. Buildings are deteriorating (Arze del Granado, et al., 2007). Even sanitary conditions being unsatisfactory have an effect on achievement - girls perform better in schools where there is a functioning toilet (Suryadarma, Suryahadi, Sumarto, et al., 2006). Modern equipment is often missing, a fact that many Indonesian principals consistently argued in PISA surveys was hindering effective teaching, even though PISA has found the relation between investment and performance is weak; of main central importance is not how many resources there are, but how efficiently they are used (OECD, 2010e). However, it also happens that the equipment is available, but is not used because no one knows how to use it. In one instance laboratory equipment was not even unpacked, as it was considered too valuable to use, in case it would get broken (personal communication with U.Waluyo, September 2009).

While the National Ministry of Education is responsible for overall planning, such as what subjects should be taught at various levels, responsibility for implementation is vested at the local level. One of the explicit goals for the decentralisation process was to improve the quality of education and student achievement outcomes (Sumintono, 2009). The curriculum reform was seen as one way to reach that objective. The competence based curriculum that was introduced in 2004 gave schools the freedom to develop their own curriculum and develop these competencies in accordance with local conditions and requirements as well as adding subjects to meet particular local needs (Indonesian National Ministry of Education, 2010; Sumintono, 2009; Weston, 2008). Unfortunately, this did not have the desired effect for several reasons. It has been said that to lift achievement levels, the curriculum has to be made more demanding and taught by competent teachers who believe that all students can learn (Carnoy, 2004). The competence based curriculum reform had to be quickly revised as it was too demanding for the Indonesian context (Sumintono, 2009). Teachers did not believe all students could learn, thus often when they failed, students had to take the whole blame (Bjork, 2005). The changes in the curriculum were superficial, wordings were different, but the content remained basically the same. The local content components were implemented in various, but often not very useful ways. Schools in Sumatra, for
example, taught students how to write the Malay language using Arabic characters (Weston, 2008, p. 22). Bjork (2005) came to the same conclusions when in the late 1990s he studied the first trial of Local Content Curriculum.

Generally, teachers around the world embrace being given freedom and responsibility (Bjork, 2004). This was not the situation in Indonesia. As stated previously, traditionally the Indonesian culture is hierarchical and authoritarian. During the Sukarno and Suharto era, it was emphasized to teachers that their primary responsibility was to the state and to uncritically and unquestioningly implement governmental policies while pedagogical skills were not valued. A main motivation to become a teacher in Indonesia is job security, while many Western teachers say they chose the career because they wanted to make a difference in children’s lives. An Indonesian teacher identifies with being a public servant, not a professional, pedagogical expert (Bjork, 2003, 2005). This was the context for the school based management reform. Overnight, without any incentives or particular support, teachers were supposed to be independent and creative, critical and questioning, student centred and inspirational. From having followed orders they were now to shape policy and decide practice. The difference between the teacher role that had been integrated over decades and the teacher role now expected was massive (Bjork, 2003, 2005).

The curriculum formally changed but assessment remained unchanged. The multiple choice format is mainly utilised; there are no requirements for students to express themselves, be creative, demonstrate problem solving skills or higher order thinking. There are twice-yearly tests in every grade. The national exams at the end of year six and nine are taken very seriously as they decide if, and to what school the student can progress (Behrman, et al., 2002). It is a matter of pass or fail, without any pedagogical or diagnostic aspects. Schools are also measured as to how well the students do on exams, therefore teachers certainly teach to the test, and months are spent in preparation (Weston, 2008).

In summary, it can be said that Indonesia’s decision to decentralise education was driven by global trends and pushed by financial circumstances and international aid organisations such as the World Bank. It was a decision that was taken at the macro level without acceptance or involvement by the local educators who were supposed to implement the reform. It is a model that is very foreign to Indonesian
culture and very possibly not suitable but rather illustrates how model borrowing across cultures has to be implemented with great care.

5.10.4. Summary of the exosystem.

Both Finland and Indonesia were struck harder than their neighbours by economic recessions in the 1980s and 90s. Thereafter, both countries abandoned their strongly centralised systems in favour of decentralised governance. Allocation of funding is managed and school-based curricula are designed and implemented at the local level.

In Finland, educators were involved in and prepared for the reform. Teachers with research based Masters training were well equipped to design curricula and used to working independently. They considered themselves, and were considered by others to be pedagogical experts (Linnakylä, 2004). Finland is consistently ranked one of the world’s most transparent countries (Transparency International, 2009). Students are assessed in the classroom by their teachers; no national standardised tests are used. Assessment is based on pedagogical considerations with a view to turning every student into a successful student (Sahlberg, 2007).

In Indonesia the decision of decentralised governance was taken at the central, macro level. There were introductory workshops, but implementation of new policies was not followed up, thus educators at the local level were often neither involved, nor prepared. Local politicians and administrators were ignorant about education matters (Sumintono, 2009). Teachers were badly educated. They identified themselves as public servants who follow orders implementing government policies and often lacked both subject knowledge and pedagogical skills (Bjork, 2005; Weston, 2008). Indonesia is one of the world’s most corrupt countries which correlates negatively with achievement outcomes (Transparency International, 2009). Assessment is test centred; the use of multiple choice questions favours basic rote learning rather than higher order thinking. The exams are high stakes tests, teachers teach to the test and substantial time is spent on test preparation (Weston, 2008).

Decentralisation has spread across the globe despite there being very little evidence of the benefits, particularly not in developing countries. On the contrary, decentralised governance of education has been linked to increased inequity and increasing inequality between schools and students, which has occurred in both
Finland and Indonesia (Carnoy, 2004; Cusso & D’Amico, 2005; Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006).

Decentralisation of education is a panacea that has been implemented in totally different circumstances, without prior analysis of cultural, political and social context (Bjork, 2005). While the Finnish context is favourable, it seems rather unlikely that the concept will work in Indonesia within a realistic timeframe.

5.11. The Mesosystem.

5.11.1. Introduction:

A mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person. *Special attention is focused on the synergistic effects created by the interaction of developmentally instigative or inhibitory features and processes present in each setting* (italics in original; Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 22).

Typical interactions in the mesosystems for a student could be a family gathering or the coming-together of two divorced parents; a parent visiting school and talking with his teacher, two friends of a student meeting – one he trains kickboxing with, the other is a member of his church. Thus a mesosystem is a combination of microsystems. The mesosystem focused on in this section is the relationship between parents and schools, as that has been seen as a factor commonly underpinning high performance (see e.g. Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000) and, following from the definition above, how congruent values and attitudes in the two settings are.

5.11.2. Finland

Decentralisation of the education system was partly motivated by a desire for increased local input in decision making, and the Basic Education Act indeed requires parents to be involved in local development (The Finnish National Board of Education, 2005). The “Culture of Trust” is based on the belief that teachers together with parents can instigate and implement optimal teaching and learning (Dall, 2010a). It is well documented that Finnish parents have a positive attitude towards
schooling and towards cooperation between school and home. However, this is not always followed through by personal action. Cooperation is often interpreted as a division of responsibilities; the school for teaching and the home for upbringing (Haapasalo, et al., 2010; Räty, Kasanen, & Laine, 2009).

The most common form of parental involvement is attendance at meetings at school, either school functions or parent-teacher meetings. Räty et al. (2009), for example, conducted a study that showed 85% of participants, more women than men, claimed to always or almost always attend parent evenings. However, the participants in that study were either vocationally or academically educated and the children were young, attending year five. Sometimes performance discussions take place, where a student’s progress is outlined with a view to depict growth in relation to the individual’s previous level of performance and stated goals. According to PISA 2006 only 15% of Finnish students attend schools where parents are informed of their child’s performance in relation to other students at the same school (compared to 98% in Indonesia), and 16% are compared to students in other schools, contrasted to 74% in Indonesia (Dall, 2010b; OECD, 2007b; The Finnish National Board of Education, 2005). This demonstrates that Finnish students are, as stated previously, assessed in relation to their own capabilities while there is a high level of competition in the Indonesian education culture.

In the present study, 78% of Finnish parents say they are rarely or never contacted informally by teachers. About two-thirds of all parents agree that there is a formal meeting between teachers and parents once or twice a year in which 63% of parents state that they rarely or never attend. 78% of Finnish parents are not at all active in the parents’ association.

However, in Finland, it is very common for schools, parents and students to communicate via a particular internet portal; in Helsinki, for example, it is called WILMA (City of Helsinki Education Department, 2011). All users have their individual passwords to access the system. Teachers post grades, absences, comments on students’ behaviour; the headmaster/mistress can send information bulletins; parents can notify the school of a need for absence and follow their child’s school life and students can communicate with teachers as required outside school hours. In the present study a majority of Finnish parents agreed that communication between school and home is mainly taking place via the internet, using interactive, online communication systems, which means that discussions about a student’s progress,
or particular concerns on the part of a teacher, a parent, or the student, can be instantly conducted and acted on. Thus, it may well be that there is more effective communication between Finnish schools and parents than in most other countries.

There is no legislation detailing how schools should be managed apart from stating that there should be a headmaster in charge. Thus, comprehensive schools may have school boards or cooperation committees, where parents are represented (Räty, et al., 2009; The Finnish National Board of Education, 2005). However, the interest from parents to participate has proven rather low (Räty, et al., 2009).

Generally, mothers with higher education tended to be more actively involved in school matters (Räty, et al., 2009). This is a finding supported by other studies, confirming the link between parental involvement and higher socio-economic status (Teddlie, Stringfield, & Reynolds, 2000).

On the other hand, several research projects, for example, a nationwide study organised by the National Board of Education, have demonstrated involvement by parents in curricular work and assessment guidelines at most primary schools. It appears though that participation wanes from year seven (The Finnish National Board of Education, 2005).

Parental involvement is generally considered a factor underpinning high performance in effective schools (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). However, in Finland the teachers are used to being autonomous and independent in their work and too much direct interference may not be appreciated; the home is supposed to support school work and facilitate student performance. Similarly, the parents are used to trusting the teachers with the teaching and they take responsibility for the student’s upbringing in home and family (Räty, et al., 2009). Thus, Finns believe that subject learning should be left to the school and parents should do other activities with their children in their free time (Lloyd, 2011). Consequently, almost 80% of principals in Finland reported that there was no pressure from parents in regards to high academic standards (OECD, 2007b). This can be compared to the situation in, for example, other top PISA performers such as Japan and Korea, where students (and consequently parents and teachers) are under constant, great stress to achieve highly and therefore private tutoring as a complement to normal schooling is traditional (Chung, 2010). This again highlights the dilemma with surveys such as PISA evaluating the effectiveness of national education systems simply by aggregated scores without considering the cultural context. If students spend as
much time in extra private tutoring as they do in regular schooling, how can high performance be evidence of an effective education system?

Parental participation in homework is another factor that may link school and home and also facilitate higher achievement outcomes (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). PISA supports this claim, demonstrating that students whose parents are engaged in their schooling and homework and frequently read to them, who often discuss political, social and cultural issues and/or regularly have the main meal with them, perform at a significantly higher level, even accounting for SES differences (OECD, 2010d). In the present study, 6% of Finnish students say their parents often help with homework, 38% say occasionally. These figures are the lowest compared to the other countries. However, Finnish students spend fewer hours in school and less hours doing homework than students in other OECD countries (Aho, et al., 2006). In one survey 24% of (highly educated) parents said that they always helped their child prepare for tests, and another 51% said fairly often (Räty, et al., 2009). In another, 53% of students (year nine) said their parents were willing to help with homework (Haapasalo, et al., 2010). It may well be that there is less need for Finnish parents than others to assist with homework.

Nowadays, parental involvement also includes a limited possibility of choice of school. Traditionally, students attend the school closest to where they live, and still the students living in the local area always take precedence before others. However, if there is capacity left, students from other areas can be accepted. This is a system that has been widely debated in Finland and concerns have been raised over the creation of an educational market and compromising equity. PISA 2009 supported this concern while establishing that school choice and competition generally led to higher segregation and lower equity. The majority of children in Finland still attend their local school, particularly through year one to six. The choice is mainly taken advantage of by parents with a higher education in the largest cities, and children attending year seven to nine. (OECD, 2010e; Risto Rinne, et al., 2002; Räty, et al., 2009; The Finnish National Board of Education, 2005).

5.11.3. Indonesia

As pointed out above, parental and community involvement in education has been shown to have positive effects, even though different forms of engagement can work to a varying degree in various situations. Community and parents setting high
expectations of educational standards and parents’ engagement with students in their out of school activities, such as homework, seem to be of particular importance (van der Werf, Creemers, & Guldemond, 2001). Thus PISA 2006 measured principals’ perceptions of parents’ expectations and found that in Indonesia 23% of students attended schools where principals reported constant pressure from many parents to set high academic standards and for students to achieve them, 60% experienced pressure from a minority of parents and 16% found pressure from parents largely absent. As described above, Finnish principals rarely experience this pressure (OECD, 2007b, p. 234; fig 5.7). Thus Indonesian principals experience a lot of pressure from parents, while in Finland parental pressure is largely absent and the reported percentage in Finland is the lowest reported by principals in all countries.

This may again be explained by the Finnish Culture of Trust; schools are trusted to educate students in an optimal way, and results clearly show that they do, which is why no pressure is necessary. It may also be due to Indonesian parents, paying fees, often with difficulty and thus needing to make sure they get value for money.

This positive correlation of parental involvement is thought to be possibly even greater in developing countries. A large scale study was conducted in 1996 – 1997 within the Primary Education Quality Improvement Project in Indonesia (the PEQIP project), where the effects of parental involvement were compared to other improvement strategies as reflected in pre- and post intervention test results. The study stated that there were hardly any empirical data from previous studies of parental engagement. This study itself showed that a rather low level of parental involvement was actually achieved; nevertheless only teacher development was more effective. The researchers argued that more research is needed into what type of involvement creates positive results in what situation, as this study established a positive correlation between voluntary work and Bahasa Indonesia, not maths or science, while on the other hand help with homework underpinned improved scores in mathematics. However, when comparing costs involved, parental engagement proved by far the most cost-effective strategy (van der Werf, et al., 2001). Other studies have more strongly ascertained the positive effect of parental involvement in the home, in, for example, help with homework, but found no clear link for parental in-school engagement (Finn, 1998).
In a survey conducted in 2000, 75% of public schools and 50% of private schools in Indonesia stated that they believed an empowerment of parents would enhance the quality of the school (Behrman, et al., 2002).

When the decentralisation process was implemented in 2002, part of the reason was an aspiration to democratise the country by engaging more people to take part in decision making processes. Thus, Indonesian parents’ right, and responsibility, to be involved in educational matters was made into law in a decree from the Ministry of National Education, MoNE, in 2002, which stated that there should be education councils formed at district level and school committees should be formed locally. Further, in the latest law on national education, 20/2003, School Based Management, SBM, and School Committees, SC, are emphasized as means to increase active community involvement in order to improve transparency, quality, equity and efficiency in education, leading to improved achievement outcomes. The areas of responsibility for the SCs are quite wide-ranging, including resourcing and financial matters as well as planning and evaluating the educational process (Fitriah, 2010; Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006; Sumintono, 2009).

Even though decentralisation has been implemented worldwide, there is no clear evidence that it is a system that works in developing, traditional and authoritarian societies (Carnoy, 2004; Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006). As has been pointed out previously, the Indonesian society is traditionally hierarchical. Just as teachers had never before been invited to voice an opinion, but rather have been rewarded for following orders, parents were equally unaccustomed to being heard (Bjork, 2003, 2005). Commonly, they were also lacking the educational background and the knowledge required to have an impact. Therefore, the headmaster often came to dominate the work of the committee, particularly as he had access to all information and could choose what to withhold and what to present. Consequently, in many cases parents were not even aware that there was a SC at their child’s school (Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006). Further, the rushed implementation of decentralisation and the ambiguity in legislation regarding roles and functions led to confusion and unpreparedness at the local level. Sumintono (2009), for example, argued that decentralisation of education had not led to increased community participation and that SCs in reality mainly served in an advisory capacity. Another study suggested that even though SCs were established at practically all schools, many were inactive and the level of scepticism as to what could be achieved was
high. A qualitative study of two schools, found that there was only the one annual parents' evening organised to give parents information about the school's financial status and to discuss parents' financial contributions to the proposed school budget. It also established that the less parents had to contribute financially, the less they became involved in school matters (Fitriah, 2010).

The BOS, bantuan operasional sekolah, the school operational assistance program was introduced in 2005 to support school-based management and thus increase democracy, transparency and public accountability through increased community involvement. It was also intended to alleviate the burden of paying school fees, particularly for poor families, with a view to decrease student attrition. Parental involvement was to be channelled through the aforementioned SC. There are many detailed instructions regarding how the election of a SC should be carried out, but despite this there are many examples of SC chairpersons being designated by the principal and parents not even being aware of the existence of a SC. The regulations of the BOS required a school budget to be prepared by the headmaster, the treasurer and the SC chair. The budget should be widely discussed before being submitted with the BOS application. Further, regular accounting reports of how money was spent should be prepared and circulated among parents and teachers. These requirements of transparency and accountability often proved not to be acted on; rather the headmaster prepared the budget as well as the reconciliation on his own and the documents were then formally rubberstamped by the SC chairperson prior to submission (Suharyo, 2006; Weston, 2008). There are also reports of widespread corruption in the (mis)use of funds, and threats to parents in SCs who do not want to go along with this, as well as long delays in the distribution of funds (Jakarta Post, 2011; Voice of America, 2011).

In PISA 2009, parent groups in Indonesia were reported to have a direct influence on budgeting by 57% of principals (Finland 3%), 1% on staffing (Finland 1%) and 8% (Finland 22%) on instructional content (OECD, 2010a; school questionnaire, Q25). However, these data must be read with the caveat that in Indonesia, parents' financial contributions to the school are considered as active involvement.

The World Bank, which actively promoted the implementation of decentralisation, states that School Based Management has increased parents' engagement and changed the role of teachers. Further, the BOS has vitally
increased school attendance by children from poor families. Moreover, it is stated, school staff and school committees decide how to use available funds and full accountability is assured (World Bank, 2010).

Every five years, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, IEA, conducts a study in policy and practices and associated trends in reading literacy achievement, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study. Principals, teachers, parents and students in year four are surveyed. The last report from the 2006 study found the home – school involvement in Indonesia to be exceptionally low. This was based on:

principals’ responses to seven questions, including four questions about frequency of communication from the school to the home (teacher-parent conferences; letters, newsletters, etc., sent home; written reports of child’s performance; events at school to which parents are invited) and three questions about the percentage of students with parents who participate in the life of the school (volunteer regularly to help in the classroom or school; attend teacher-parent conferences; attend cultural, sporting, or social events at the school) (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007, p. 264).

This study also reported that 46% of Indonesian students had parents who had not completed lower secondary education (Mullis, et al., 2007, p. 119). Thus, it may be very difficult for them to help their children with their homework. In the present study, 16% of Indonesian speaking students affirm their parents help often, only 5% of Sasak children say the same, and conversely, only 9% of Indonesian speaking students say their parents never help, compared to 32% of Sasaks, which may indicate these parents possess less cultural capital.

