



REPORT ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE FINNISH UNESCO ASPNET SCHOOLS TO THE UNESCO FUTURES OF EDUCATION INITIATIVE - 1ST PHASE AUTUMN 2020

This document presents a synthesis and some preliminary conclusions of the Finnish ASPnet schools reports of November – December 2020, and it will be completed later.

15 January 2021, Paula Mattila, Finnish national ASPnet coordinator 2014 – 2020.

0. Summary and preliminary findings

Finnish UNESCO ASPnet schools received with interest the UNESCO Futures of Education (FoE) initiative, and about half of the schools delivered what could be called a strong student voice in envisioning the year 2050. Both teachers and students report they found the task meaningful in so much as they can genuinely be part of a global futures discussion. The FoE exercise in Finland was carried out in a simplified version with less phases and fewer questions in order to attain more responses. We believe this was a successful strategy and we can go into deeper and more extensive discussions once we receive guidelines for FoE 2021 from Paris.

Some preliminary findings from the Finnish schools' reports:

- ✓ *30 years from now is a somewhat hard task for our youngsters to envision. It may indicate that we need more futures-oriented pedagogics.*
- ✓ *Students discuss many issues with great empathy, such as nature, family, animals, but also providing education and food, as well as equity for all; and they seem to signal a readiness to act in ways that may help achieve a sustainable future.*
- ✓ *Students' greatest futures worry is climate change, but they are also afraid of war. We need to see if peace education can be enhanced in our schools.*
- ✓ *Our students are relatively well informed of how to safeguard nature, but they don't seem to be as knowledgeable about the role technology might have in making societies sustainable. Yet they live in a highly digitalised society. The role of technology in our teaching and learning should perhaps be reappraised.*
- ✓ *Finnish students have been brought up in a globalising world, and their schools are serviced with great many internationalisation options. Nevertheless, when looking into their own futures, they do not discuss internationality or, global citizenship. There is no national strategy of internationality nor global education in place, but perhaps there should be.*
- ✓ *About FoE: The questions that were suggested to be asked in the FoE process, may have been too vague for the young respondents, and in the possible next round we have to think of questions and prompts that will help target the areas of interest in ways that are more palatable for young people.*

1. Background

UNESCO ASPNET schools were invited by their Paris headquarters to join the UNESCO Futures of Education Initiative (FoE) in the summer of 2020, followed by an interactive launch webinar in early September. Finland was immediately ready to take the initiative further in its national ASPnet network of some 60 educational institutions.

The situation was found opportune in circumstances where all schools globally shared similar experiences and challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic: closures of schools and distance learning if any as the only option to go on formal teaching and learning.

The initiative comprised a set of tasks where students of all ages were invited to discuss, dream and depict their own future in thirty years' time, in 2050. What would the world look like when these children and young people would be more or less middle-aged? What kind of a world would they envision they themselves would be constructing? And how could a sustainable future be constructed by way of global citizenship education and education for sustainable education?

Finland, as one of the 182 countries within the global network of 11 500 UNESCO ASPnet schools, strives to be active with its network of some 60 educational ASPnet institutions varying from preschools to university teacher training departments. Coordinated by the National Agency for Education (EDUFI), and reporting to the Finnish National UNESCO Commission, the network provides a cross-cutting element within the education system of the country that has received much international acclaim for its basic education and well-trained teachers.

The FoE webinars organized by the ASPnet headquarters for the national coordinators in September, were inspirational and reassuring, setting all necessary goals and guidelines for the work within the national networks. Moreover, as these were pioneering events where the headquarters and the national coordinators were able to meet – cost-effective, highly egalitarian – it helped create a feeling of a joint effort where challenges were shared and pleasure taken in working for something that was both highly topical and genuinely worth establishing.

The first deadline for the submission of the country reports was 30 November. In Finland we decided to stretch this out to the week just before Christmas, i.e. before the holiday-season break. Paris informed simultaneously of their extension of the deadline to end of January 2021.