In the present study, 60% of Indonesian speaking parents and 76% of Sasak speaking parents say they are rarely, or are never contacted informally by teachers. About two-thirds of all parents agree that there is a formal meeting between teachers and parents once or twice a year, of which 51% of Sasak parents and 39% of Indonesian speaking parents state that they rarely, or never attend. 48% of the Indonesian speaking and only 24% of the Sasak speaking parents say they are not at all active in the parents’ association. Thus, it seems that Indonesian speaking parents have slightly more contact with teachers, but Sasak parents are more active
in the parent association. As established in the previous section, simply making a financial contribution to the school can be interpreted as parental involvement. However, from meetings with parents in 2009 it was evident that they do want to be more involved in school matters, and they expressed a desire for increased transparency in planning and budgeting as well as more communication regarding their children’s academic, as well as non-academic development.

However, interaction between school and community can also be studied in the opposite direction. Another IEA survey, the Civic survey, found that a much larger number of teachers in Indonesia, compared to other countries, reported having taken part in community activities, together with their students, related to the local environment and underprivileged people and groups. This was largely substantiated by principals. As a comparison, these sorts of actions were hardly undertaken at all in Finland, where the main community activities were cultural events and awareness raising activities (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010, p. 152). Students were also asked about their willingness to volunteer to help out in their local community in the future. Indonesian students were far more willing than most, 96% agreed, (without a gender difference), while Finnish students were less willing than most others, only 29% were prepared to do so (34% female, 24% male) (Schulz, et al., 2010, p. 157). Again, this illustrates the difference in cultural values. As described in 5.6.2, Indonesia is a highly collectivistic society, thus concern for and loyalty to the community is often a much higher priority for Indonesian students than for more individualist Finns. The focus on moral character building that was emphasised by Indonesian parents and teachers, of course, also has a strong impact on students’ attitudes. Morality, in this context, equals submitting individual wishes and achievement to the communal good.

Finally, school choice is a matter that Indonesian parents are strongly involved in, more than in any other country according to PISA figures. In 2006, 90% of Indonesian students attended schools where the principal reported that there were two or more other schools competing for the same students (OECD, 2007b, p. 233; fig 5:6). On the other hand, in some areas there is only the one school so no choice is available. Further, as students are normally accepted to lower secondary schools based on examination results, students with low test scores, often from poorer families are left with no choice but to go to a lower performing, often private school
Thus choice, and reasons for choosing, or not choosing, a particular school, is another example of the competitive Indonesian education culture.

5.11.4. Summary of the mesosystem.

Both Finnish and Indonesian parents seem to be generally less involved in school matters than others. In Finland it may be due to the “culture of trust”; parents believe that teachers are qualified and able to optimally educate and assess the students. Hence, traditionally students’ learning is left to the school and their upbringing is the responsibility of parents. However, as there seems to be extensive communication between home and school through the use of online communication systems, rarely considered in surveys, it may well be that there is more effective communications than in many other countries.

The majority of parents in Indonesia have not completed lower secondary schooling. This low level of education, combined with the traditional hierarchical deference for teachers and principals, the ingrained practice of equating financial contributions with parental involvement, as well as the longstanding custom of not being heard, may contribute to less parental involvement, particularly on the part of Sasak parents. In personal communication, however, parents often asserted that they would like to be more involved. On the other hand, Indonesian schools and students seem to be more outreaching and involved in community activities, which would fit with the collectivist culture, and would contribute to the students’ moral and altruistic development, but would have little impact on literacy levels.

5.12. The Microsystem.

5.12.1. Introduction:

A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994a, p. 1645).
Examples of microsystems in the present context would be the student’s relations with teachers, parents and peers. This involves what Bronfenbrenner called the engines of development - proximal processes which are regular reciprocal activities of an increasing degree of difficulty, such as a parent reading and discussing bedtime stories with the child. It also includes resources available to the student, for example, the number of books at home and at school, and to what degree they are taken advantage of as expressed by how often a student would read for pleasure.

In the following section the focus will firstly be on aspects of school culture relating to perceived learning environment and thereafter on students’ reading engagement, as these are the factors often considered of utmost importance for high reading achievement outcomes (OECD, 2010e, 2010g). There is of course no single definition of what is meant by school culture. Neither would there in many instances be one single culture in a school, nor would it be developed in isolation, but influenced by the surrounding community (Bell & Kent, 2010). However, internal positive characteristics mentioned in the literature include effective leadership, effective teaching, cooperation between teachers, clear rules and consistency in implementation, clear communication between staff and shared goals. In short, it involves creating a learning community where all stakeholders take ownership and feel they belong (Reynolds & Teddlie, 2000).

Students’ feeling of belonging at school, student engagement, measures how students identify with and value the importance of education, as well as to what degree they participate in academic and non-academic school, as well as extracurricular activities (Linnakylä & Malin, 2008; Willms, 2003). School satisfaction primarily seems to depend on relations with teachers and with peers. Students need to feel cared for, fairly treated and safe. Thus, for example, high teacher expectations and strong personal support and encouragement, order in the classroom, absence of violence and bullying are factors that contribute to students’ engagement in school, which in turn affect students’ wellbeing as well as academic performance (Haapasalo, et al., 2010; Samdal, Nutbeam, Wold, & Kannas, 1998; Willms, 2003).
5.12.2. Learning Environment:

5.12.2.1. Finland:

Several international surveys have reported excellent academic achievement outcomes but relatively low student engagement in Finland. Students have compared school to “a prison, an asylum, or a boring book” (Gordon, Lahelma, and Tolonen, 1995, in Finnish, cited in Haapasalo, et al., 2010, p. 134).

In one study, just 41% of 15 year old students declared that they liked being in school and only 31% enjoyed school activities. Merely 20% believed their teachers were interested in them as individuals (Haapasalo, et al., 2010, p. 140). In PISA 2009, just 49% of students stated that they perceived most of their teachers to be interested in their wellbeing, and 62% thought the teachers really listen to what they have to say (OECD, 2010a, Q34).

However, disengaged students do not constitute a homogenous group. There is a variety of profiles as to combinations of positive or negative attitudes to schooling, good / bad relations to teachers and good / bad relations to peers. In a cluster analysis of the PISA 2003 results, 27% of the Finnish students were found to be disengaged in all respects, with negative attitudes to school and poor teacher as well as peer relations. These students also demonstrated low self concept, low self efficacy and low achievement outcomes. However, the weakest performers were students with negative school attitudes and negative teacher relations, but positive peer relations. On the other hand, there was a small group, 7% of students, with overall strong positive engagement. These students were performing at the second highest level, but still lower than another cluster comprising 13% of the students, with positive attitudes towards schooling but problematic teacher relations, feeling neither supported nor treated fairly, with poor peer relations and low self beliefs. Other constellations were students accepted by peers but feeling low support from teachers, and the opposite, students with warm teacher relations but not accepted by their peers. This all demonstrates how different strategies have to be utilised in an effort to strengthen different students’ school engagement. It also indicates that Finnish teachers may want to focus more closely on what motivates students, to relate to their world and make them feel they are heard. Further, it suggests that many students in Finland, even though they are not enjoying the learning environment, still through extrinsic motivation and belief in the value of schooling,
manage to overcome stress and anxiety to achieve at the highest level (Linnakylä & Malin, 2008). This “sisu effect” was observed in the Nordic analysis of the PISA 2000 results:

It seems as if Finnish students do not give up on tasks that they find difficult or boring to the extent that Scandinavian students do. They seem to have the energy and self-discipline to keep their concentration throughout the test (Lie & Roe, 2003, p. 155).

Schools / classrooms with disengaged students and a negative climate, commonly result in disciplinary problems (Sweeney, 1992). Disciplinary problems negatively affect the learning environment. In PISA 2009 the disciplinary climate was measured and an index created by students reporting how often it occurred that “students don’t listen to what the teacher says, there is noise and disorder, the teacher has to wait a long time for students to quieten down, students cannot work well and students don’t start working for a long time after the lesson begins”. The index for disciplinary climate in Finland was one of the lowest overall, and compared to PISA 2000 the situation had worsened (OECD, 2010c, p. 189, 2010e, p. 90). At no time was this description evidenced in the present study during personal classroom observations. This discussion will be further discussed below.

Student disengagement not only negatively affects students’ wellbeing while in school, but also their future personal, social and professional development, which is why the strengthening of school engagement may be one of the most urgent challenges in Finnish school culture in years to come (Haapasalo, et al., 2010).

Another aspect of school culture affecting student engagement is the availability of personal support and encouragement. As previously described in the section about the macrosystem (rf. section 5.5.1.), support of special needs is viewed as a means to optimise educational equity and facilitate every student’s right to obtain the best possible learning outcomes. Thus when learning problems are detected, early and immediate intervention is a priority at all levels, but particularly in the primary years and in relation to reading, writing and mathematics (Linnakylä, et al., 2007; Sahlberg, 2006b; Savolainen, 2009). Confirmation that this policy is working is reported in PISA 2009, where 84% of Finnish students agreed that they
get extra help from their teachers when they need it (OECD, 2010a, student questionnaire, Q34). 82% of students in the present study concur.

Finally, the classroom climate is highly influenced by assessment format. Standardised testing has spread across the world, both at national and international levels (Kellaghan, 2001). However, there is no evidence showing that frequent testing leads to improved student performance. Instead it tends to lead to augmented student drop-out, lowered teacher retention, decreased student motivation and increased cheating on tests, by students as well as teachers (Mitchell, et al., 2009; Sahlberg, 2007). Other concerns are, for example, curricula being modified and narrowed, teachers ‘teaching to the test’, excluding more challenging or worthwhile content, limiting the number of pedagogical strategies such as multi-modal and critical teaching, with the aim of improving student ranking (Mills, 2008). It has also been argued that test results may show what students have gained at a superficial level, but not necessarily learned at an abstract level. Finally, it is claimed that tests do not automatically show the efficacy of the educational system – high achievement outcomes can be a result of activities outside of school such as private tutoring (Sahlberg, 2007).

Paradoxically, the PISA top performing Finns embrace an education culture devoid of standardised, national testing and based on a ‘culture of trust’ where students are assessed in the classroom in relation to their individual progress. The Finnish education culture is built around qualities such as equity and equality and takes an inclusive and holistic perspective. Thus education goals have not been reduced to utilitarian, quantifiable knowledge and skills, but equally honour creativity and personal development (Aho, et al., 2006; Dall, 2010a; OECD, 2001b, 2003a, 2007b; Sahlberg, 2007; Väljärvi, et al., 2002; Väljärvi, et al., 2007).

5.12.2.2 Indonesia

Several studies have described the Indonesian classroom culture as teacher-centred and focused on passive emulative rote learning (see e.g. Bjork, 2005; Dunbar, 1991; Zulfikar, 2009). There are various contributing factors to this situation. In Indonesian culture elders are respected. Teachers are seen as role models for moral and proper conduct and their knowledge is absolute and thus what is taught cannot be questioned by students (Dunbar, 1991, personal communication with U.Waluyo, September 2009)). Teachers are lacking content knowledge due to poor teacher
training. They are not rewarded for pedagogical skills. They are recruited as any civil servant and that is how they identify themselves, not as professional pedagogical experts (Bjork, 2005; Zulfikar, 2009).

This contrasts strongly to findings in the previously mentioned IEA Civic survey, which evaluated to what degree students feel free to express themselves and participate in classroom processes (Schulz, et al., 2010, p. 167). Indonesian students, alongside students in Denmark, England, Italy and New Zealand, testified to a larger degree by far than the others, to an open classroom culture, where students are encouraged to think independently, express their views and discuss with others who take a different stance. Similarly, Indonesian teachers responding to the same question, scored considerably above average (Finnish teachers below).

From classroom observations it can be ascertained that there certainly is a lot of rote learning still taking place in Indonesia. There is plenty of “chorus work”, students reading in unison or responding in unison, strategies that would not be employed in Finland, particularly not in year nine classrooms. From class observations, it seems clear that the standard of instruction is a great deal higher in Finland. However, there was also evidence of interactive teaching, involved students, group work and creativity in Indonesia. Often there were debates with teams practising how to put forward their arguments and learning to follow the rules upheld by a mediator – maybe an expression of the oral culture and the recent popularity of democracy. Students also did presentations, interacting or individually reading stories they had written; 32% of Finnish students said they write in their leisure time contrasted to 65% of the Indonesian students (no differences between language groups). The interest among Indonesian youth to read and write their own poetry also sets them apart.

PISA 2009 asked students how they perceived their teachers were trying to stimulate them to read, by for example, relating texts to their own life experiences, asking for their opinion about the text, or challenging them through questions to get a better understanding of the text. Generally, the Finnish students scored well below the OECD average, while the Indonesian students were on par or above (OECD, 2010a; student questionnaire, Q37).

In the IEA Civic survey, students were also asked to what extent they perceived they are able to influence decision making processes and practices at their school, related to “The way classes are taught; What is taught in classes;
Teaching and learning materials; The timetable; Classroom rules (and) School rules (Schulz, et al., 2010, p. 164). Indonesian students scored greatly above average (while Finnish students felt they had less than average influence). These views were substantiated by teachers, when asked the same questions. Indonesian teachers scored significantly above average (and Finnish teachers below). As reiterated in previous sections and reported by the Finns themselves, the Finnish cultural approach is to reward very modest attitudes, which could help explain why Finnish students and teachers state that they feel they have less influence than others, despite Finnish teachers clearly having great autonomy in their classroom. The Indonesian cultural emphasis on consensus, harmony and contentment would have influenced the Indonesian’ responses. The teachers’ attitudes are particularly interesting, as they may indicate that teachers are aware of the influence they could have, due to the decentralised decision making process, although they, so far, have not taken great advantage of the opportunity. The responses also reflect a budding change in teaching and learning attitudes that was coming through in various interviews. However, in reality no major change can take place as long as the education culture is governed by the national examinations. The results are of crucial importance to students and parents, teachers and principals. Therefore, what is tested and how (multiple choice), decides what teachers teach and how (rote), and what students learn and how (memorising). This framework is effectively sustaining the status quo and blocking dynamic and innovative development.

In the IEA PIRLS 2006 study, students were asked whether they felt safe in school with reference to instances of bullying, theft and violence. In this respect, Indonesian students reported feeling less safe:

Principals’ characterizations of the extent to which a number of student behaviours, including classroom disturbance, cheating, profanity, vandalism, theft, intimidation or verbal abuse of other students, and physical conflict among students, are a problem in their school, reported an unusually high percentage of students at a low level of safety, 46% (Mullis, et al., 2007, p. 278).

This is surprising against the background that keeping harmony is of such great importance in the Indonesian culture.
Assessment has a significant impact on classroom climate, teaching and learning strategies. In Indonesia, summative assessments are conducted throughout the year and, as stated previously, high stakes national, standardised examinations, typically based on multiple choice tests, are conducted at the end of year six, nine and twelve (Dunbar, 1991; Zulfikar, 2009). These tests decide the students’ futures, as to if and where they can continue their studies (Behrman, et al., 2002; Weston, 2008). They are also used to measure teachers’ and principals’ performance and as a basis for instructional resource allocation (OECD, 2010a, school questionnaire, Q16 and Q22). This has led to massive cheating, even on an organised, official scale. Local governments have set up “success teams” to pressure schools to perform, and, for example, with the help of teachers or school administrators, to hand out answer keys (Rachman, 2010). Often teachers also offer tutoring in their homes after school for a fee. In personal communication, students relate that cheating is expected. Further, the nature of the tests, being multiple choice, encourages rote learning and teaching to the test. In Mataram, for example, the government organises “tri (sic) out” tests, based on previous national exams, prior to the actual national test. Extensive time is allocated to test preparation. This was the reason why, for example, on a great number of occasions, the classes involved in the present project were not available.

Thus, the assessment format influences the classroom interaction. Teachers complained that they felt forced to only teach to the tests. However, it has to be emphasised as well, that for higher order teaching and learning to take place, teachers would also be required to be far better qualified.

In meetings with teachers, parents and students, the duress of the national exams and subsequent tragic effects on failing students were frequently raised. It was often argued that exams should be part of a process, not the overshadowing goal of schooling.

In PISA 2009, Indonesian students expressed strongly positive attitudes towards school and teachers, stating for example that school had helped to give them confidence to make decisions and taught them things that can be useful in a job. On the other hand, 22% believed that school had done little to prepare them for adult life after school (OECD, 2010a, student questionnaire, Q33). Likewise, they affirmed that they get along with most of their teachers. 81% also believed teachers were interested in students’ wellbeing (compared to 49% in Finland). Interestingly,
62% of Indonesian as well as Finnish students sensed that teachers really listened to what they had to say (OECD, 2010a, student questionnaire, Q34). In the present study, 89% of Indonesian students found it easy to approach their teachers in school related matters. Only 15% of Finnish students discussed personal matters with some of their teachers, while 33% of Indonesian students attested to doing so.

In the present study, 62% of Finnish students agreed to the statement that maintaining discipline in class takes too much time, compared to 32% of Indonesian students. In response to a related question, 53% of Finnish students concurred that many of their teachers are very strict, while only 23% of Indonesians had the same opinion. Correlating these responses to classroom observations is helpful in the interpretation.

Finnish schools that were visited were orderly with a low to moderate sound level. During breaks, teachers supervised rest areas and the school yard. If students were observed, for example, running in the corridors, any teacher noticing, would intervene. In classrooms, students overall were focused on the task at hand, raising their hands if they wanted to respond to a question. They were orderly, but at the same time they were relaxed.

Figure 13. Finnish classroom. Source: Anna Dall, 2008.
In Indonesia, some classes visited were organised, orderly and quiet, particularly in the top-ranked international standard school. Other classes were noisy, with students yelling out answers to the teacher’s questions as they pleased, chatting to one another, and not paying attention. Sometimes there was a lot of distracting noise from outside. Some classes were totally chaotic and the teacher could not be heard over the commotion. Never once though did a teacher berate a student or tell them to be quiet. In one disorderly class, the principal entered the classroom without anyone taking any notice; neither did the principal himself show any reaction to the racket.

Thus, it may be that in Finland, where the greatest percentage of students thought they had many very strict teachers, disturbance is not tolerated at all in class, and therefore seemingly more time is taken up with maintaining discipline. During observations no evidence for a negative disciplinary climate was found. In Indonesia on the other hand, most teachers were not seen to be very strict and in class observations no time was spent on maintaining discipline, which in many cases meant that there was no discipline. Thus, the suggestion of an overall orderly and efficient disciplinary climate could not be corroborated, but an open and positive classroom atmosphere was the norm.

However, there certainly are aspirational rules in Indonesian schools regarding conduct and every school displayed them prominently. In the meetings with parents and students in 2008 and 2009 they often emphasised that regulations should apply equally to teachers and students. Although it was said that students who were late for school were not allowed to enter, late teachers were. It was also suggested that teachers do not treat students equally, but are influenced by their background and have favourites, a practice which should be abolished.
5.12.3. Reading culture

5.12.3.1. Finland

There is a long tradition dating back to the 1500s in the Nordic culture of valuing reading literacy, as detailed in previous sections (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2005; Linnakylä, 2004). This has made Finland into a country of readers.

In PISA 2000, reading engagement was measured by aggregating the scores for positive attitudes towards reading, frequency of reading and diversity of reading material. Thus, the Finnish students showed the highest level of reading engagement in this survey. 41% agreed that reading was one of their favourite hobbies; 78% said they read daily and only 22% said they never read for enjoyment; 26% only read if they had to and 23% believed reading to be a waste of time (Linnakylä, 2007; OECD, 2001a, 2010c).