Knowing how busy and extra stressed the schools were during autumn 2020, we decided to ask our local ASPnet coordinators to concentrate on hearing the students on their futures visions, only engaging other informants and asking the questions about GCED and ESD, if feasible.

This is the official report for the first round of FoE discussions in Finland. It may be followed by a second round in the spring term of 2021, where the results of this first batch of findings may be used in order to encourage new schools to join the discussions, and schools that already sent in their contributions, to take their discussions further.

2. About the FoE process in Finland

The coordinating unit, the EDUFI / National ASPnet Coordinator with her team invited the Finnish ASPnet schools to join the FoE initiative first at the annual UNESCO schools conference in September 2020, and later by providing them with the guidelines and a reporting form that had been translated into Finnish and somewhat “streamlined” with focus on the maxim we had received from Paris: *“Every voice counts, every perspective matters”*.

So, in Finland we invited schools to join the FoE initiative with fewer questions and work stages than the original guidelines suggested, with the idea that schools would not take on any extra complicated tasks in the middle of the busy, corona-infected autumn term. The package was delivered to the ASPnet schools in early October together with the inspirational materials from UNESCO, and also from several Finnish NGOs through FINGO, their joint platform on global development.

You can have a look at our FoE inspiration pages at <http://kohtivuotta2030.blogspot.com/2020/11/>

As already suggested, all schools were busy finding ways to keep teaching and learning as close to normal as possible while the pandemic was hitting societies through its second waves. In order to add motivation to the FoE assignment, it was pointed out that in Finland carrying it out would actually be in line with some of the key elements of the national core curricula: Global citizenship education and education for sustainable development

are interwoven into the value base and transversal competences as well as the syllabi of several subjects. Hence, the FoE task would provide a fit-to-purpose way to carry out one or more learning projects that would help make GCED and ESD tangible for the students.

Special emphasis was set on how important the EDUFI regarded the participation of as many ASPnet schools as possible in the campaign, in order to let the students in great numbers express their feelings and visions from a great variety of schools.

3. Who are the respondents?



Reports were received from 31 educational institutions in Finland, which is half of the number of ASPnet schools nationally. The schools represent varying local circumstances as the map here suggests. Most responses came from schools in the capital region in the south well as from in and around the City of Oulu in the north, home of the active regional ASPnet network Polaris.

We did not ask about the numbers of students who were involved in the events where the responses were collected, but the estimate is somewhere between 300 and 1 000 students altogether. With 31 schools of varying sizes giving their reports, there were mentions that only three students came to the meeting that was arranged to discuss FoE; whereas another school reported that practically all of the school's 200 students took part in the discussions in one way or another.

Figure 1: Locations of schools that participated in FoE in autumn 2020.

The respondents are quite young! The youngest are well under 10 (basic education 1st graders, or even preschoolers aged 5-6). A majority of the respondents come from upper secondary general education schools where students are between 16 – 19 years of age. The reports include the voices of a few older students, too, who study in the basic education programmes for adults. We know also from the reports that some of the respondents in all age groups had immigrant backgrounds.

Only a few schools had found it feasible to ask the students' guardians to contribute to the FoE dialogue, but where this had taken place, their voice is bringing an interesting ingredient to the school's report.

4. What do the Finnish students talk about when they envision 2050?

First, a caveat for the readers: The report findings come with some bias regarding their authenticity and generalisability. Authenticity: Unless reporting direct quotations from students (which, however, are translations of their original Finnish), the students' observations have first been selected and collated by their teachers, and then by the national coordinator. Thus, those responsible for the selection and reporting of the "student voice" are inevitably also reflecting something of their own interests, and of their ability to interpret this kind of information. Generalisability: the number of cases for each observation in the report is rather limited varying from 1 to 65, with climate change having received the largest number of mentions in the schools' reports.

Climate change is the big worry, one that has been mentioned in practically all schools' responses.



A Finnish way to look at climate change is to fear losing the values that are tied to (Finnish) nature: the students repeatedly say they want to keep the forests healthy and green, but they also mention air that is safe to breathe, clean waters, changing seasons with snow in winter and flowers in summer. They want to be able to see the stars at night. *"When we are adults, we still want to have free nature, unchained by man"*, a student writes.