In PISA 2009 the situation had changed. The Finnish students showed one of the greatest declines in reading for enjoyment compared to the OECD average. 34% of students agreed that reading was one of their favourite hobbies (7% down), 67% said they read daily (11% drop), 33% never read for enjoyment (11% increase), 35% said that they only read if they had to (9% increase) and 27%, a 4% increase, thought reading was a waste of time (OECD, 2010c, p. 169). There was a significant drop in the reading of magazines, newspapers and comic books (OECD, 2010c, p.
Thus, the Indonesian, Canadian, New Zealand and Polish students reported that they read more than the Finns for enjoyment (OECD, 2010g, p. 64). In the present study, the Australian students in private schools, and the Indonesians to a higher degree than the Finns, agreed that reading was one of their favourite leisure activities. Similarly, all Australian and Indonesian students were more convinced than the Finnish that it is very important to read and know about great literature, to explore writers from their own country as well as the great classics from around the world.

5.12.3.2. Indonesia:

Indonesia is traditionally an oral, collectivist culture. Learning is a group activity and knowledge is obtained from a teacher through oral communication. Even though there have been widespread literacy campaigns, the solitary reading of a book is not common (Dunbar, 1991). Available reading resources, such as the number of books at home, are far lower than for most other countries. The 2006 PIRLS study showed that Indonesian homes were among those that contained the least number of children’s books at 10 or less per household (Mullis, et al., 2007, p. 113). Similarly, while 20% of Finnish students came from homes with 201 to 500 books, the OECD average being 12%, the figure for Indonesia was 3%. 23% of the Indonesian students stated that they had less than 10 books at home (OECD, 2010a; student questionnaire Q22; 2010c).

However, the PISA surveys indicate there may be a change of attitude with the younger generation. In the 2000 study 82% of Indonesian students said that reading was one of their favourite hobbies. 92% read daily and 8% were not reading at all for pleasure. However, at that time 41% did not respond to this question (OECD, 2001a).

The corresponding figures from PISA 2009, where all students responded to the question, showed a slight decline consistent with the general trend in reading for enjoyment. Still, 87% of Indonesian students said they were reading daily, and only 12% were not reading for enjoyment at all. 32% said they read only if they had to, 77% agreed it was one of their favourite hobbies, while 4% thought it was a waste of time (OECD, 2010c). Consistently, 82% of Indonesian students in the present study attested to reading being one of their favourite leisure activities. The Indonesian students’ claimed interest in reading and reported reading habits have been met with
great scepticism from some Indonesian scholars. It is impossible to establish the
reliability and validity of these self-reported data; however, there are some indicators
that can be discussed.

As related previously in this section, the number of books in Indonesian
homes is small by comparison to the number of books available in a typical Finnish
household. Similarly, an Indonesian school library would not impress most
Westerners. Still, 94% of Indonesian parents in the present study believe there is a
good library at their child’s school. Again, this can be explained by the frame of
reference. Previously, there were no books. Now there is an entire room at each
school, dedicated to books and it is being used. Teachers use it for classes; students
go there in their leisure time.

In meetings in 2008 and 2009, students involved in the present study were
asked to write down the titles of as many books as they could remember that they
had recently read. Admittedly, the lists were not always extensive, but with more or
less effort there were at all times a number of titles. Harry Potter was mentioned by
everyone in the eclectic company of Twilight, Indonesian Legends, Go Girls and YU-
GI-OH. It also shows the importance of clear definitions; while a comic would
probably not be considered a book in Finland, it would be in Indonesia.

Further, the question in the present study about reading habits referred to the
habit of most days reading anything at all apart from school books; not only books
but examples given were texts such as newspapers, magazines and comics. The
fact that Indonesian youth love comics was substantiated not only by the students
themselves, but also by parents and teachers.

Even if the self-reported reading habits were exaggerated, would that not in
itself express a positive attitude to reading, that it is a good thing to be involved in
and the more you read, the higher your status?

Regardless of the extent that Indonesian students read printed matter or not,
they do all read on the internet and a massive proportion of students in the present
study had a Facebook account. Chatting and texting were visibly favourite activities.
While 48% of Finnish students believed that computers in time will replace books,
this idea was embraced by 77% of Indonesian speaking students and 61% of Sasak
speakers. Corresponding numbers for parents were in Finland 12%, Indonesian
speaking parents 67% and Sasak speakers 53%. Indonesians truly believe in a
digital future.
5.13. Summary of the microsystem.

One of the main characteristics of the Finnish education system is the instant intervention when a student shows any learning difficulties. Another is the absence of national, standardized testing. Both these factors would be supportive of each student reaching their unique and optimal level of learning and a positive learning environment. On the other hand, many Finnish students show low school engagement, and schools are reported to exhibit a negative disciplinary climate. However, this was not evidenced in personal communication and observations. As all these data are self-reported, naturally there can be a cultural bias. This in itself can lead to interesting – and skewed - findings. Bronfenbrenner stresses that how the reality is experienced by the individual is as important to the researcher as how it can be objectively described. Because what is true for a person is framed by the cultural context, survey data must be triangulated with other data from, for example, interviews and observations.

Finland has traditionally been a country of readers, and in PISA 2000 the Finnish students evidenced the highest level of reading engagement. In PISA 2009, reading for enjoyment had declined in all participating countries, but the drop in Finland was one of the greatest.

In Indonesia, contrary to views commonly held, the students attested to an open classroom climate where discussion and expressions of personal opinions were encouraged. On the other hand, a comparatively large percentage of students were found not to feel safe in school, an experience corroborated by principals.

Indonesia is traditionally an oral culture and reading is still not commonly embraced. However, the PISA surveys, as well as the present study, indicate that this may be changing as a majority of Indonesian 15 year olds state that reading is one of their favorite hobbies.
5.14. Conclusion:

5.14.1. Finland

The original research question for this project was to explore why the Finnish students outperform others in the PISA surveys in reading literacy and to establish whether there are “success strategies” that can be implemented to improve performance in a totally different culture such as Indonesia.

In this chapter Finnish education culture has been studied thoroughly, using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory. The analysis has shown that there is no single “success solution” but an intricate combination of interactive factors. In Bronfenbrenner’s terms, all the systems, from macro to micro are in alignment and are pulling in the same direction. Thus, the strength of the complete education culture becomes more powerful than the isolated indicators at each level. In summary, the main aspects underpinning the Finnish outstanding performance would include an understanding that long-term planning precedes long term high achievement outcomes. Thus, the broad and deep consensus about long term education goals and the subsequent consistency in implementation, and follow-up at all levels, are cornerstones. Further, it is a culture that has an inherent high appreciation of education and reading. Teachers are held in high regard and thus the brightest and most apt students are attracted to the profession and offered research-based training to become exceptionally proficient, pedagogical experts. Therefore, they are able to take part in the decision process, work autonomously and professionally implement policies at the local level. The culture of trust makes it possible to avoid the utilitarian high stakes standardised, national testing. Instead, the inclusive and holistic policies make for each student to be genuinely assessed by the teacher, in the classroom, in relation to his or her individual progress. There is early and immediate intervention if a learning difficulty is noticed, particularly at the primary levels of reading literacy and numeracy, as students that fall behind in the early years have progressively smaller chances of recovering later. A well developed online system facilitates interactive communication between schools and home. Students do not always enjoy their school work, but appreciate the value of education and thus use the Finnish “sisu” (attitude to keep going no matter what the adversity) to achieve at the highest level.
Are there any indications that this representation might change or other matters of concern that call for attention?

A slight decline in equity has already been noticed, due to greater opportunities for parents and students to choose what school to attend and the establishment of competing private schools. This has in turn led to an increased trend for schools to develop their own character and profile, specialising in a certain field to attract students. As the school choice is an option more frequently taken up by parents with a higher education, this could clearly lead to increased segregation. Sweden is a good example of such a development, which will be discussed in the following chapter 6.

Finnish students’ respect for their teachers was lower than other students in the present study. Whether this is an early sign of a change in attitude or rather an expression of cultural modesty (not to be overly positive) remains to be seen.

A considerable number of students show low school engagement and appear to have strained relations with their teachers. These are important matters as they affect not only the student’s wellbeing at school but also the student’s future personal, social and professional development. Thus, different strategies to strengthen different students’ sense of belonging in school would need to be developed and implemented in pre-service as well as in-service teacher training.

Finland has traditionally been a country of readers. In previous PISA surveys the Finnish students have shown the highest level of reading engagement, a factor that has been considered a major reason for the high achievement outcomes in reading literacy. In a general trend of students reading less for enjoyment, the Finnish students exhibited the largest drop of all and are now found at an average level. The underlying explanations for this surprising shift would need to be established. During data collection for the present study, there were no indications of this upcoming drastic change in Finnish reading habits, whereas the decline was very obvious in Sweden and was discussed with students at different meetings.

In view of the common current belief in global education solutions, the second part of the research question was whether factors contributing to the Finnish students’ high achievement outcomes in reading literacy were culturally bound, or could they be transposed to such a totally different culture as Indonesia to improve their disappointing results.

Just as there are many interacting factors underpinning the high quality of Finnish education, so is there a complexity of aspects influencing the poor Indonesian performance. In Bronfenbrenner terms, the systems are not aligned; they are not pulling in the same direction, if pulling at all.

When the Dutch left and Indonesia attained independence, the large majority of the general population had not undergone any schooling and the literacy rate was 6%. It is clearly a daunting prospect to build an education system from scratch, with basically no teachers, no teacher trainers, no educators who knew how to run a school and no instruction material. Great effort was made to establish schools throughout the country, even though facilities often were very basic and teachers were poorly qualified. Education was appreciated as an effective means of supporting the unification process of the country; thus instruction focused on basic
literacies and character building to instil proper and correct morals and attitudes, based on the Pancasila. Teachers were primarily civil servants, not teachers; their prime allegiance was to the state, not students and parents; loyalty and obedience were rewarded, not pedagogical skills.

In this context, a number of reforms, influenced by globalisation, have been adopted in the last decade; reforms that emulate Western education systems, such as a new competence based curriculum, extended teacher training, a new certification process for teachers, decentralisation and school based management. A system with high stakes, standardised, national tests was already in place.

The dilemma is that Indonesia is not a typical Western country. One outstanding difference is that poverty bars many children – to a varying degree between provinces – from obtaining even basic education, let alone a high standard one. To attain higher quality, the curriculum needs to be made more demanding, taught by competent teachers who believe all children can learn. However, Indonesian teachers lack the skills to implement even the competence based curriculum. They often certainly lack both content knowledge and pedagogical skills to provide instruction that challenges students in problem solving and higher order thinking. Therefore, they may resort to rote learning which fits well with the ubiquitous multiple choice exams. As the tests are of crucial importance, teachers spend a lot of time preparing and certainly teaching to the test, meaning more rote learning. This is a vicious circle that can only be broken by more proficient teachers. It is generally agreed among parents and teachers that teacher qualifications need to be improved. However, it is doubtful to what degree the legislated extension of teacher training will translate into higher content and pedagogical skills, leading to improved student achievement outcomes, as tertiary education is of an equally low standard. Tellingly, the certification process has already been watered down and fraught with fraud and corruption. This is another catch-22 situation; the tertiary teacher training program must build on the educational standards of the year 12 students commencing their studies. Because this standard is low, the quality of the graduating teachers will be low, thus maintaining the status quo in perpetuity.

Further, the decentralisation and school based management processes are at an impasse because teachers and parents often have neither the knowledge, nor the confidence to take active part, and at other times because the headmaster wants to retain control, and thus there is no functional school committee in existence. In the
present study, parents asserted that they would like to be more involved in school matters even though many agreed that currently they are passive. This may well indicate that the existing format for parental involvement may be experienced as formal and intimidating. Ironically, decentralisation has reduced equity even further as differences between provinces have widened due to funding inequalities.

Thus, there are numerous examples of systems misalignment. Regardless of the quality of education policies, if they are not clearly stated, understood and embraced at all levels and with an implementation framework solidly in place, there will be no practical changes. Decentralisation would be a flagrant example, demonstrating failed interaction between all systems. Ultimately, the students at the micro level are paying the price.

A particular micro system concern affecting results that should also be highlighted is the large number of students speaking a local language at home, but being instructed and assessed, including in the PISA studies, in Indonesian. Most likely this would affect the outcomes.

However, as stated previously, achievement outcomes in reading literacy are also strongly related to students’ reading habits and attitudes towards reading. The availability of printed matter is low compared to Western countries and the oral culture still prevails. Nevertheless, findings from the PISA surveys as well as the present study do indicate great interest in reading among Indonesian students. This may not necessarily mean that the Western culture would be emulated by, for example, the establishment of bigger and better libraries, or by providing students with books in other ways. A large majority of both Indonesian students and parents believe in time that books will be replaced by computers. High reading literacy achievement outcomes may well be obtained differently in a digital future, through, for example, the ubiquitous mobile phones and internet cafes.

Can Finnish success strategies be implemented in Indonesia? At this stage, it may seem to be somewhat like implementing a tertiary curriculum in primary school. However, this will be discussed further in chapter 8; conclusion, discussion and recommendations.
Chapter 6.

Data analysis relating to the changing education culture in Sweden, using Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems theoretical framework.

6.0. Introduction:

This chapter analyses the Swedish education culture with a view to explore some possible factors underpinning the significant drop in Swedish students’ achievement outcomes in reading literacy. As in chapter 5, but with less detail, Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems theoretical framework is used to scaffold the discussion. It is claimed that there is a misalignment between systems leading to this downwards spiral. There is little consensus and long-term consistent implementation of education policies. Decentralisation has led to increasing differences between municipalities, particularly affecting special needs education, thus decreased student equity. Teaching is a low status profession and therefore teacher training programs are attracting a dwindling number of applicants, with lower grades. There is also a significant number of teachers not qualified for the subject or the year level they are teaching. The practice of streaming students is common and there is an increasing focus on students’ individual work, putting more pressure on parents. This chapter argues that taken together, all these factors contribute to the lowered results in reading literacy in general, and the lessened equality and equity in particular. In contrast, this study found that classroom climate in the Swedish schools was positive and that many students have achieved a high degree of independence and self regulation.

6.1. Data gathering.

Initially, 10 schools in Sweden agreed to participate in the study. Later, two dropped out as they considered the administrative work involved with consent forms and other information too burdensome. Thus, 141 students and 55 parents completed the online survey. There were also a number of classroom observations and interviews undertaken.
6.2. The macrosystem.

Macrosystem Components:
- Education policies
- Education system
- Teacher training
- Historical impact
- Cultural
  homogeneity/heterogeneity

Figure 16. Macrosystem components. Source: Anna Dall, 2011.

Sweden is well known as a country that strives for an egalitarian society. It has achieved equal and narrow income distribution coupled with a generally high standard of living and an extensive social safety net. Contributors to these achievements have been equal access to quality education regardless of social-economic family background and geographical domicile and the rationale for the establishment of a nine-year, compulsory, comprehensive school system. Basically all schools were state schools and students attended the one closest to their home (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006; Björklund, Edin, Fredriksson, & Krueger, 2005; Myrberg & Rosén, 2006). During the 1960s, 70s and 80s, students achieved at top levels and the system proved equitable with low differences between schools (Lärarnas Riksförbund; Teachers National Association, 2010; Skolverket - The National Agency for Education, 2004; Skolverket, 2009b, 2010b). The disappointing PISA 2009 results must be contrasted against this background, as not only have the Swedish students’ achievement outcomes in reading literacy in general significantly deteriorated but equity and equality aspects have suffered in particular. The number of weak readers has significantly increased and the number of strong readers has dropped; the differences between boys’ and girls’ performance have increased so that the gender gap is now greater than the OECD average; the spread of results between schools has increased; and the differences between immigrant and native students are now larger in Sweden than the average OECD country (Skolverket,
2010b). What factors could be underpinning such a massive shift in system outcomes?

6.2.1. Education policies.

6.2.1.1. Evolution or revolution.

As described in chapter 5, instrumental factors in the Finnish success story, have been the long term vision and the broad political consensus in implementation of education policies in Finland, so there has been a steady evolution without drastic changes. The situation in Sweden is different; education has often been a political bone of contention and (in the debate) schooling has been in a continuous state of crisis (Björklund, et al., 2005). The comprehensive school was introduced in 1962, but unlike in Finland, it seems this became more of an ideological and organisational reform than a pedagogical one; for example, the skills to teach heterogeneous groups had not been developed in teachers. In the 1970s and 1980s reforms regarding funding, new curricula and partial decentralisation were passed (Lundahl, 2002) and the reform process culminated in the turbulent decade of the 1990s, with wide-ranging neo-liberal education reforms such as outright decentralisation of education and the introduction of school choice, but also changed curricula, a changed grading and testing system, initiation of quality audits and changed teacher training. Thus, one of the world’s most centralised education systems was transformed into one of the most competitive, decentralised and deregulated (Lundahl, 2002; Skolverket, 2009b; Wikström, 2006). That phase is at present being followed by yet another intense reform period with the implementation of new curricula, a new teacher training program, a teacher registration system and the development of national assessment tests (Skolverket, 2009b; Wikström, 2006). In a survey on attitudes to schooling in the Nordic countries, it was ascertained that the Swedes held the least confidence in their education system and that they thought there had been too many major school reforms occurring too often (Nordic Ministerial Council, 2001). Consistently, in the present study, about half of the parents in Sweden agreed that high school education is of a very high standard, hardly anyone strongly agreed, and it was the lowest endorsement of parents in all countries.
6.2.1.2. School choice.

Traditionally, in Sweden all schools were state schools and students attended the school closest to their home, the so-called residency principle. In 1992 there was an ideological turnaround, in line with other OECD countries, as a voucher system was introduced and municipalities were required to equally fund independent schools. Therefore in Sweden, schools are not allowed to charge tuition fees (Swedish Government, 1996). However, even though these schools are tax funded, they are allowed to operate for profit (Myrberg & Rosén, 2006). Thus, parents and students are free to apply to another state school than the one they belonged to by way of the residency principle (even though children living in the uptake area had precedence). They were equally free to choose a private school of their liking. In 1990, one percent of students attended years 1 – 9 in independent schools; in 2010 this had increased to 11%. Independent comprehensive schools were found in 60% of the municipalities, with a particular concentration around the bigger cities (Skolverket, 2010c). The factors of choice and competition between schools were assumed to raise education quality and offer students with different backgrounds more equal opportunities (Björklund, et al., 2005; Wikström, 2006). Instead, these factors seem to have contributed to the growing ethnic and social segregation in the Swedish school system. More middleclass, well educated parents take advantage of the school choice, creating increasing socio-economic segregation between state and independent schools (Myrberg & Rosén, 2006). Thus, students from similar backgrounds tend to attend the same schools, leading to more homogeneous classes, which generally is not considered to assist educational performance, particularly not for low performing students, and may have contributed to the growing difference in achievement outcomes between students from different schools. It may also have contributed to the growing intolerance among teenagers. However, some argue that the increasing housing segregation is an equally contributing factor (Lärarnas Riksförbund; Teachers National Association, 2006; Myrberg & Rosén, 2006; Skolverket, 2009a, 2009b, 2010b; Svensson, 2010; Wikström, 2006).