Even if seemingly well informed of the great threats the world is facing, the respondents are – of course - looking at them from the perspective of (very) young people in their own domestic settings. Also, as pointed out by even some high school teachers, the task was difficult for most students as the time perspective was so long: the students' perspective is in the present. A touching way reflecting the age of the respondents was voiced in their hopes that even in 2050 they would still have their homes, their parents, and pets.

However, there are also signs of global solidarity. A lot of the students say they want a future with equality, stronger human rights, no racism nor bullying, and with peace. It is clear from the answers that these young people in the seemingly peaceful northern corner of Europe are worried about a possible war, or wars, in their lifetime.

The youngsters would like to see poverty abolished, and free basic education be provided for all. When talking about money and wealth, they say they would like everyone to be able to afford to eat, and that those who are poor should be helped. There are a couple of mentions about the growing influence of technology and other giant enterprises the students think should be limited.

The future is seen as inhabited by robots that increasingly overtake the world of work and other spheres of life, but there are very few depictions of future technologies, with the exclusion of flying cars and a random mention or two of time machines. Oh, and a rare hint to biotech: a student believes all people have been *"microchipped"* by 2050.

The responses do not provide adequate data for more serious conclusions, but the difference between mentions that have to do with nature protection, and the ones about technological changes, is of some interest. Nature and finding ways to safeguard it is close and feasible to Finnish schoolers, whereas technology with the threats and solutions that it might provide, does not seem to lend itself to such practically oriented futures visions. However, technology in a variety of forms is very much present in the lives of these youngsters. Is it then not present as a futures issue in the teaching and learning at our schools? Moreover, should it be and to what extent? Perhaps so, as technology and the sciences behind it will be needed in saving the nature, too.

And as there is rarely a rule without an exception, here is a quote from a high schooler's essay:

We will be able to utilise old wind turbines to produce water. The significant difference in temperatures between the bottom and top of the turbine tower makes it possible to condense and collect sweet water. Thus, by the year 2050, each tower will have helped form a large oasis in the midst of the surrounding deserts. Moreover, while bringing sweet water and energy to places that used to be uninhabited, there are now artist colonies that use the towers for experimental purposes.

The corona pandemic is, of course, present in a great number of responses. It is rather a positive reflection though, with most respondents expecting a final defeat of the virus in near future. All in all, it seems that the students think all major health threats will be overcome by the year 2050. The Covid-19 in its many mentions is regarded as a health issue, and only rarely a problem feeding into social isolation or restricting their basic rights as school-goers. For most part of the autumn 2020, schools in Finland were open so the experiences with the months in distance education in the spring term were no longer at the forefront in the students' thoughts – a reflection, perhaps again, of the short time perspective of the young respondents?



When pondering what solutions would be needed to attain a safe future, the youngsters repeatedly mention education and collaboration. However, they rarely discuss the ways in which education and collaboration for a better future should be organised. Perhaps, unlike the youngsters of the Cold War years, these kids do not come with suggestions of societal issues to be demolished or developed (well, there are a few tongue-in-cheek suggestions of fewer lesson hours and more lenient assessment in schools).

The potential key question here is: can it be that students even in upper secondary education are not really motivated to look into the functions of the society – one that they will soon be running as adults? There are a few exceptions though, as a high schooler suggests in this mini essay:

I cannot live my future without doing something about it, and without influencing issues. I know I cannot do much anything alone, but I promise to do almost everything in my power to make others realise what the situation on this globe is.

Internationality is another aspect that is, rather surprisingly, missing in the youngsters' future visions. A few schools do report that they wish international collaboration at state level has a constructive role even in the future, but there are no references to plans concerning their own lives and careers in globalised settings, if mentions about the importance of knowing foreign languages and diverse cultures are not taken into account. The ESD elements in the curricula may have affected in the way that kids are clearly also aware of the harmful effects of tourism for just fun.