6.2.2. Education system.

Formally, the Swedish schools system is comprehensive with no tracking. In reality though, streaming seems to be increasingly common, i.e. pupils within a class are grouped together according to abilities and performance, thus creating
homogeneous groups (Skolverket, 2009b, 2010b). In PISA 2009, 35% of Swedish principals reported that students in some subjects were grouped into different classes depending on ability, and 53% agreed that in some subjects students were grouped by ability within their class (OECD, 2010a; school questionnaire, Q12). This situation is particularly detrimental to lower performing students, and results tend to be similar to those found in tracking systems, which e.g. the PISA surveys indicate lead to lower equity (OECD, 2010h).

6.2.3. Teacher training.

In the McKinsey report it is stated that “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 13). Further, the belief that changes in the organisation could instigate improved achievement outcomes was branded naive. It was argued that regardless of what changes are made to curricula, governance or funding, there would be no significant improvement if the teachers were not highly proficient. The researchers studied the currently best performing education systems in the world and declared that the common denominators were the opportunity to choose the very best candidates for teacher training and then to give them the very best training to turn them into effective instructors. This being accomplished, systems and support were put in place so that teachers would be able to engage every student and give every student excellent learning conditions to reach their optimum. This is what countries like Singapore, Korea and Finland have managed to do, albeit using different, culturally appropriate strategies (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 13).

In Sweden the situation is again different. Teaching is not a high status profession at the present time. There have been a dwindling number of applications to the teacher training program, and applications received have often come from students with lower grades. Often teaching has not even been their first choice, but a second or third preference (Bolter, 2011). Thus entrance requirements to the teacher training program are low. In 2007, there were 1.2 applicants per available place. As there are great differences between different universities, this would mean that in some instances all applicants would be accepted (Lärarnas Riksförbund -The National Association of Teachers, 2008).

In a study by the National Association of Teachers (2008) it was found that quite a few of students who studied to become medical doctors, lawyers and social
welfare workers had considered becoming teachers but decided against it mainly
due to poor pay and working conditions. Another study concluded that wages from
1968 to 2000 for female primary school teachers declined by 6 percent in relation to
others with a similar education level; for male teachers the decline was 13%.
Working conditions have deteriorated, evidenced by health problems related to
stress. Teaching has become a less attractive option, particularly for high ability
students, causing the proportion of qualified teachers to decrease (Björklund, et al.,
2005). In PIRLS 2006, Swedish teachers expressed less career satisfaction than
most others (Mullis, et al., 2007). However, in contrast, in a Swedish survey teachers
declared themselves very content with most aspects of their work situation such as
with the teaching, students, colleagues, with less confidence in the school leaders
and extremely low confidence in politicians with influence over education.
Regardless, one in three had considered changing work (Skolverket, 2010b)

The standard of teaching and teacher training has been intensely debated in
Swedish media. A majority of parents (approximately 60%) in the present study were
of the opinion that media portrayed schooling in a negative way but only about half of
them thought that the teacher training needed to be improved. However, a survey on
attitudes to schooling in the Nordic countries established that parents with children in
school are more positive towards the education system than the general population.
It was also stated though, that education is “debated often and rather critically in the
Swedish media” (Nordic Ministerial Council, 2001, p. 28). Conversely, parents
interviewed in the present study gave examples of children bringing home
assignments corrected by the teachers, which they returned having corrected the
teachers’ grammar and spelling mistakes.

The teacher training program was scrutinized in an audit by the National
Agency for Higher Education, and severe failings were found in several cases; for
example, the academic requirements were low and the examination requirements
were doubtful (Swedish Government, 2007). In some cases students themselves
complained that the standard was far too low, and in it was found that pre-service
teachers spent far less time on study than other students (Lärarnas Riksförbund -
The National Association of Teachers, 2008). Therefore, the Government appointed
a committee that was given directives to analyze the situation and make suggestions
for a revised teacher training program (Swedish Government, 2007). This has
resulted in a new teacher training program that will be introduced in 2011 (Regeringskansliet - Government Offices of Sweden, 2010).

However, practically all teachers believe they have adequate content knowledge and pedagogical skills. They also trust that they have succeeded in their mission and given students knowledge in their subjects (students agree) as well as managed to inspire and engage them (students do not agree) (Skolverket, 2010b).

The Government has also decided to introduce a teacher registration system from 1 July 2011. This means that after completing teacher training, the teacher needs to work at a school and be supervised by a mentor for at least one year before the principal can issue a certificate of suitability. To apply for registration both the certificate from teacher training and the certificate of suitability have to be submitted. Only registered teachers will be eligible to be employed as permanent teachers and to independently grade students. However, teachers of mother tongue are exempt due to the situation that there are few qualified mother tongue teachers (Swedish Government, 2010). In 2010 only 48% of mother tongue teachers were qualified (Skolverket, 2010a). Curiously, in PISA 2009, 87% of Swedish principals responded that instruction is not hindered due to a lack of qualified mother tongue teachers (OECD, 2010a; school questionnaire Q11). However, the explanation may be that the PISA questionnaire refers to the test language, which is only Swedish, and the government documents may refer to Swedish as well as all other mother tongues that immigrant children have the right to study.

Thus in 2011, a new curriculum, a new teacher training program, a new teacher registration system and a revised grading system have been introduced, all in the effort to improve achievement outcomes. The Government realizes the crucial importance of excellent teachers and has therefore authorized a campaign over two years to try to attract top performing high school students to the teaching profession, enticing them to apply for the teacher training program and make it their first preference (Bolter, 2011).

6.2.4. Cultural homogeneity / heterogeneity.

Sweden has traditionally been a very ethnically homogeneous country. However, this has changed dramatically. In 1960, 4% of the population were immigrants, in 2009 this figure had risen to 14%, meaning that 1.3 million out of 9.3 million Swedes were born in another country (Statistics Sweden, 2009). In 2004, yet another 800,000 had
at least one parent born in another country, and people from 203 other countries lived in Sweden, with the majority having resided in Sweden for at least 10 years (Bavner, 2004). About two-thirds of students with an immigrant background speak a language other than Swedish at home. There is a positive correlation between speaking Swedish at home and performance. However, the National Agency of Education stresses that other factors could also contribute as extensive research shows that it is easier for a child who is proficient in his or her mother tongue to learn another language (Skolverket, 2010b). Students with a foreign background have the right to study their mother tongue, including history, literature and culture, as a separate subject at school, with the aim to cement bi-lingual competence (Bavner, 2004). At one of the participating schools there were photos of the various mother tongue teachers, totalling 42. However, it has also been claimed, for example, in a recent newspaper article written by the Assisting Minister of Education, that teachers hold lower expectations for immigrant students and thus inadvertently hold them back (Sabuni, 2011). In Sweden there is currently a higher proportion of students with an immigrant background achieving at low levels and a lower proportion achieving at high levels compared to the OECD. However, families migrating to Sweden are often refugees from very different cultures. In 2010, there were 32,000 asylum seekers (Statistics Sweden, 2010). In some of the other OECD countries, such as France and the UK, the immigrants come from former colonies and already speak the language. Others, for example, Australia and Canada have a more selective immigration policy and a large proportion of immigrants are people with higher education (Skolverket, 2010b). In 2009, there were 6,170 asylum applications lodged in Australia compared to 24,190 in Sweden (Asylum Seekers Resource Centre, 2010).

6.2.5. Summary macrosystem.

In summary, in a short time Sweden has gone from a highly centralised and unified system to one of the world’s most competitive, decentralised and deregulated. Free school choice seems to have led to increased school segregation and more homogenous populations. Within classes more homogenous groups are created by ability streaming. Teaching has low status and attracts a dwindling number of applicants; applications come from students with lower grades. The teacher training program has been audited and found to be sadly failing in standards in many
institutions. However, teachers are confident they have adequate skills, and succeed in imparting knowledge as well as managing to inspire and engage their students. Sweden has also become a strongly heterogeneous country with a growing proportion of the population being immigrants and refugees.

6.3. The Exosystem.

The exosystem includes processes between settings; at least one where the developing person is actively taking part and at least one other which has an impact on the student, but without the student being personally involved. One such example would be the implementation of decentralisation policies which greatly influences school performance and students’ achievement outcomes. In Sweden the effects of decentralisation seem to be major.

6.3.1. Decentralisation.

In Sweden in 1991 education governance was transferred from the central government to the municipalities, and they were given the full responsibility for resource allocation. As has been discussed previously, decentralisation in Indonesia, and to a minor degree in Finland, has led to reduced equity. However, the effects seem to be greater in Sweden, where decentralisation has created strong variation between municipalities in regards to educational costs, teacher – pupil ratios and the number of qualified teachers. A particular concern, that may be causing increased differences between schools, is that funds allocation is only to a minor degree is related to schools’ and students’ specific needs, especially as this was one of the motivations for decentralisation in the first place (Skolverket, 2009b, 2010b). There are substantial differences in funding per student and year, so that the most generous municipality allocates 100% more than the lowest spending one (Lärarnas Riksförbund; Teachers National Association, 2010, p. 23). Another concern is that only 50.1% of total education funding is filtered down to classroom instruction, which is well below the OECD average of 63.6% (Lärarnas Riksförbund; Teachers National Association, 2010, p. 4). The number of unqualified teachers has risen drastically. A study in 2007 showed that only 43% of teachers in years 6-9 in state schools, and 33% in independent schools had formal teacher training relevant to both the year
level and the subjects taught (Lärarnas Riksförbund; Teachers National Association, 2010, p. 21).

The decentralisation also conferred responsibility to the municipalities for quality control and implementation of the goal oriented curriculum. The intention was for the municipalities to demonstrate, in a local education plan, how they intended to reach the nationally formulated goals. Then teachers should use the curriculum and the local plan as a basis for their own lesson plans in order for students to reach the fixed goals. This was coupled with a criterion based grading system with a view to improve performance and monitor progress. However, the steering documents were vague, and teachers were interpreting standards differently. This led to increased differences between schools as well as grade inflation. Independent schools in particular seemed to be more liberal (Lärarnas Riksförbund; Teachers National Association, 2010; Wikström, 2006)

6.3.2. Summary exosystem.

Decentralisation seems to have had major effects on schooling in Sweden. There are great variations between municipalities as to education costs, teacher – pupil ratios and the number of qualified teachers. Further, municipalities seem to allocate resources without relating to schools’ and students’ special needs. The considerable leeway for interpretation regarding standards for grading has also caused increased differences between schools and grade inflation.

6.4. The mesosystem.

The mesosystem includes processes and linkages between settings where the student is taking an active part, such as relations between the student’s family setting, the school and the peer group. In the following sub section, interactions between parents and teachers in Sweden will be explored, with the assumption that the greater the synergy, the greater the positive effects on students’ attitudes and performance.
6.4.1 Parental involvement.

The PIRLS study in 2006 showed increased parental involvement since the previous study in 2001. It also established that Swedish schools are among the safest in the world (Mullis, et al., 2006).

In PISA 2009, one-third of principals stated they were under constant pressure from many parents for students to achieve high academic standards; two-thirds experienced pressure from some parents. These figures are among the highest results surveyed. Only 3.67% stated that pressure was largely absent – the lowest figure of all (OECD, 2010a; school questionnaire, Q18). This may be an expression of the low confidence in the education system previously discussed.

In Sweden in 1996, the Government initiated a trial project with school boards for individual schools, or parts thereof. It is up to every municipality whether to establish this type of board or not, and also to determine what issues they can decide on (Barnverket, 2011). Areas of responsibility may include, for example, school hours, distribution of subject hours, teaching and learning environment, extracurricular activities, anti bullying and others, but may not include decisions regarding individual students, nor interfere with teachers’ professional judgements on how to implement teaching. Thus, the extent of responsibilities varies largely between municipalities. Members of the boards include the principal, representatives for staff, possibly students, but the majority should be made up of parent representatives. Initially, this caused some trepidation among staff that parents would “take over“ but this has not eventuated; rather confusion about the board’s exact role and responsibility has sometimes made it more of a discussion club than an executive instrument. A real concern has been that few parents have been interested in taking active part, and often those who do so are people already used to being in power situations. Still, at times parents have felt daunted by the responsibility of being in the majority, leading to suggestions for changed proportions, so that parents make up half the numbers and staff the other half. The project is to be revaluated mid 2011. Thus, principals in PISA 2009 maintained that parent groups had a direct influence on instructional content (18%), while they testified to governing boards having an influence on staffing (17%); budgeting (27%); instructional content (14%); and assessment practices (5%) (OECD, 2010a; school questionnaire, Q25).
Teachers are required to meet with the student and his/her parents once a semester to discuss how to support the student’s academic progress and social development. This is meant to be an interactive conversation where each party can be heard and acknowledged. Nine out of ten students in years 7-9 are very happy with the way these development talks pan out (Skolverket, 2010b).

In the present study, 55% of Swedish parents say that they are rarely or never contacted informally by teachers. The corresponding figures are for Finland 78%, for Lombok Indonesian speaking parents 60% and for Sasak speaking parents 76%. More than half of Swedish parents state that communication mainly takes place via email. About two-thirds of parents in all three countries agree that there is a formal meeting between teachers and parents once or twice a year. However, while only 3% of Swedish parents reported that they rarely or never attend, 63% of Finnish, 51% of Sasak and 39% of Indonesian speaking parents reported the same.

Another way for parents to be involved in their children’s schooling is through assistance with homework. 82% of Swedish students assert that their parents often or sometimes help with schoolwork and assignments, and 81% of parents concur. This can be compared to 44% of students in Finland and 58% of Indonesian students. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, Finnish parents often believe school work should be left to the teachers, and Indonesian parents may often lack the knowledge to be of help. The very high percentage of parental involvement in Sweden may indicate a close parent-child relationship, but it may also stem from the Swedes’ low confidence in their education system, as has been discussed above.

6.4.2. Summary mesosystem.

There are opportunities for parents to take an active part in their child’s schooling in a formal way, by becoming involved in the local school board, but few parents seem to take an interest. However, in the present study, there seem to be more informal contacts between parents and teachers than in the other counties. Basically, all parents attend teacher – parent meetings. Parents also help their children with their homework to a very high degree. This may be an expression of their low trust in the education system and the teachers.
6.5. The Microsystem.

The microsystem refers to the student’s face to face interactions with, for example, his or her parents, teachers and peers. It also relates to engagement with available resources such as books. In the following sub section, perceived learning environment and reading engagement will be discussed, as they are factors often considered to underpin high achievement outcomes in reading literacy.

6.5.1. Learning Environment.

In personal communication in Sweden it was often said that “it’s true the Finnish students achieve very highly, but our students are so much happier in school”. Indeed, the National Agency of Education conducts a survey every three years on students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards school and in the last one in 2009, the findings were very positive. The large majority of students were happy in their school, with their peers, with their teachers and with their studies. They found the demands and expectations placed on them to be adequate, and the pace appropriate. They appreciated the knowledge they had obtained and believed it would be useful for their future (Skolverket, 2010b). Still, in the PISA survey, conducted the same year, in 2009, as many as 25% of students were of the opinion that school had done little to prepare them for adult life after leaving school, and 10% had found school to be a waste of time (OECD, 2010a; student questionnaire, Q33). However, the positive attitudes towards teachers was again supported; 74% of the students in the PISA survey thought most teachers were interested in their wellbeing, 81% said teachers treated them fairly, 70% believed most teachers really listened to what they had to say and 80% claimed that they received extra help from their teachers when needed (OECD, 2010a; student questionnaire, Q34). In the present study, a similar large majority of students were of the opinion that it was important to their teachers that they performed as well as possible, but only 66% agreed that they got extra assistance when required.

Regarding disciplinary climate, PISA found a particularly large increase in students in Sweden affirming the teacher never, or almost never, had to wait for them to quieten down (OECD, 2010c), even though 29% still declared that in most, or all mother tongue lessons the teacher had to wait a long time for them to do so.
Further, 25% claim students do not listen to what the teacher says, 32% allege there is noise and disorder, that 17% of students cannot work well and 23% of students do not start working for a long time after the lesson begins (OECD, 2010c; student questionnaire, Q36).

This can be compared to the Swedish survey, which found that even though a large majority of students in years 7-9 responded that the classroom atmosphere was enjoyable and positive, in most lessons one-third did not get the peace and quiet they needed to work well. One in four was disturbed by other students and one in five found the level of noise to be distractingly high. This was a particular issue for the girls (Skolverket, 2010b, p. 28). In the present study, 46% of students thought maintaining discipline in class took too much time and only 24% reported that many teachers were very strict.

With the introduction of the comprehensive school, classrooms became very heterogeneous. While in Finland great effort was made to develop pedagogical strategies to teach such groups and still be able to cater for individual needs, this seems not to have eventuated in Sweden. Teachers felt, and still do, that they lack the necessary skills to some degree. At the same time, there has been a shift in steering documents, from viewing the individual as part of the whole, to seeing the individual as a separate entity. This has led to a change in classroom instruction strategies, from class teaching adjusted to the individuals, which generally is considered to have positive effects, to class teaching based around individual work, which generally has brought about negative effects (Carlgren, Klette, Mýrdal, Schnack, & Simola, 2006; Skolverket, 2009b). An emphasis on individual work means that the students must independently take responsibility for their own learning, which was intended to be a means to develop self regulation and social competences, preparing students for adult life. It has shifted the responsibility from teachers to students; teachers have taken a step back, and have become facilitators instead of pedagogical experts who can not only convey knowledge but also inspire and engage (Carlgren, et al., 2006; Skolverket, 2009b). In research cited previously, it was asserted that the quality of an education system can never surpass the quality of its teachers (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Thus, as a focus on individual work fits well with the goal oriented curriculum and criterion based grading system, it may also be a consequence of the diminishing professional standing of Swedish teachers. Individual pupils taking responsibility for their own learning has also highlighted the
importance of social background and the degree to which parents possess the cultural capital to be able to support their children (Skolverket, 2009b). As shown in the present study, Swedish parents help their children with their homework to a much larger degree than others; this may well be due to the extent of individual work.

Another effect of individual work methods can be seen in the increased need for special support, as weaker students, who do not have the necessary encouragement from home, do not cope with the demands for independence and self regulation. Conversely, weaker students with highly educated parents seem to attain adequate support to a greater extent and thus obtain higher achievement outcomes (Skolverket, 2008, revised 2011).

Early detection and immediate attention by teachers to observed special needs have often been considered one of the important factors underpinning the Finnish high performance with low differences between schools. In general though, when special support is discussed, it relates to cognitive aspects, particularly to literacy needs for students in early primary school. In Sweden, support in the early years most often relates to reading and writing needs, but in later years it often also relates to behavioural and emotional needs. However, not all students who are considered to be in need of special support receive it, or they do not receive it in an appropriate way. The availability of special needs resources varies between municipalities. Thus, much special needs instruction takes place in separate groups, leading to student exclusion. Research on special needs teaching in Sweden has suggested that there is a negative correlation, so that the earlier and the longer pupils have received special needs instruction, the less likely they are to reach the national goals defined in the curriculum. It may well be that these students would have been even worse off in a regular class. Another interpretation is that because the student is separated out in a special needs group/class, he or she misses out on positive peer effects, less demands and expectations are put on him or her, and the student’s self image and beliefs in what he or she can accomplish diminish. Another aspect is that sometimes the social competencies are prioritised, so that more time is spent on training students to cope with individual work forms and less time is spent on particular cognitive competencies such as reading literacy (Skolverket, 2008, revised 2011).

As stated previously, the curriculum is goal oriented and the grading system is criterion based. To ensure fairness between schools and teachers in grading,
national tests are implemented in years 3, 6 and 9. 86% of teachers admit that the tests greatly influence their work (Skolverket, 2010b). In PISA 2009, 61% of Swedish principals state that achievement data are posted publicly, 43% say the data are used to evaluate the principals’ as well as the teachers’ performance and 36% ascertain it influences resource allocation. Thus, the Swedish system, unlike the Finnish one, seems to be greatly influenced by aspects of globalisation of education by way of the testing culture and transparent accountability.

6.5.2. Reading engagement.

Reading literacy is not only a cognitive process but also an affective one, involving students’ attitudes to and motivations for reading. Thus, reading engagement is strongly connected to achievement in the area of reading literacy. In PISA the variable “reading engagement” includes information on time spent on reading, interest in and attitudes towards reading, and diversity and content of reading. In PISA 2000 the Finnish students showed the highest reading engagement by far, with an index in relation to the OECD mean of +0.46, compared to Sweden +0.14 (Kirsch, et al., 2002; Linnakylä, et al., 2007)

The correlation between reading engagement and high achievement can also be explained by the Mathew Effect; good readers get better because they practise more and they practise more because they are good at reading and therefore enjoy it and in turn practise more – an upwards spiral. The reverse Mathew Effect would be applicable to struggling readers (Stanovich 1986 cited in Afflerbach, 2008).

In a survey conducted in 2006, it was found that while 70% of students in year nine had read one to five novels in school during the last semester, more than one in ten students (17% of boys) had not read even one. Those students exhibited attitudes that were far more intolerant and prejudiced than others (Lärarnas Riksförbund; Teachers National Association, 2006).

Another survey conducted by the Teachers’ National Association to map reading habits of students in years seven to nine, found that interest in reading is decreasing with age; in year seven, 10% of the students said they never read in their leisure time; in year nine (15 year old students) the figure rose to 20%. Furthermore, the gender gap is widening with age. This survey also explored students’ favourite pastimes; for both boys and girls the two most popular activities were “hanging out with friends” and secondly “do sports and exercise”. “To read books” ranked number
10 for girls and number 12 for boys; even doing homework was ranked higher (Lärarnas Riksförbund; Teachers' National Association, 2005).

In PISA 2000, 36% of students said they do not read for enjoyment and 30% read for 30 minutes or less daily. In 2009, the corresponding figures were 37% and 34%. Thus, the trend found in PISA of decreasing time spent on reading for enjoyment among all students, was also apparent in Sweden, although not to a great degree (OECD, 2001b, 2010c). In the present study, 39% of students said they read something not related to school most days.

In discussions with students, it was apparent that many were highly organised. Numerous tasks were competing for their time and they had to decide how to prioritise between, for example, studying/homework (which was done more thoroughly for a strict teacher or if a test was coming up), training, other leisure activities (which normally did not include reading) and spending time with family and friends. A very low proportion of students in Sweden said yes to the survey question “I could do better at school, I just cannot be bothered” and a very high proportion said yes to “I always put my very best effort in at school”. When this was discussed in class, students explained that “very best effort” was not an absolute, but had to be put into context. For example, if more time had gone into preparing for a test, the result could have been better, but the best effort was put in, in relation to the importance it was seen to have. One student was nonplussed and asked “You wouldn’t want me to give up my training only to study more, would you?” In discussions with teachers and principals, they were very pleased that the students had succeeded in taking responsibility for their own learning. This structured, long-term awareness also showed in one of the survey questions; 68% of Swedish students said they had clear plans for what they wanted to do with their lives, compared to, for example, only 43% in Finland. Further, students often mentioned that many books have been made into films and watching a movie was more time effective, and had the added bonus of a picture. Some commented that books were “so yesterday”, and 57% in the survey expressed the belief that books in time would be replaced by computers (not a view shared by their parents) and 60% affirmed that they do not read many books but read a lot on the computer. Compared to the 2001 PIRLS study, the 2006 survey showed a decrease in the number of readers, but nevertheless Sweden was one of the countries with the highest number of parents reporting that they read for enjoyment every day, more than 5 hours per week and
with the most favourable attitudes towards reading, which generally related to higher achievement outcomes for the children (Mullis, et al., 2007). Similarly, in the present study, a majority of students said their parents often read books. The various PISA surveys have shown a positive correlation between parents’ interest in reading as well as number of books at home and students’ reading engagement and achievement outcomes. However, in Sweden students commented that reading is for older people who have the time to read books, rather than viewing them as role models to be emulated.

6.5.3. Summary microsystem.

6.5.3.1. Learning environment.

Swedish students appear to be very happy with every aspect of schooling. However, the disciplinary climate seems to be one area which leaves something to be desired, because although the atmosphere is positive and friendly, a substantial proportion of students find too much time is spent on maintaining discipline, and they find it difficult to work in peace and quiet.

There has been a shift from class teaching, adjusted to pupils’ individual needs, to class teaching based around individual work. Thus, students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning and teachers take a back seat or facilitative role. The effects of this have been an increase in the importance of students’ cultural capital and socio-economic background. It has also led to a stronger demand for special needs support. The availability of special needs instruction varies greatly between municipalities, but it has been established that students who are in need may often not get the appropriate type of support, particularly if the parents are not highly educated. As special needs support is often offered in special groups or classes it leads to exclusion. Swedish research has even suggested a negative correlation between early and prolonged special needs instruction and achievement outcomes.

6.5.3.2. Reading engagement.

While Swedish students appreciate that they need to be able to read for future work and studies, they do not consider reading to be a favourite activity. Many students seem to have taken responsibility for their own learning and have become masters in
prioritising, among all the tasks that compete for their attention and time. Reading is ranked a low priority. Of special concern is the indication that students that do not read novels at all, develop intolerant and prejudiced attitudes, to a higher degree, towards, for example, minority groups.

6.6. Conclusion.

It was concluded in chapter 5, that the Finnish success in Bronfenbrenner’s terms, depended on all systems being aligned. Ironically, the Swedish systems are also aligned, but in a negative downwards spiral.

At the macro level, it is apparent that there is no consensus and no continuity, but constant reforms and constant political squabbling. For example, formal grades used to be given only in year eight and year nine. In the last election campaign in 2010, one of the big issues was whether to change the introduction of formal grades from existing year eight, to year seven or year six, which from a distance does not appear to be a watershed. The school choice policies, however, do seem to be so. Sweden has turned away from the centralised, uniform, comprehensive state school system and instead adopted one of the world’s most competitive and deregulated models, where tax money is funding independent schools often run by for-profit companies.

Teacher quality and teacher training quality must be at the heart of the matter. With low status, teaching has been attracting a dwindling number of applicants with lower grades. The teacher training programs have also been found to be inferior in audits. Many teachers are not qualified for the year level or subjects taught. The lack of quality teachers may have contributed to the increasing streaming of students and the emphasis on individual work. It does not seem too farfetched to assume that this also would have an impact on student achievement outcomes.

The decentralisation has clearly led to great differences in education costs, teacher – pupil ratios, the number of qualified teachers and the availability of special needs support between different municipalities and schools.

Parents seem to help their children with their homework and meet with their teachers to a much greater degree than other parents in this study; this may stem from parents taking great interest, but it may well be an expression of the Swedes’ documented low confidence in the education system.
Increased streaming and increased individual work has caused stronger reliance on parents’ cultural capital and calls for special needs support. However, as special support is often given in separate groups or classes, Swedish research has suggested a negative correlation between early and prolonged special needs instruction and achievement outcomes.

On the other hand, the classroom climate appears to be very positive and students are happy with most aspects of their school experience, even though the disciplinary climate still can be improved, as a sizeable proportion of students find it difficult to work in the classroom. Relations with teachers seem to be very good. Many students have achieved a high degree of independence and self regulation, they manage to take responsibility for their own learning and to prioritise the great variety of tasks that compete for their time and attention.

For decades the Swedish Model was a brand name for an equal and equitable society. Across the world it was studied, debated and often emulated. Finland, for example, based its comprehensive school system on the Swedish version. While it took the Finnish students from average to the top performers that they still are, the Swedish students went from top performers to the average level that they are today. In chapter 5, the Bronfenbrenner model clearly established the positive alignment between systems that underpins the excellent Finnish student performance. Thus, applying Bronfenbrenner’s analytic tools to the Swedish educational culture is a revealing comparative exercise with wide-ranging implications for further policy discussions.
Chapter 7.

An exploration of differences in attitudes between Swedish speaking and Finnish speaking 15 year old students.

7.0. Introduction.

This chapter investigates differences in academic performance and attitudes between Finnish speaking and Swedish speaking students and parents in Finland. Although they are a minority group, the Swedish speaking Finns hold a privileged status. It will be argued in this chapter that the privileged minority status of the Swedish speaking Finns has contributed to more relaxed attitudes to educational performance and has thus led to achievement outcomes that are lower than Finnish speaking students. As in the previous chapters, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model will be used to scaffold the discussion.

The PISA surveys show significant differences in achievement outcomes between the Swedish and the Finnish speaking students in Finland, not only in reading literacy but also in mathematics and science. The country’s average in reading literacy is 536, which ranks Finland at third in the PISA survey after Shanghai (China) and Korea. The average for Finnish speaking schools is 538 and for Swedish speaking schools 511. That means that the Swedish speaking students in Finland still perform at a higher level than students in the other Nordic countries, but in the international assessment stakes they come in at number 10. There are also regional differences among the Swedish speaking communities (Harju-Luukkainen & Nissinen, 2011). The present study examines differences in attitudes between Swedish and Finnish speaking students and parents. A consideration of discrepancies in outlook between these two groups, analysed through the Bronfenbrenner framework, is thus able to shed light on factors influencing Finland’s high performance in reading literacy.

7.1. Data gathering.

Five Swedish speaking schools participated in the project. 85 students, 34 parents and eight teachers completed the online survey. There were also a number of classroom observations, class discussions and interviews conducted.
As detailed in previous chapters, important elements of the macrosystem involve the components listed in Figure 17 below. These are addressed in this chapter under the headings: minority group status and historical impact; minority group status and cultural values; regional differences; teacher training, teaching styles and respect. The discussion of the exosystem is very brief, as there are no major differences to the discussion presented in chapter 5. The account of the mesosystem looks at parent – teacher relations, while the microsystem analysis focuses on socio-cultural background and minority status, disciplinary climate, special needs support and reading engagement, and appreciation of the mother tongue subject.

This analysis reveals that the underperformance of Swedish speaking Finns is an effect of a broad range of systemic factors. The privileged minority status at the macro-level has filtered through to other levels, so that students and parents, and possibly even teachers, exhibit a more relaxed attitude to education. Swedish speaking students do not value academic success as much as the Finnish speakers and show less ambition and perseverance, but a higher sense of belonging in school.

7.2. Macrosystem.

Macroystem Components:

- Education policies
- Education system
- Teacher training
- Historical impact
- Cultural values
- Cultural homogeneity/heterogeneity

Figure 17. Macrosystem components. Source: Anna Dall, 2011.
7.2.1. Minority group status and historical impact.

Bronfenbrenner quoted the Russian professor Leontiev saying “It seems to me that American researchers are constantly seeking to explain how the child came to be what he is; we in the U.S.S.R. are striving to discover not how the child came to be what he is, but how he can become what he not yet is” (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, p. 14, 1979, p. 40). This statement indicates a move from researching the status quo to conducting transforming experiments, where changes to an aspect of the macrosystem will have future effects on other system levels. It has been suggested (Paulston, 1977) that the case of Swedish speaking Finns obtaining the constitutional right to education in their own language, could be seen as a transformative program. While commonly in other countries, minority groups’ cultural and linguistic diversity have not been protected and therefore they have been assimilated, the Swedish Finns have, so far, been able to retain a distinct ethnic and linguistic identity (Paulston, 1977; Østern, 2004). As detailed in chapter 5, the national framework at the macrolevel, including components such as education policies, education system and the structure of teacher training programs, is the same for Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers in Finland. However, other macrosystem aspects such as historical impact and cultural values prove to be very different in the Swedish speaking communities compared to the Finnish speaking part.

Minority group students’ motivation and achievement outcomes have been studied within the anthropology of education, with John Ogbu as one of the key theorists. His cultural – ecological theory also emphasises the importance of viewing the minority status in a holistic perspective; he argues, for example, that the voluntary or involuntary migrant status of a group, and how the minority group is perceived by the dominant group, and the minority group’s reaction, are factors that impact on the educational achievement of that group. Thus, for instance, a family may choose to immigrate to another country in order to give their children better opportunities, and this is likely to lead to higher academic achievements. On the other hand, forced minority status is likely to create resistance to the dominant culture, particularly where the minority culture is disparaged, and this can be expressed in low achievement outcomes. Clearly, each minority group faces their
own challenges (Foster, 2004). Ogbu also recognised the distinctive educational situation of autonomous minority groups, such as non-immigrant groups with a distinctive ethnic, linguistic, religious or cultural identity, but numerically constituting a minority group, e.g. Amish and Jews in the US. While Ogbu himself mainly studied the situation of black students in the US, he called for research exploring minority groups in Europe. He argued that ethnic groups’ low achievement outcomes often were attributed to socio-economic factors while ignoring the impact of their minority status. He also stressed that minority groups’ performance would be highly impacted by the historic interrelations with the dominant group (Luciak, 2004).

For centuries Finland was part of the kingdom of Sweden. The Swedes mainly lived along the western and southern coastline, and the Finns, coming from the East, settled in the inland forest areas. Even though the Swedes were numerically always in the minority, they saw themselves as superior, “bättre folk” (better people) and for a long time held political and financial power. Thus, Swedish was the language used in government, business and culture. This continued even after Sweden lost formal control of Finland to Russia in 1809. However, during the 1800s the Finnish nationalistic movement grew steadily and in the early 1900s Swedish dominance in public life was swept away. This led to a mobilisation to unify all Swedish speaking Finns, not only the privileged elite but also common farmers and fishermen, to secure their future as an ethnic minority (Paulston, 1977). This is why both Finnish and Swedish are acknowledged as national languages and why this was enshrined in the constitution adopted after independence. Today, the Swedish speaking minority constitutes 6% of the population, living predominantly along the western and southern coastline. Half of them live in municipalities where they form the majority, but in the capital Helsinki for instance, where 20% of them reside, they make up only 10% of the population (Finnäs, 1997; Hansén, 2004). Swedish speaking Finns are guaranteed the right to, for example, education and government services in their language provided they live in a bilingual municipality where they exceed 8% of the population or 3000 persons (Finnäs & O’Leary, 2003; Hansén, 2004).

7.2.2. Minority group status and cultural values.

The Swedish speaking minority group is in continuous numerical decline. One reason proposed is lower birth rates, associated with higher socio-economic status and greater urbanisation. Further, half of the Swedish speaking Finns live in
municipalities where there is Finnish domination, and many intermarry, thus even if a great deal of the children become bilingual, there seems to be a preference for Finnish as the first language (McRae, 1988). There has also been extensive emigration from Finland after the Second World War, particularly to Sweden, intensifying in the 1960s and 70s, and especially by Swedish Finns. Concurrently, there has been a massive influx of Finnish speakers into the traditional Swedish areas (Finnäs, 1997; Hedberg & Kepsu, 2003). All in all, the Swedish minority group has become more vulnerable, to the extent that some even contest it being considered an ethnic minority group; it has been claimed that values are shared among the population, only expressed in two different languages (McRae, 1988). Others argue that this view represents a way of overly simplifying a sensitive cultural issue (Hedberg & Kepsu, 2003). Empirical studies show differences in that Swedish speakers generally have a higher socio-economic status, they are unemployed to a lesser degree, are more likely to have a tertiary education, live longer, endure better health status and have lower divorce rates (Saarela & Finnäs, 2003, pp. 446, 454). Many Swedish Finns are found in positions of power (Frykholm, 2007). In personal communication with Swedish speakers as well as Finnish speakers there was consensus that there certainly are differences between the two groups. However, there was also a resistance to go into what these differences were as it was considered a delicate matter. “They are not like us” was a common comment.

7.2.3. Regional differences.

There are not only differences between Swedish speaking and Finnish speaking students, but also performance differences between various regional groups of Swedish speakers. Students from the only area where Swedish is protected, the unilingual autonomous island / province of Åland, achieve the highest outcomes in reading literacy, 527 score points in PISA 2009 (Harju-Luukkainen & Nissinen, 2011; McRae, 1988). However, while students in the southern province of Uusimaa reached the score of 515, the students in the Ostrobothnian province on the west coast only averaged 504 (Harju-Luukkainen & Nissinen, 2011). This is somewhat puzzling, as Uusimaa is predominantly urban, with a strong shortage of qualified teachers, bigger schools, a greater Finnish influence and a greater proportion of bilingual students. In Ostrobothnia, on the other hand, there is a majority of Swedish speakers with great social capital, no lack of qualified teachers, small and safe
schools and a low degree of social problems (Brunell, 2009). The people in Ostrobothnia also seem to have a closer cultural connection to Sweden, e.g. most TV programs watched are broadcasted by the Swedish TV stations (Hedberg & Kepsu, 2003). Brunell (2007, p. 126) claims that the situation in Ostrobothnia can be satisfactorily explained by “the student material, which held lower socio cultural status” and therefore there should be no concerns about the quality of Swedish-Finnish schools. In response, it has been argued that although socio-economic / socio-cultural aspects such as parental education and income plus availability of classic literature at home certainly are of importance, they cannot be accepted as sole explanatory factors (Frykholm, 2007). Interestingly, other surveys, conducted by the Finland-Swedish National Board of Education found that even though there may be linguistic and socio-cultural variations within Finland-Sweden, there have been no significant differences in achievement outcomes between Uusimaa and Ostrobothnia in national mother tongue evaluations (Hellgren, 2011, p. 94; Silverström, 2006, p. 66). An explanation for this might be that the national study evaluated other aspects of mother tongue (i.e. Swedish) than the PISA survey.

Another suggested explanation for the regional differences has been the importance of dialects. Studies have shown that children with a strong dialect have more reading problems than children who practice the standard language at home (Frykholm, 2007). Sometimes the differences between a local dialect and Swedish standard language are as strong as between Swedish and Danish or Norwegian and it can even carry a negative connotation to use standard Swedish in daily life (Brunell & Saretsalo, 1999, p. 175). Thus, it has been suggested that the heavier Ostrobothnian dialect may make it more difficult for students here to code switch in school and that this may contribute to lower performance in reading literacy (Frykholm, 2007).

There is also the increasing degree of bilingualism to be considered. 12% of Swedish schools in Finland reported in PISA 2009 that 20% - 40%of the students were speaking another language (mainly Finnish) at home; for 4% of the schools the proportion was 40 – 60% and for another 4% the numbers went above 60%. Thus, in 80% of Swedish speaking schools and in 100% of Finnish speaking schools there were less than 20% of students who spoke another language than the language of instruction at home (Harju-Luuikkainen & Nissinen, 2011). This can be compared to the National Board of Education evaluation, where it was found that half of the
students in Uusimaa spoke only, or mainly Swedish outside school compared to 75% in Ostrobothnia. Generally speaking, students, who to a higher degree and to a larger extent, use only Swedish, perform significantly better than others in reading literacy (Silverström, 2006). However, Finnish speaking students have also been found to have a positive influence in Swedish speaking classes contributing to higher achievement outcomes (Brunell, 2007).