But really, the survey shows that youngsters do not (wish to) go into many details about their future activities. This observation presents the question to us who drafted the set of questions and cues to be answered in the FoE discussions: there should have been more emphasis on how those overtly benevolent wishes of education and collaboration as guarantees for a good future could be turned into action. Perhaps, as cues, we should have asked the respondents to think first who they are in the year 2050: what they have studied, what kind of work and civil society engagements they would have gathered, what their family life would perhaps be like then – and then go into envisioning their lives in 30 years from now.

To conclude, the responses as an entity form a colourful, multi-faceted picture that invites for many interpretations and calls for a new phase in the FoE process where more questions could be asked and more thoughts generated. All in all, the responses as they are now, can be seen as a reflection of students of varying age looking into the year 2050 from the perspective of young people living in a solid society where nature and education are highly valued.

5. A glimpse at GCED and ESD

As explained in the introduction, the Finnish ASPnet schools were not obligated to answer the FoE questions that had to do with the role of GCED and ESD in building a sustainable future through education. A handful of schools, however, reported they had discussed these themes with their students. Some observations:

The students mentioned the following issues as helpful in educating global citizens:

- An atmosphere of over-all kindness and well-being, as well as of equity and equality
- A caring school culture that invites everyone to discuss all kinds of issues, even controversial ones, thus fostering freedom of speech
- the above includes the possibility of expressing oneself in different modes: in speaking and writing, in music, or through visual approaches
- the students also point out that in GCED it is important to study history, (several) languages and learn about different cultures.

When asked about ideas to improve today's education to allow students to become global citizens, the students mentioned the following issues:

- Model UN simulations
- reading fiction and non-fiction with GCED and ESD themes
- meeting people representing different ethnic and religious backgrounds and world views
- more in-depth study of history, languages, cultures (both one's own and generally)
- visits and project-based learning with global and cultural themes
- possibility to engage in helping others and in preventing or mediating in conflicts
- possibility to engage in ensuring sustainability in the school's activities.

6. Teachers' views on dealing with the FoE initiative

It goes without saying that behind every ASPnet school's responses to the FoE query there has been a lot of effort by one or several teachers in the school in question. Teachers are of course instrumental in dealing with this kind of tasks and information.

The reactions coming from teachers in the participating schools are mostly positive: the assignment has been fairly easy to fit into the school's daily procedures. More importantly, the task itself has been found meaningful by the teachers and the students, as well. Some teachers report reactions where the students have found the time span of 30 years a bit too much to grasp, and occasionally, students have seized the opportunity of having a little fun while putting together their answers.

As the schools and teachers were given rather free hands in terms of how to carry out the FoE assignment, plus that there was flexibility timewise, the practical solutions vary from school to school. A sample of the solutions is given in the table below.

Space for FoE

Schools' solutions to handle FoE

| | |
|--|---|
| Regular teaching and learning | FoE was part of regular lessons or carried out in connection with them: essay writing, homework, part of test |
| Project based learning | FoE was part of multidisciplinary learning modules or thematic courses, or linked to another project |
| Activities with visual solutions | FoE in pictures, posters, exhibitions, videos |
| Activities with digital solutions | FoE in a discussion platform on the net; as a theme on Padlet, or in a blog http://unescolaanila.blogspot.com/ |
| Schools' teams and clubs | Some schools targeted meetings of their Unesco, Environmental or other relevant teams to FoE |
| Theme days / Campaigns | FoE was the content of a specific theme day, or part of a UK theme day, such as Day of Children's Rights |
| Collaboration with NGOs | FoE was part of a day with special program organised by, e.g. PLAN, UNICEF, Taksvärkki (ODW Finland) |

FIGURE 2: Schools carried out the FoE Assignment in several innovative ways.



If the FoE assignment is extended in some ways into 2021, it is obvious that the practical solutions can serve as models for other schools that may wish to carry out the assignment. And clearly, it does not have to be the UNESCO FoE Initiative, it might be any other GCED, ESD and/or futures-oriented learning assignment.

More importantly, the schools' reports both from Finland and whatever will be provided via the UNESCO ASPnet headquarters will be of interest in thinking about how to reinforce (or simply, introduce) futures thinking into teaching and learning. This is the kind of material that may well be of interest for curriculum development as well.

7. "It's an honour that we are asked these questions"

This is the official report from Finland to be sent to UNESCO as our ASPnet schools' contribution to the Futures of Education Initiative. This is the material that we had the pleasure of collecting and collating, with reflections of genuine insights into how children and youth from all over Finland understand and wish to see their and the world's future in the next few years and decades. As indicated in the UNESCO FoE guidelines, schoolers were invited to think what kind of education they would wish to deliver to their children and grandchildren. Teachers are of course in key position here, also in the sense that they are instrumental in turning the content of curricula into practical pedagogies – every day.

The voice of Finnish schoolers is hopefully understood and recorded in this report as authentic as possible.

A primary school 4th grader was reported by their teacher to say: *"It is an honour that we are asked these questions."* Likewise, it is a great honour and obligation that we as the adults who are carrying out the FoE assignment for Finland do it in a responsible manner both in our own country and together with UNESCO and other national ASPnet coordinations.

8. The next steps

The best way to ensure that the important findings of the FoE process are not just reported and then forgotten is to make a feasible plan with a relatively tight schedule to take things further. For Finland, the EDUFI will send the report (that has already been translated into English) to Paris ASPnet headquarters in January 2021, with kind requests to be informed of the envisaged next steps globally.

Simultaneously, in January 2021, the report will be sent to all UNESCO schools in Finland for comments and for further use. Also, the report also be shared on the EDUFI website, as well as through FINGO to all relevant NGOs.

The report will also be sent to the UNESCO Commission in Finland as well as to the forum of Finnish UNESCO Chair Professors for possible comments and consultations.

The next steps after that may be:

- the Unesco schools in Finland that did not participate in the first FoE round in the autumn will, if they so wish, join the process and report their results to EDUFI
- the schools that already took part in FoE in the autumn will comment the report together with their students, and possibly use its findings for further work with the GCED, ESD and futures themes
- EDUFI convenes the UNESCO schools – **including an ample representation of the students** – to a common webinar discussion where the FoE theme is further elaborated. Perspectives here may include development of curricula, responsible international education collaboration, and teacher in-service training
- whenever feasible, the next steps taken by Paris UNESCO headquarters will be reported to the Finnish UNESCO schools, and Finland's role as a potential active actor within the FoE theme will again be promoted.



Annex: FoE voices from two Finnish ASPnet schools

A PRIMARY SCHOOLERS' LIST ON PRACTICAL THINGS THAT EVERYONE CAN DO TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE:

Climate and nature

- we don't litter, we collect litter that other people have spread, but we do it in a sensible way
- we eat vegetarian food, we eat everything on our plate

Health

- we follow official health instructions

Helping

- donate to those who are poor
- help those in need at school and elsewhere, according to what is feasible

Behaviour

- we act kindly towards everyone
- we don't play violent games
- we don't annoy others and we seek help for those who are violent
- if somebody gets nervous and aggressive, we try to calm them down and get help
- we know how to apologize if we have done something wrong
- we learn ways to calm down in controversial situations
- we know how to say "no" to bad things

Appreciation and gratitude

- we value what we have, even the small things
- we value life
- we value our families, others (religion, beliefs, thoughts, gender, skin colour, difference)
- we value food.

THE YEAR 2050 BY TIKKALA PRIMARY SCHOOL

THIS IS WHAT WE WANT TO KEEP:

*Clean air,
clean water from tap
and mopeds that are powered by gasoline.*

*Clean nature,
food,
and our families and friends.
Snowy winters, Finland's forests and clean waters.*

*And all children have a home,
and they still play, as they used to.*

*Recycling, we must develop it further,
and
traditions, they should be valued and maintained as we used to.
Free education,
safety
and everybody has the chance of going to a tiny little school, such as our very own Tikkala.*

*Oh yes, and dogs will still be nice,
and animals will still be taken care of.*