All in all, the situation seems contradictory. Logically, the students in Ostrobothnia should be the ones with higher results; unilingual to a higher degree, a surplus of qualified teachers, high social capital, few social problems and a closer cultural connection with Sweden. It does not seem reasonable to sweepingly attribute the lower performance to socio-cultural background factors such as it being a rural area with lower education expectations. Thus Ogbu’s theory of the effects of minority status explaining lower academic performance will be explored below in 7.5.1.

7.2.4. Teacher training, teaching styles and respect.

The training of Swedish speaking teachers is carried out at the Pedagogical Faculty of the Åbo Akademi University, located in the Ostrobothnian town of Vasa. According to the annual report, 84 students out of 323 applicants, i.e. 26%, were accepted into the class teacher training program in the spring of 2010. 60% of the applications came from students in Ostrobothnia (Nordman, 2011, p. 3).

Does the lower level of competition affect the standard of accepted pre-service teachers and in the end the standard of qualified Swedish speaking teachers? The McKinsey report (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) argued that the standard of an education system can never surpass the standard of its teachers. While there was no study found that actually compared performance levels of Swedish and Finnish teachers, another aspect is intriguing. There is a great shortage of qualified teachers in the Swedish speaking schools where 25% are not formally qualified, compared to only 8% in Finnish speaking schools (Brunell, 2007; Silverström, 2006, p. 52). Mainly affected is the southern part of Finland-Sweden. Despite this, the students in this area achieve higher learning outcomes than students in Ostrobothnia where there is an oversupply of qualified teachers (Brunell, 2007, 2009).

Finnish speaking teachers use set textbooks to a much higher degree than the Swedish speakers. Consistently, Swedish speaking principals have maintained
that the lack of teaching material in Swedish affects performance negatively. As the Swedish speaking students constitute such a small group, it is not commercially profitable to publish textbooks for them, neither is it considered appropriate to use textbooks developed for the Sweden-Swedish students (Knubb-Manninen, 2008). In the present study, 76% of Finnish speaking students attest they have used a set textbook in mother tongue class often or sometimes during the last month, compared to only 30% of the Swedish speakers. Other differences were also found in the present study; many more Finnish speakers said that in mother tongue class they had read silently to themselves, read aloud to the class, the teacher had read aloud, they had practised conversation skills and done role plays. On the other hand, many more of the Swedish speakers said that they had written projects, written essays, produced portfolios, done oral presentations and worked on computers in mother tongue class often or sometimes during the last month. The stronger focus on written skills may explain why in the national evaluation the Swedish speakers were equal with the Finnish speakers only in the writing task (Silverström, 2006).

In a national study it was found that Finnish speaking teachers found large groups to be a main challenge (Finnish speaking school classes are generally bigger than the Swedish speaking classes, but smaller than in the OECD in general; rf.ch. 5). Swedish speaking teachers were challenged by the high standards set out in the curriculum (Knubb-Manninen, 2008). In personal communication with Swedish speaking teachers it was suggested that teachers in Swedish speaking schools are less demanding, the Finnish speaking work harder and are more serious. Similarly, some Swedish speaking students also suggested they did not work hard because they were not sufficiently encouraged by teachers and peers and in the survey no more than 60% of Swedish speakers thought it was important to their teachers that they achieve as well as possible as opposed to 79% of Finnish speakers.

The teaching style in Finland has often been described as teacher-centred and traditional. However, while international studies seem to indicate that the Finnish speaking teachers are highly focused on cognitive, academic performance, the Swedish speakers seem to stress other aims, leading to students being happier at school with a more positive relation to the teachers (Brunell, 2007; Knubb-Manninen, 2008). This is not totally supported by the present study, where 70% of Finnish speaking students say that they find it easy to approach most of their teachers with questions and to discuss school related matters, compared to 65% of Swedish
speakers. Further, 15% of Finnish speaking students assert that they discuss personal matters with some teachers, contrasted to 9% of Swedish speakers (even though the majority of Swedish speaking teachers believe they are approached often or sometimes to discuss personal matters). On the other hand, PISA results show that the Swedish speakers express a higher degree of belonging in school (Brunell, 2007).

As discussed in chapter 5, Finnish people are known for respecting their teachers, but the Finnish students in the present study were found to respect their teachers the least of all. Again, there were differences between the language groups; 65% of the Swedish speakers in the study said they respected most of their teachers compared to 72% of Finnish speakers. Only 46% of Swedish speaking students believed their parents had great respect for their teachers, contrasted to 62% on the Finnish side, and only 60% of students in Finland-Sweden ascertained that their teachers always treated them with respect (74% of Finnish speakers). All in all, findings in relation to teacher training, teaching styles and respect are contradictory and inconclusive.

7.3. The exosystem.

Decentralisation of education is implemented in the same way in all of Finland, as discussed in chapter 5. However, one might expect that less competition for Swedish speaking Finns to be accepted into teacher training would have an impact on teacher skills, and in turn affect implementation of local curricula. The greater proportion of unqualified teachers in the Swedish speaking schools in the southern part of Finland should logically also affect results. However, these factors, as discussed in 7.2.3., appear to have little impact. It should be noted that a factor that has not been investigated in the present study is municipal funding. Large and consistent differences in funding between Swedish speaking and Finnish speaking municipalities would have an effect on student performance, thus this could be a topic for future research.
7.4. The mesosystem

7.4.1. Parent – teacher relations.

It was often stated in discussions with Swedish speaking teachers and parents that the Swedish speaking community is so close-knit and small-scale that relations between home and school are automatically close. Despite this, 88% of parents state that they are rarely, or never, informally contacted by teachers. It may be interpreted that teachers do not call specifically to talk about school matters, but that teachers and parents still often meet in a social context.

Helping with homework is another area where parents can support teachers. 56% of parents indicate helping with homework but only 39% state that they get adequate information from their child’s school regarding how they can help their child achieve better, compared to 53% of Finnish speaking parents. However, in the National Board of Education study, half of the principals thought that the support from parents for helping students with their homework was inadequate (Silverström, 2006). There does not seem to be very much homework to help with though, 75% of the students state they do homework less than 30 minutes per day, compared to 37% of Finnish speakers, and while 70% of the Finnish speaking students believe that homework is needed for good results in school, only 34% of the Swedish speakers agree. Thus, more information from teachers in regards to how parents can help their children to attain better results, and more effort, as in more homework, may lead to higher student performance.

7.5. The microsystem.

7.5.1. Socio-cultural background and minority status.

Ogbru pointed out, (rf. subsection 7.2.1.) that it is easy to attribute minority groups’ lower achievement outcomes to socio-economic / socio-cultural factors, while ignoring their minority status. As discussed above in 7.2.3, this has been evident in reports regarding Finland-Swedish students’ performance levels in reading literacy (see e.g. Brunell, 2007; Brunell & Saretsalo, 1999; Knubb-Manninen, 2008). This is somewhat puzzling for two reasons: the Finnish Swedes’ generally have a higher level of education and socio-economic status (Saarela & Finnäs, 2003), and secondly, why would socio-cultural factors here have a major negative impact on
performance, when Finland as a whole in the PISA surveys consistently has been one of the countries with the highest equity and lowest differences between schools (Kirsch, et al., 2002; OECD, 2004, 2007b)?

If instead, the focus were to be on the minority status, other explanatory factors would emerge. The Swedish speakers can attend Swedish comprehensive and upper secondary schools. There are also Swedish tertiary education programs available in Finland. For many students university education in Sweden is an alternative as well. Therefore, there is less competition for Swedish speakers to attain secondary school and university education (Brunell, 2007; Saarela & Finnäs, 2003). This may well result in Swedish speaking students showing less ambition and not valuing good school results as much as Finnish students, as was reported in PISA 2003 (Brunell, 2007, pp. 54, 106). In other studies, interest for the particular subject and belief in its usefulness have shown a positive correlation with achievement outcomes (Silverström, 2006). In the present study, there are several findings, not only supporting but also reinforcing this argument. While most students in other countries thought that what they learnt in school would be important for their future, as many as 17% of Swedish Finns disagreed (compared to 3% of Finnish students). Only 40% found what they learned in school interesting to them now, which is by far the lowest number, contrasted to 70% of Finnish students. Further, while about half of them agreed that they always put in their best effort in school, 21%, compared to 8% of Finnish students did not agree that some school work, although boring, still has to be done. When these findings, indicating lack of interest and lack of effort, were followed up in class meetings, explanations offered were “Cannot be bothered”; “Too lazy”; “Don’t have the time”; “Not important”; “Don’t have the energy”. One girl said in an interview that “so many kids just float along, they hang out with friends at night, they smoke and drink, watch TV and play computer games, and they may get money instead of parental attention. Many have the capacity, but they waste it”. On the other hand, Swedish speaking school principals estimated in PISA 2003 that they had less problems with truancy and alcohol abuse than the Finnish speaking principals (Brunell, 2007, p. 58). In personal communication several students expressed the view that doing well at school was not “cool”. Teachers also expressed their impression that school is becoming less and less important.
7.5.2. Classroom climate.

7.5.2.1. Disciplinary climate.

As discussed in chapter 5, in PISA studies the disciplinary climate in Finnish schools has been found wanting. In another study, it was found that while half of Finnish speaking students thought that every, or most classes, were disrupted by noise and disturbance, only one third of Swedish speakers agreed with this (Knubb-Manninen, 2008). In the present study, 62% of Finnish speaking students contrasted to 33% of Swedish speaking students expressed the belief that maintaining discipline in class takes too much time. This was not supported by classroom observations. Additionally, in interviews, Swedish speaking students expressed frustration about the disorder in many classes. One student said: “There is never a quiet moment in this class. But students know it’s only empty words when the teacher threatens to throw them out of the classroom, because during class time the teacher is responsible for the students”. Students voiced the opinion that there was more disorder if the teacher was not respected, or the subject was not considered important. In a study by the National Board of Education, half of the principals in Swedish-Finnish schools expressed the opinion that student disturbance may influence the academic performance (Silverström, 2006). Thus, a related matter is whether there are many strict teachers or not in the schools. One study found that there were “fewer problems with too strict teachers” in the Swedish speaking schools. Strict teachers were assumed to hinder the students’ learning, but inversely, were found to improve performance (Brunell, 2007, pp. 56,57,61). In the present study, 53% of the Finnish students (highest percentage of all) and 17% of the Swedish speaking students (lowest percentage of all) thought that many of their teachers were very strict. Bronfenbrenner stated that it is the experienced situation that matters to the researcher. It may be that the less strict Swedish speaking teachers accept a more relaxed classroom climate, while the stricter Finnish speaking teachers do not and thus more time is seen to be taken up by maintaining discipline in class. It may also well be that a more relaxed classroom climate has a positive effect on student engagement but a negative effect on academic performance.
7.5.2.2. Special needs support.

Whilst one of the factors commonly cited as underpinning the Finnish high achievement is the early and immediate intervention when a student is seen to fall behind, this seems to be less consistent in the Swedish speaking schools, depending much on the municipal funding. While 82% of Finnish speaking students in the present study affirmed that they get extra help from teachers in or after class when they need it, only 38% of the Swedish speakers said the same. One girl stated: “I asked for extra support and got it three to four times, and then they said I really didn’t need it. It really shows straight away when someone has had extra support with the special needs teacher, they focus better, they want to learn, and disruptive students calm down”. The parents held similar views, 63% of Finnish speakers and 42% of Swedish speakers said students at their child’s school got extra support when needed.

7.5.3. Reading engagement and appreciation of the mother tongue subject

The Finnish speaking students read more than the Swedish speakers. In the present study, 64% of the Finnish speakers affirmed it was one of their favourite leisure activities, compared to 44% in Swedish-Finland. This difference was evident in multiple questions. While 91% of Finnish speakers thought it was important to learn grammar and spelling, only 52% of Swedish speakers agreed; (while 72% of Finnish speakers affirmed they knew the difference between active and passive voice, 32% of Swedish speakers did so), 60% of Finnish speakers believed it was important to read and know about great literature, to explore writers from their own country as well as the great classics from around the world, contrasted to 29% of Swedish speakers. 75% on the Finnish side thought it was important to learn to communicate well, do oral presentations and practice conversations against 60% of Swedish speakers. While only 8% of the Finnish speaking students did not find it important to be able to speak, write and read proficiently to do well in other subjects, 21% of the Finnish-Swedes did so. Only 10% of the Finnish speaking students, compared to 29% of the Swedish speakers, believed that their parents did not think it important that they did well in mother tongue class. This attitude was reflected in the parent survey, where 0% of the Finnish speaking parents and as much as 42% of the
Swedish speakers did not believe mother tongue to be one of the most important subjects in school.

7.6. Summary.

The Swedish speaking students achieve lower learning outcomes in reading literacy than the Finnish speaking students. It has often been suggested that this is due to socio-cultural and socio-economical background factors. This explanation seems somewhat puzzling as the Swedish speakers are said to enjoy a higher socio-economic status. Further, in the PISA surveys Finland as an entity has shown extensive socio-economical equity - if not abolishing, at least neutralising - socio-economic background factors, so clearly this could equally occur in the Swedish speaking part of the country.

On the other hand, when analysis is based on Ogbu’s cultural-ecological theory of minority status affecting academic performance, other explanatory factors emerge. There are more places in secondary and tertiary education for the Swedish-Finns, thus competition is less fierce. This may explain the attitudes articulated by many Swedish speaking students, that school is not important, and mother tongue is neither important nor useful. On a general level, there is less interest, less ambition and less perseverance.

Consistently, there is less competition for acceptance to the teacher training program for Swedish speakers compared to Finnish speakers. Does this affect teacher and student performance? Many of the Swedish speaking teachers seem to be less strict, less demanding, and more challenged by the high requirements in the curriculum. They are less respected by the students, and students do not believe that it is important to their teachers that they achieve as highly as possible. It has also been suggested that the Swedish speaking schools are less focused on cognitive academic goals. Another intriguing aspect is that in the southern area, where there are most unqualified teachers, the students still achieve higher learning outcomes. In studies cited above, Brunell has claimed that Finnish speaking students exert a positive influence in Swedish speaking schools. Could the higher degree of bilingualism and Finnish influence in the Swedish speaking schools in the southern part of Finland be a reason for the better performance?

The Swedish speaking community seems to be close-knit. Still, fewer of the Swedish speaking parents than the Finnish speakers reported that they received
enough information from the school to know how to support their children to perform better. The Swedish speaking students spend less time on homework than the Finnish speakers, and they also do not believe that homework is needed for good school results.

Special needs support is one of the main factors underpinning Finnish speaking students’ high achievement outcomes. This support seems to be less consistent in the Swedish speaking schools.

It is often stated that the classroom climate and the disciplinary climate is better in the Swedish speaking schools. PISA results suggested that the Swedish speakers feel they belong in school to a higher degree than the Finnish speakers. However, in the present study, the Swedish speaking students stated that they communicated with their teachers less than the Finnish speaking students, in regards to school related matters as well as personal matters. Regarding disciplinary climate, it has to be stressed that this has been rated by students. The Swedish speaking teachers were experienced as less strict, which may well mean that they allow a more relaxed classroom situation, more freedom and student autonomy, and thus less time is seen to be taken up by maintaining discipline. This may be beneficial for students’ sense of belonging, but detrimental to academic achievement.

The Swedish speakers do not value academic success as much as the Finnish speakers and show less ambition and perseverance. They read less than the Finnish speakers. They have less classic literature and poetry at home. They seem not to appreciate any aspect of the mother tongue subject. They do not believe their parents think it is important that they do well in mother tongue, and correspondingly, the parents, to a large degree, say they do not find the mother tongue subject to be one of the most important in school.

Thus the findings of the present study point to an education culture in the Swedish speaking part of Finland that is more relaxed in relation to academic performance than in the Finnish speaking area. However, as the results are derived from a limited sample, further research would be required to draw more generalisable conclusions.¹

¹ The researcher has been awarded a grant from the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland enabling her to undertake a more in-depth study of cultural differences between students in the Swedish speaking and the Finnish speaking parts of Finland on completion of this thesis.
Chapter 8: Conclusion and discussion.

8.0. Conclusion.

In this chapter a summary of debates and discussions in previous chapters and responses to the research questions will be offered, followed by discussion of future direction and research.

8.1. Research questions.

This thesis explored cultural factors underpinning achievement outcomes in reading literacy in Finland, Sweden and Indonesia. It was set in the context of the current trend of globalisation of education and sought to discuss whether global solutions are inevitable, desirable or even possible and the extent to which they can be modified by national cultural filters. Thus, it is not a thesis about reading literacy per se, or strategies for the teaching of reading literacy, but rather it explores how education cultures affect academic performance as exemplified in the area of reading literacy.

The thesis was motivated by a desire to enhance the life prospects of Lombok school students in Indonesia through better quality education. Because Finnish education culture has proven strongly conducive to high achievement outcomes in the PISA surveys, cultural aspects of Finnish education were explored with a view to establish the possibility of identifying universally valid “success” strategies so that these could be emulated in a totally different culture. Additionally, the Finnish school system was based on the Swedish model, but, whereas Finnish students advanced to become, and stay, top performers in PISA tests, Swedish results in reading literacy have dropped to an average level. Thus, the study also aimed to find possible reasons for this decline. Finally, the study was interested in identifying factors causing the difference in performance in reading literacy between Swedish speaking and Finnish speaking students in Finland.

What sets the present study apart from other studies of PISA and reading literacy is its comparative cultural focus and the use of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theoretical framework to itemise key elements of educational cultures. This holistic model allows for logical, scaffolded comparisons between education cultures.
and clearly defines strengths, weaknesses and inconsistencies. The present study is thus broader and more comprehensive than comparative studies that are mainly concerned with comparing and contrasting formal education systems.

8.2. Key findings.

The study argues that the stronger the alignment of system levels, as identified by a Bronfenbrenner model, the stronger the impact of the education culture on student performance.

It was posited in chapter 5 that high achievement in Finland was an effect of a totally aligned educational culture. Finnish educational culture is characterised by a high degree of synergy and cohesion, with all forces in the macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem and microsystem pulling in the same direction. It was argued that in Finland, long-term planning was an important element, preceding long-term high achievement outcomes. At the macrolevel, long term planning is facilitated by a broad and deep consensus about long term education goals and it is matched by a consistency in implementation. Finnish education culture has an inherent high appreciation of education and reading, and a high opinion of teachers. It is thus able to attract the brightest and most capable students to the profession and offer them research-based training so that they become exceptionally proficient, pedagogical experts. The culture of trust in Finland makes it possible to avoid high-stakes standardised, national testing of students and to alleviate the associated stress for parents and students as well as for teachers themselves. Students are assessed by teachers, at the microlevel in the classroom, in relation to their individual progress, within the framework of national curricula and goals. At the exosystem level, teachers are well equipped to take part in decision making processes and to work autonomously and professionally to implement policies. There is a well-developed online system for interactive communication between schools and home at the mesolevel. Finally, at the microlevel, there is early and immediate intervention if a learning difficulty is noticed, particularly at the primary levels of reading literacy and numeracy because students that fall behind in the early years have progressively smaller chances of recovering later. Students do not always enjoy being at school, but they still value education and use the Finnish “sisu” (attitude of perseverance) to achieve at the highest level. In discussions (cited in chapter 2) about the effects of
globalisation of education, the expression TINA is often used – There Is No Alternative. However, as the Finnish case study demonstrates, the effects of globalisation can be filtered through and mediated by the cultural context – There Is An Alternative. Thus it was also claimed in chapter 5 that Finland is an example of an education culture resistant to negative effects of globalisation of education.

In Indonesia, as argued in chapter 5, systems are not aligned. Globalisation has had a major impact on education and Western-influenced policies are adopted at the macrolevel. However, there is patchy implementation at other levels. The study argues that the traditionally hierarchical culture and teachers’ low level of knowledge and skills are major explanatory factors for poor reading literacy. It was concluded that few strategies from Finland could easily or immediately be transposed and implemented in Indonesia. The chapter thus refutes the concept of globally valid education solutions.

As illustrated in chapter 6, the misalignment of systems in Sweden contributes to lowered academic performance. Sweden is a country that is also strongly influenced by the globalisation of education. One of the world’s most centralised education systems has been transformed into one of the most competitive, decentralised and deregulated over just two decades. It was argued that inconsistent education policies and variations in municipal funding, as well as the teaching profession’s low status attracting low numbers of applications, often from students with low grades, are explicatory factors for the downturn in student results.

The educational culture of Swedish speaking Finns in Finland was explored in chapter 7, with a view to understand why these students performed at a lower level compared to Finnish speaking Finns in Finland. It was argued that their privileged minority status impacted on students’ and parents’ attitudes to influence education performance. This also served as a major explanatory factor for a misalignment of systems for these students. John Ogbu’s socio-cultural theory detailing the effects of minority status is sustained by the Bronfenbrenner ecological systems framework which shows more precisely how systemic misalignment affects student success.

8.3. Major themes arising from the present study.

Even though all systems need to be aligned for an optimally effective education culture and reforms cannot be seen in isolation, steps can be taken towards better alignment. Five major themes arising from this study, and discussed in various
chapters, are pertinent to a consideration of factors informing reading literacy outcomes: the purpose of schooling – education in a wider or more limited sense; the possibility of a concept of universal literacy; the impact of bilingualism; teachers – training and trust; the impact of decentralisation of education.

8.3.1. The purpose of schooling.

This study argues that the quality of an education system cannot be reduced to discrete quantitative data. A comprehensive evaluation of education systems is required to assess quantifiable, as well as non-quantifiable, goals and outcomes and would necessitate both large scale quantitative and qualitative surveys. While standardised learning outcomes can be measured in quantitative studies, other aspects such as students’ feeling of belonging, or feeling safe in school, and a whole set of interlocking culturally-specific factors and features, would need to be explored in qualitative analyses to get an in-depth understanding of how such factors also impact on reading literacy. Additionally, students’ self-reported data is culturally influenced. This was illustrated in the present study, when, for example, quantitative data from student surveys, relating to maintaining discipline in the classroom was contrasted with classroom observations, as discussed in chapter 5. To mention another example, it was also evident in responses from Indonesian parents, whose personal and limited experience gave rise to more positive evaluations of existing facilities and equipment in schools compared to parents in the Nordic countries, who are used to higher standards and thus hold higher expectations.

Steering documents in the three countries included in the present study show a cross-national consensus that academic achievement is only one of a number of goals that should be attained in educating children. Other national goals advocate a wider sense of education and its purpose (Dall, 2010b). However, PISA studies appraise education outcomes in a limited sense and fail to take into account cultural contexts and circumstance. Chapters 2 and 3 detail the wide-spread concern that the massive impact of the PISA surveys would lead to a utilitarian and instrumental view of education, narrowed and standardised curricula and a high-stakes testing culture, at the expense of higher order educational goals that cannot be quantified and thus risks remaining just politically correct rhetoric. In fact, the OECD is conducting another project, researching innovative learning environments to transform schools to encourage deep learning and innovation and thus better prepare students for the
21\textsuperscript{st} century (OECD, 2010a). As pointed out in chapter 3, the trend towards increased global standardisation goes against the development of innovative systems and destroys creativity and innovative thinking within specific educational cultures (Peters & Oliver, 2009; Sahlberg & Oldroyd, 2010). Thus, it is important to stress that innovative approaches will serve no purpose unless they are embedded in an aligned, culturally relevant and appropriate education system.

If non-quantifiable goals, expressed in many national steering documents, were to be taken seriously, demands on teachers would be higher, and educational values would need to be equally supportive. As described in chapter 5, The Finnish-speaking part of Finland offers an example of globalisation aspects being modified by the cultural context, creating an educational culture that is holistic and inclusive and still achieving highly academically, albeit that students express less sense of belonging to their schools than others. On the other hand, Swedish and Swedish-speaking Finnish educators suggest, as described in chapters 6 and 7, that lower academic performance may be the price they have to pay for students' greater sense of belonging. However, again the caveat of culturally influenced responses discussed above must be taken into consideration.

It was maintained in chapter 1 that the outcomes of an educational system require a discussion of its effectiveness in relation to goals and values. PISA has a major impact on education policies globally and yet no such debate has occurred. Therefore, PISA results give the impression of being objective only if one considers them to exist in a contextual and cultural vacuum. Just as systems need to be aligned for the greatest impact, education cultures and goals need to be aligned, embraced and evaluated in relation to educational outcomes if they are to have any substance and filter down to the microlevel classroom.

8.3.2. A universal reading literacy concept.

PISA claims to hold cross-cultural validity, as discussed in chapter 1 and 3 and sustains the idea that literacy is necessary for economic and social development. Developing countries such as Indonesia aspire to become globally competitive and for their workforce to be globally employable (overseas or domestically). Therefore, there is a perceived need to raise reading literacy performance to meet the PISA criteria as they are developed by OECD experts, defining what knowledge and skills are needed in the real world of a globalised knowledge economy. This may well lead
to an acceptance of a global literacy notion, measured by a one-size-fits-all yardstick despite an obvious misfit with other elements in educational culture contexts.

8.3.3. Bilingualism.

Speaking one language at school and another at home is likely to affect academic performance, but it is equally likely that other factors, such as socioeconomic status, teacher expectations and student motivation have an impact (see chapters 5, 6 and 7). To fully understand this influence we need studies of the relationship between socioeconomic status, motivation and bilingualism. The student’s proficiency in the two languages or lack thereof, is crucial in determining literacy achievement.

This thesis suggests that factors other than language are in play. As discussed in chapter 7, in Finland the great majority speak Finnish but a small minority of six percent speak Swedish, and studies, cited in chapter 7, have shown that Swedish speakers, who go to Swedish schools and speak Swedish at home, perform better than students who speak Finnish (or another language) at home. However, in Ostrobothnia, where Swedish speakers are in the majority, and where there is no lack of qualified teachers, students perform at a lower level than students in Uusimaa where there is a shortage of qualified teachers and greater Finnish influence.

The thesis supports the contention of other studies, as evidenced in chapter 6, which show that students speaking a language other than Swedish at home achieve lower outcomes, but it is believed that factors apart from language influence their performance. Bilingualism is valued in Sweden, thus students with an immigrant background receive instruction in their mother tongue, including history, literature and culture, as a separate subject at school, with the aim to cement a bi-lingual competence and identity, rather than to create “halvspråkighet”, that is students lacking proficiency in either language. However, the Swedish School Inspection recently found that lower teacher expectations on immigrant children translate into lower achievement outcomes (Sabuni, 2011)

In Lombok, the majority of students taking part in the present study spoke a language other than Indonesian, the language of instruction, at home. It would be valuable to learn how these students perform in the PISA surveys, in comparison with students speaking Indonesian at home. If the contentions of this thesis hold then it could be logically assumed that the Indonesian speaking students achieve higher
outcomes. Such an analysis is beyond the scope of the present study but should be considered for future research. This hypothesis is supported in the present study by Sasak speaking parents who express the belief that students leave school with considerably less-adequate levels of reading literacy than Indonesian speakers, because Sasak speaking students are not instructed in their mother tongue.

8.3.4. Teachers, training and trust.

Highly trained teachers, who are trusted by the community, parents and students, and who trust in the students’ abilities, are crucial to an effective education system. Even though all systems need to be in alignment for an optimally effective education system and culture, better teacher training could be the starting point for improved systems alignment.

The McKinsey report stated that the quality of an education system could not surpass the quality of its teachers (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 13). Finland was used as one of the positive examples. As discussed in chapter 5, teaching is a highly respected profession in Finland and it attracts the brightest and most suitable candidates. Students undertake a long and challenging research-based training program, and Finnish teachers become pedagogical experts who are trusted by community and parents. This culture of trust, which can only exist in a context free of corruption, enables teachers to base their teaching and assessment on students’ abilities rather than national standardised tests. Combined with the early and immediate intervention by teachers when special needs are detected, the high quality of teachers reinforces the trust in students’ inherent, but varying capabilities and their right to optimally develop their unique talents.

In Indonesia the situation is different, as elaborated in chapter 5, and where it was also suggested that to improve student performance, the curriculum has to be made more demanding. However, to teach a more challenging curriculum, teachers need to be better qualified, thus tertiary education quality needs to be raised, which is difficult as proficiency levels of students coming from year 12 are low. This is a vicious circle that needs to be broken. An attempt was made to raise the standards of teachers by the Indonesian government, by extending the teacher training program and introducing a certification process. Sadly however, adding more of the same will not automatically lead to a change. Additionally, requirements for certification were soon watered down and the whole process was impaired by
corruption. This again shows the validity of Bronfenbrenner’s framework and the alignment principle, and reinforces the McKinsey report when it was stated that it was naive to believe that policy changes alone will make a difference. If the best policy reforms, developed at the macrolevel, are not accepted and embraced by teachers, they will make little or no difference. The best ambitions of parents and students will not be fulfilled if there are no capable teachers. Thus, attempts to improve achievement outcomes in reading literacy in Indonesia have to involve attempts to improve teacher performance, aligned with policy “from above” (macrolevel) and parent/community support “from without” (meso and microlevels).

Similarly, in Sweden, teaching is not a prestigious profession. The number of applicants to teacher training has been dwindling. In surveys, cited in chapter 6, the Swedes have shown low confidence in their education system and their teachers. Many teachers are not qualified for the subject, nor are they qualified to teach at the level they are teaching. This may well have led to the increased practice of ability streaming within classes and increased individual work for students. This, in turn, causes a greater need for special needs education as well as dependence on parental support with consequences such as lower achievement outcomes in general, and decreased equity and equality in particular.

It was also suggested in chapter 7 that the less rigorous selection process into the teacher training program for Swedish speakers in Finland may impact on teacher qualifications and in turn, student performance.

8.3.5. Limits of decentralisation.

Decentralisation, as discussed in chapter 2, is one aspect of globalisation that has been widely implemented, despite there being little substantive evidence of the benefits, particularly in developing countries. Findings from the present study point to decentralisation contributing to lowered equality and equity in education in all locations.

In Finland, with its highly qualified teachers who are used to and treasure working autonomously, the local implementation of the curriculum has all the prerequisites to succeed. However, decentralisation in Finland also involves the partial local funding of education. Differences in fund allocation between
municipalities may have contributed to the slight decrease in equity found in the latest PISA survey, as discussed in chapter 5.

In Indonesia, decentralisation of education was introduced as a direct effect of globalisation, at the behest of the World Bank and other aid organisations. It is a reform that fits poorly with Indonesian culture and the current state of teacher competence. As detailed in chapter 5, local administrators and educators are inadequately prepared and lack knowledge and skills required for the decision-making processes to work. There are great variations in funding between regions and municipalities. Overall, decentralisation has led to increased inequality and inequity.

Similarly, in Sweden, great differences in funds allocation between municipalities, particularly in relation to funding of special needs education, have resulted in decreased equality and equity.

8.4. Discussion and suggestions for further research.

8.4.1. Finland.

Finland has been successful in implementing holistic and inclusive policies based on equity, equality and quality. However, there have been recent indications of decreasing equity, which may be an effect of decentralisation or associated with the introduction of school choice. Naturally, this tendency should be closely monitored.

Other concerns that should be explored from a cultural perspective are the (reportedly wanting) school disciplinary climate and Finnish students’ low school engagement, as discussed in chapter 5. When comparing classroom observations in the four country settings in the present study, there were no indications that the disciplinary climate in Finnish speaking schools was poor. However, as Bronfenbrenner emphasises and as was discussed in chapter 4, the experienced situation is just as important as the objectively observed. In some classrooms observed in Indonesia chaos ruled, but as no students were reprimanded, no time was taken up to maintain order in the classroom and the disciplinary climate has in PISA surveys been classified as good, as discussed in chapter 5. Conversely, it may well be that while objectively and comparatively, not much time is taken up to keep order in the Finnish classrooms, it was perceived as such due to Finnish teachers’ and students’ high expectations. Similarly, low school engagement should be
examined in a qualitative study; are Finnish students truly less “happy” than others, or are their responses reflections of the Finnish temperament and culture? In other words, cultural context must be taken into account in evaluating education systems and their effectiveness.

8.4.2. Indonesia.

The systems in Indonesia, from the macrosystem, through the exosystem, the mesosystem and down to the microsystem, need to become aligned. To find solutions and aligned implementations that are culturally relevant, the initiative must come from Indonesians themselves rather than Western experts. In many ways an appropriate framework exists at the macrolevel since teacher training has been upgraded, the curriculum revised and a system put in place to support children from poor families to attend school. However, misalignment blocks implementation. To improve the Indonesian education culture and raise academic performance, this study suggests that initially the following areas are of major importance.

At the macrolevel, and filtering through down to the microlevel with all systems aligned, all children must be granted real, not just formal, access to education. The main problem from an equality point of view is that many children are barred from attending school for financial reasons. Even though there is government funding to assist and exempt these students from paying school fees, in reality this money is often diverted.

In Indonesia, corruption is often declared to be a major obstacle to an effective system and it is being targeted by the Indonesian government. A key challenge is how an education system based on trust could be implemented in a corrupt society.

Indonesian education is focused on the high-stakes, national standardised tests. Teachers are teaching to the test and an enormous amount of class time is devoted to preparing for them. Because the tests are usually multiple choice, they favour rote teaching and learning.

Test results can decide a student’s educational future. Further, test results reflect on principals and teachers and also affect funding of schools. This encourages rampant corruption on the part of schools to secure good results for all, or some, students. Thus the standardised national tests create a good deal of angst for all stakeholders, principals, teachers, parents and students without evidence of
positive outcomes. Under these conditions a review of the national assessment system is recommended.

At the exolevel, the decentralisation of education needs to be reassessed. It is a concept that is foreign to the traditionally hierarchical Indonesian tradition and at an impasse due to the current state of teachers’ and local administrators’ level of competence.

Even though there are still a number of issues that need to be addressed to raise Indonesian students’ achievement outcomes, many education reforms have been passed and there is a strong determination to improve the situation. Under these conditions it is a prime time to work with educational leaders, schools and teachers to assist in making these reforms work.

Teachers sit at the heart of the matter. Reforms will not have an impact unless implemented by teachers. Regardless of how ambitious students and parents may be, they need competent teachers to succeed. Conversely, for teachers to be able to make a difference, they have to identify as educators with expert content knowledge and excellent pedagogical skills as well as enjoying professional identity and pride.

Thus, the major recommendation for the commencement of reform in Indonesia is a focus on pre-service and in-service training. It has already been decided to extend the teacher training program and upgrade it with a certification process. The challenge is to find ways of raising standards and not just adding more of the same; to improve equity and equality without the sacrifice of learning standards. An area of particular interest is the pedagogy and philosophy for the teaching of heterogeneous groups. Another relates to the early detection of special needs support and strategies for remedial teaching. A prerequisite for such an upgraded program to work and not be eroded by corruption, must be the continuous involvement of teachers. If teachers feel that they have had a real input and they accept and embrace suggested changes, a transformation will occur. Better qualified teachers can implement a more demanding curriculum, student performance will rise, and instead of the current vicious circle there would be an upward spiral, however slowly and localised.

8.4.3. Sweden.

In Sweden the various levels of systems are negatively aligned. Factors of importance in this situation are the decentralisation of education and teacher
Decentralisation has led to great differences between municipalities in funding and there are great differences in education costs, teacher – pupil ratios, numbers of qualified teachers and availability of special needs support between different municipalities and schools. Affluent municipalities can afford to spend more on education and to pay their teachers more to attract the best. They spend more on special support, the results improve, and the school gets a good reputation and attracts higher achieving students, all of which contribute to increasing inequity. This study suggests that a return to a system of state funding would deliver a greater degree of both equality and equity. This solution is supported by the Swedish teachers’ associations.

Currently, teaching has a low status in Sweden. The numbers of teaching applicants is dwindling and are often derived from students with lower grades. There has been a grave critique of the quality of the teacher training program. It has been proposed that the lowering standards of Swedish teachers has led to increased ability streaming, and a growing portion of individualised work, which in turn brings about higher dependence on parental support and special needs instruction, eventuating in increasing socio-economic gaps and decreased equity. To turn around this regrettable development, teacher quality needs to be increased.

A new model for teacher training has been put in place and a system with certifications has been introduced. However, this is a remedial approach and does not change the basic facts that in countries where the students are top performers, teaching is an attractive profession and there is competition to be accepted into teacher training. The training program is long and challenging (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Thus the question is what can be done to change public opinion, and particularly students’ opinion about the status of teaching? Higher wages is the solution normally suggested and this may have a certain effect, but while Finnish teachers are only paid the OECD average, Swiss and German teachers are the most highly remunerated. Importantly, this is not reflected in higher student achievement outcomes. The recommendation would be to make use of professional marketing and media experts, a strategy supported by the aforementioned McKinsey report. Clever advertising to promote teachers as interesting, smart, cool and brilliant may have an impact. Currently soaps about police, life guards, border security guards, doctors, nurses and lawyers are omnipresent on television; very likely a well
produced, ongoing series about interesting, professional, unusual teachers would contribute to enhanced status. This would be a novel topic for further research.

8.4.4. The Swedish speaking part of Finland.

This thesis has argued that the Swedish speaking Finns’ privileged minority status has affected parents’ and students’ attitudes to education and attitudes are drastically different to students in the other countries. This has caused a misalignment of systems and led to lower achievement outcomes. Interestingly, within this group of Swedish speaking Finns in Finland, there are significant differences in performance. Students in Ostrobothnia, where there is no lack of qualified teachers and where the majority is Swedish speaking, are performing at a lower level than students in Uusimaa, where there is great shortage of qualified teachers and much more bilingualism and Finnish influence.

This is a complex issue that warrants further research.

8.5. Précis.

To conclude, this thesis argues that alignment of system levels within an education culture is the key to understanding students’ performance in reading literacy and thus explains Finnish students’ high achievement outcomes.

The assessment of systems levels is usefully analysed through Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theoretical framework. Such a focus underlines the importance of culture. Finnish education culture has largely succeeded in resisting the negative effects of globalisation of education, while education policies in Sweden and Indonesia have been greatly influenced by globalisation. Decentralisation, for example, has reduced education equality and equity. Strategies undertaken in the Finnish context cannot easily and immediately be transposed to the Indonesian education context. The notion of a globally valid education concept is refuted and evaluations of effective education cultures cannot be made using discrete quantitative measures. Students’ performance in reading literacy is culturally influenced and should be understood in a cultural context. A culture is organic, a complex ecology growing from a particular past and constantly changing. An effective education system must be embedded in an education culture that aligns values throughout all systems levels.
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### Appendix 1. Student survey.

#### Core Opinionnaire for *International Comparative Study - Students*

**Back**

### Main Demographic Categories

1. **Gender**
   - (1) male
   - (2) female

2. **School**
   - (1)
   - (2)
   - (3)
   - (4)
   - (5)
   - (6)
   - (7) None of the schools above

3. At home we mainly speak: Alternatives varied between countries. The most common immigrant languages in each country were listed.
   - (1)
   - (2)
   - (3)
   - (4)
   - (5)
   - (6)
   - (7)
   - (8)
   - (9)
   - (0)

4. The main purpose of schooling; tick the alternative below that you agree most with:
   - (1) The main purpose of schooling is to give students academic subject knowledge and skills
   - (2) It is just as important for schools to foster democratic and socially skilled students as giving them academic subject knowledge and skills
### Main Value-Statement Questions

1. What I learn at school is important for my future
   - (1) strongly agree
   - (2) agree
   - (3) disagree
   - (4) strongly disagree

2. What I learn in school is interesting to me now
   - (1) strongly agree
   - (2) agree
   - (3) disagree
   - (4) strongly disagree

3. In today's society you can be successful without being good at school
   - (1) strongly agree
   - (2) agree
   - (3) disagree
   - (4) strongly disagree

4. I respect most of my teachers
   - (1) strongly agree
   - (2) agree
   - (3) disagree
   - (4) strongly disagree

5. Maintaining discipline in class takes too much time
   - (1) strongly agree
   - (2) agree
   - (3) disagree
   - (4) strongly disagree

6. My parents have great respect for my teachers
   - (1) strongly agree
   - (2) agree
   - (3) disagree
   - (4) strongly disagree
7. My teachers always treat me with respect
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

8. It is important to most of my teachers that I achieve as well as possible
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

9. I find it easy to approach most of my teachers with questions and to discuss school related matters
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

10. I discuss personal matters with some of my teachers
    (1) strongly agree
    (2) agree
    (3) disagree
    (4) strongly disagree

11. Many of my teachers are very strict
    (1) strongly agree
    (2) agree
    (3) disagree
    (4) strongly disagree

12. I get extra help from teachers when I need to, in class or after class
    (1) strongly agree
    (2) agree
    (3) disagree
    (4) strongly disagree
13. I do homework on the average (tick the alternative that is most suitable for you)
   (1) less than 1/2 hour per day
   (2) 1/2 - 1 hour per day
   (3) more than 1 hour but less than 2 hours per day
   (4) 2 hours or more per day

14. In my family we sit down and have dinner together
   (1) never
   (2) 1-3 days per week
   (3) 4-5 days per week
   (4) 6-7 days per week

15. My parent/s help with school work and assignments
   (1) often
   (2) occasionally
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

16. I talk to my parents about basically everything
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

17. My parents talk to my teachers without anything being wrong
   (1) often
   (2) occasionally
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

18. During the last month we have read silently to ourselves in English class
   (1) often
   (2) occasionally
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

19. During the last month we have read aloud in English class
   (1) often
   (2) occasionally
   (3) rarely
   (4) never
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Frequency Choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20. During the last month our teacher has read aloud in English class</td>
<td>(1) often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. During the last month we have discussed books (or other texts) in</td>
<td>(1) often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English class</td>
<td>(2) occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. During the last month we have used a set textbook in English class</td>
<td>(1) often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. During the last month we have written projects in English class</td>
<td>(1) often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. During the last month we have written essays in English class</td>
<td>(1) often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. During the last month we have practiced conversation skills in</td>
<td>(1) often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English class</td>
<td>(2) occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. During the last month we have produced portfolios in English class</td>
<td>(1) often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
27. During the last month we have done oral presentations in English class
   (1) often
   (2) occasionally
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

28. During the last month we have done role play in English class
   (1) often
   (2) occasionally
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

29. During the last month we have worked on computers in English class
   (1) often
   (2) occasionally
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

30. I know the goals for my English class
    (1) yes, clearly
    (2) vaguely
    (3) uncertain
    (4) have no idea

31. I think it is important to learn grammar and spelling
    (1) strongly agree
    (2) agree
    (3) disagree
    (4) strongly disagree

32. I know the difference between active and passive voice
    (1) yes, clearly
    (2) uncertain
    (3) have no idea

33. My parent/s think it is very important that I do well in English class
    (1) strongly agree
    (2) agree
    (3) disagree
    (4) strongly disagree
34. I think it is important to read and know about great literature, to explore writers from my own country as well as the great classics from around the world
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

35. I think students should be more involved in selecting what texts to read in the mother tongue class
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

36. I think it is important to learn to communicate well, do oral presentations and practice conversation
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

37. I know what is meant by “metaphor”
   (1) yes, clearly
   (2) vaguely
   (3) uncertain
   (4) have no idea

38. It is important to be able to speak, write and read proficiently to do well in other subjects
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

39. I write in my leisure time, e.g. stories, letters, or in my diary
   (1) often
   (2) occasionally
   (3) rarely
   (4) never
40. When I was little my mother read me a bedtime story
   (1) often
   (2) occasionally
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

41. When I was little my father read me a bedtime story
   (1) often
   (2) occasionally
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

42. Reading is one of my favorite leisure activities, Most days I read something not related to school, e.g. magazines, newspapers, comics
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

43. I have read this many books during the last 6 months;
   (1) 0-2
   (2) 3-6
   (3) 7-9
   (4) 10-19
   (5) 20 or more

44. My parents often read books
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

45. I do not read many books but I read a lot on my computer
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
46. I believe in time computers will replace books
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

47. I feel good about myself
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

48. I could do better at school, I just cannot be bothered
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

49. I think homework is needed for good results in school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

50. My friends do not think it is "cool" to achieve well at school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

51. I think it is important that students get extra help in school when they are struggling
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

52. I have clear plans for what I want to do with my life
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
53. Some school work can be boring but it still has to be done
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

54. I always put my very best effort in at school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

55. I want my parents to be proud of me
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

56. I want to be proud of myself
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
Appendix 2. Parent survey.

Core Opinionnaire for International Comparative Study - Parents

Main Demographic Categories

1. Gender
   (1) male
   (2) female

2. I have a son / daughter in year 9 (please tick below)
   (1) son
   (2) daughter

3. My son / daughter attends the school marked below
   (1)
   (2)
   (3)
   (4)
   (5)
   (6)

4. If your child does not attend one of the schools listed above, please indicate below whether s/he attends a State Public School, Catholic School or other Independent School
   (1) State Public School
   (2) Catholic School
   (3) Independent School

5. At home we speak mainly: Alternatives varied between countries. The most common immigrant languages in each country were listed.
   (1)
   (2)
   (3)
   (4)
   (5)
   (6)
6. The main purpose of schooling is - please tick the alternative you agree most with:

1. The main purpose of schooling is to give students academic subject knowledge and skills
2. It is just as important for schools to foster democratic and socially skilled students as giving them academic subject knowledge and skills.

Main Value-Statement Questions

1. It is very important for me that my child does well at school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

2. In today's society you can be successful without doing well at school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

3. I respect most of my child's teachers
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

4. My son / daughter respects most of his / her teachers
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

5. My child's teachers treat me with respect
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
6. I believe it is important to most of my child's teachers that s/he does as well as possible at school

   (1) strongly agree  
   (2) agree  
   (3) disagree  
   (4) strongly disagree

7. I find it easy to approach most of my child's teachers with questions or to discuss school related matters

   (1) strongly agree  
   (2) agree  
   (3) disagree  
   (4) strongly disagree

8. I talk to some of my child's teachers without anything being wrong

   (1) often  
   (2) sometimes  
   (3) rarely  
   (4) never

9. My child does homework on the average

   (1) less than 1/2 hour per day  
   (2) 1/2 - 1 hour per day  
   (3) more than 1 hour but less than 2 hours per day  
   (4) 2 hours or more per day

10. I help my child with homework and school assignments

    (1) often  
    (2) sometimes  
    (3) rarely  
    (4) never

11. In my family we sit down and have dinner together

    (1) never  
    (2) 1-3 days per week  
    (3) 4-5 days per week  
    (4) 6-7 days per week
12. My child talks to me about basically everything
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

13. I know the goals for my child's English course
   (1) yes, clearly
   (2) vaguely
   (3) uncertain
   (4) have no idea

14. I think the content of the English course is relevant
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

15. I think it is important for students to learn grammar and spelling at school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

16. I think it is important for students to read and know about great literature, to explore writers from my own country as well as the great classics from around the world
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

17. I think it is more important for students to learn to understand, use and write real-life texts than to explore literature
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
18. I think the students should be more involved in the selection of texts to be read in English class
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

19. I think it is important for students to learn to communicate well, do oral presentations and practice conversation
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

20. It is important for students to be able to speak, write and read proficiently as it is the basis for achievement in other subjects
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

21. Computers should be used more in English class
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

22. Most students today leave school with an adequate level of reading literacy
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

23. Reading literacy is more important for girls than for boys
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
24. Standards of English teaching in general need to be improved
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

25. In today's society computer skills are more important than reading literacy
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

26. I believe English is one of the most important subjects in school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

27. I write in my leisure time, e.g. stories, letters or in my diary
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

28. When my son / daughter was little, I read him / her a bedtime story
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

29. Reading is one of my favorite leisure activities. Most days I read something not related to work, e.g. magazines, newspapers or books
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
30. I have read this many books during the last six months
   (1) 0-2
   (2) 3-6
   (3) 7-9
   (4) 10-19
   (5) 20 or more

31. I do not read very many books, but I read a lot on the computer
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

32. I believe in time computers will replace books
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

33. My daughter / son would do better at school if s/he had different friends
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

34. I think it is important that students can get extra help in school when they are struggling
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

35. Students at my child's school always get extra support when needed
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
36. I believe it is really important that students learn to be persistent and not give up when they find things boring or difficult
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

37. I believe my son / daughter always puts in his / her very best effort at school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

38. I believe high school education in general in this country is of a very high standard
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

39. Teachers have too many other things to do in school besides teaching
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

40. School should take greater responsibility for the students' social and personal development
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

41. Teacher training needs to be improved
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
42. There is a good library at my child's school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

43. There are enough computers at my child's school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

44. I get adequate information from my child's school regarding how I can help my child achieve better
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

45. I get adequate information from my child's school in regards to school rules and regulations
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

46. My son's / daughter's teachers informally contact me
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

47. Most communication between my child's school and the parents is via email
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
48. There are formal meetings at school between parents and teachers
   (1) never
   (2) 1-2 times per year
   (3) 3-4 times per year
   (4) more than 4 times per year

49. I go to meetings with the teachers
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

50. I am active in the Parents Association
   (1) very
   (2) moderately
   (3) not at all

51. We have class get-togethers, teachers, parents and students
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

52. I believe teachers are underpaid
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

53. I believe media are portraying school in a negative way
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

54. The standard of schooling in general was higher when I went to school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
55. The standard of reading literacy was higher when I went to school
(1) strongly agree
(2) agree
(3) disagree
(4) strongly disagree
Appendix 3. Teacher survey.

Core Opinionnaire for International Comparative Study - Teachers

Main Demographic Categories

1. Gender
   (1) Male
   (2) Female

2. Country
   (1) Sweden
   (2) Finland
   (3) Australia
   (4) Indonesia

3. The main purpose of schooling - please tick the alternative you agree most with:
   (1) The main purpose of schooling is to give students academic subject knowledge and skills
   (2) It is just as important for schools to foster democratic and socially skilled students as giving them academic subject knowledge and skills

Main Value-Statement Questions

1. I have high expectations of all my students
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

2. In today's society you can be successful without being good at school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
3. My students respect me
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

4. The parents of my students respect me
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

5. Teachers are respected in society in general
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

6. To me teaching is more than just a job, it is a vocation
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

7. Students approach me with questions or to discuss school related matters
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

8. Students talk to me about personal matters
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

9. Parents approach me to discuss school related matters
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never
10. Parents approach me to discuss their child's personal matters
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

11. I call parents without anything being wrong
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

12. I email parents
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

13. In our school we keep records online of students' attendance, disruptive behaviour etc for
    parents to monitor
   (1) yes
   (2) no

14. I give my students homework
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

15. I put great emphasis on grammar and spelling in my class
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

16. I think it is important to read and know about great literature, to explore writers from my own
    country as well as the great classics from around the world
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
17. I think it is more important to understand, use and write real-life texts than to explore literature
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

18. Students are involved in the selection of texts to be read in English class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

19. I put great emphasis on teaching students to learn to communicate well, do oral presentations and practice conversation
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

20. Most students today leave school with an adequate level of reading literacy
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

21. Standards of English teaching in general need to be improved
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

22. I write in my leisure time, e.g. stories, letters or in my diary
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never
23. reading is one of my favourite leisure activities. Most days I read something not related to work, e.g. magazines, newspapers or books
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

24. I have read this many books during the last 6 months
   (1) 0-2
   (2) 3-6
   (3) 7-9
   (4) 10-19
   (5) 20 or more

25. I read fiction
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

26. I read non-fiction
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

27. I read pedagogical literature about e.g. new methods and strategies for teaching
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

28. I read research reports
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never
29. I work in teams with teachers from other subjects in integrated projects
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

30. I work in teams with teachers from other subjects with regards to student matters such as students needing extra support, students having problems at home, etc
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

31. I work with other English teachers, discussing pedagogical matters, doing projects together
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

32. I invite other English teachers to observe me in class, in order to discuss how I can improve my teaching strategies
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

33. During the last month students in my English class have read silently to themselves
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

34. During the last month students have read aloud in my English class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never
35. During the last month I have read aloud to the students in my English class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

36. During the last month we have discussed books, or other texts, in my English class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

37. During the last month we have used the set textbook in my English class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

38. During the last month students have written projects in my English class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

39. During the last month students have written essays in my English class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

40. During the last month students have practiced conversation skills in my English class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

41. During the last month students have produced portfolios in my English class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never
42. During the last month students have done oral presentations in my English class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

43. During the last month students have carried out role play in my English class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

44. During the last month students have worked on computers in my English class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

45. I play classical music in class
   (1) often
   (2) sometimes
   (3) rarely
   (4) never

46. I believe high school education in general in this country is of a very high standard
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

47. Teachers have too many other things to do in school besides teaching
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

48. Schools should take greater responsibility for the students’ social and personal development
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree
49. Teacher training needs to be improved
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

50. There is a good library at our school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

51. There are enough computers at our school
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

52. There are formal meeting at our school between parents and teachers
   (1) never
   (2) 1-2 times per year
   (3) 3-4 times per year
   (4) more than 4 times per year

53. Parents of the students in my English class are actively involved in their child’s schooling
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

54. I believe my workload is too great
   (1) strongly agree
   (2) agree
   (3) disagree
   (4) strongly disagree

55. During the last year I have participated in in-service training organized by the school
   (1) not at all
   (2) 1-2 days
   (3) 3-4 days
   (4) 5 or more days
56. During the last year I have participated in professional development courses, organized and paid by myself

(1) not at all
(2) 1-2 days
(3) 3-4 days
(4) 5 or more days

57. I believe media are portraying school in a negative way

(1) strongly agree
(2) agree
(3) disagree
(4) strongly disagree
Research Project Information Sheet.

HREC approval No. S/08/143

International Comparative Study

The Project:

“A cross-national, comparative study of 15 year old students’ performance in the area of reading literacy, with particular reference to the gender gap, in Australia, Finland, Sweden and Indonesia.” It is conducted by researchers from the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia and part of a PhD research project.

The research questions:

- Why do Finnish students perform better than any other students in the world? Is there a new formula, Nokia education that can be franchised?
- Why do the high performing Finns also exhibit one of the greatest gender gaps in reading literacy? What strategies and interventions could be designed to reduce this gender gap that is evident in all countries, raising boys’ interest and performance in the area of reading literacy?
- Why do Finns achieve better than their neighbours, the Swedes, as the two countries in so many ways are very similar?
- Why do such diverse countries as Finland, Sweden and Australia all perform above the OECD average?
- Is it possible to define factors underpinning the Finnish, Swedish and Australian high achievement in reading literacy that could be applied in a totally different culture like Indonesia?

Methods and methodology:

There will be initial informal conversations with students, and their parents and teachers, in the four countries. Findings will form the basis for surveys, using an exciting interactive survey technique called symbolic dialogue. Results will be collated into country profiles and returned to all participants, to analyse, compare, evaluate and respond to – an opportunity to gain new understandings about other cultures and attitudes as well as a new perspective on how they themselves think, act, teach, study and learn. This will be followed by in-depth interviews.
We need your help!

To realise this ambitious project we need the cooperation of 5 committed schools in each country. 15 year old students and their parents as well as their mother-tongue teachers will be invited to take part in online surveys. Participation is totally voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time without the need to provide an explanation, and any information gained from them will not be used. There is no risk or discomfort associated with participating in the project. However, as stipulated in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research in Australia, follow-up counselling will be provided by the School Counsellors in each school in the very unlikely event of it being needed by any participants. All information obtained will be treated with the highest confidentiality. Online surveys will take approximately 30 minutes to complete, and in-depth interviews 45 minutes to 1 hour. Data gathered will be used as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Philosophy as well as for publication purposes. Participants will be provided with a summary of findings.

The research team from the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia:

The principal researchers are Finnish-born Associate Professor (education), Juhani Tuovinen, (also principal supervisor) (jtuovine@usc.edu.au, phone +61 7 5459 4580) and PhD candidate Anna Dall, (adall1@usc.edu.au, mobile in Australia 0421 608 447), born in Sweden and with extensive experience of educational leadership. The co-supervisor is Dr Phillip Mahnken, (pmahnken@usc.edu.au), lecturer in Indonesian studies and coordinator of languages. You are very much welcome to contact either, or all, of us with any questions or concerns you may have.

Complaints?

If you have any complaints about the way this research project is being conducted you can either raise them with the Principal Researchers or, if you prefer an independent person, contact the Chairperson of the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Sunshine Coast: (c/- The Academic Administration Officer, Teaching and Research Services, University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore DC 4558; telephone (07) 5459 4574; facsimile (07) 5430 1177; e-mail humanethics@usc.edu.au.

Why would you help?

The findings may contribute to improved levels of reading literacy for children in general, and boys in particular. The process of taking part in the symbolic dialogue will be of personal and professional benefit to all participants. Your contribution will be recognised in publications arising from this research.

Think about it!

But please, not too long…. Online surveys are about to be uploaded soon! We would really love to hear from you, so please contact Anna Dall (adall1@usc.edu.au, mobile: different number in the different countries) by – different dates in the different countries, and let her know that you have decided to make a difference by taking part in this project! Be assured that your participation is important and very much appreciated!

Thank you!