

Global Education in Finland

Global education aims at raising a sense of global responsibility in people of all ages. It includes human rights education, equality education, cultural education, development education, environmental education, media education, peace education and security education.

Global Education for All Ages

Global education is a legally defined educational principle in Finnish schools. However, how this principle is turned into practice, varies greatly from school to school. Finnish Non Governmental Organizations, NGOs, have created educational materials to support the inclusion of global education in the teaching programs.

Youth organizations have attempted to bring global educational information within the reach of the young on their own terms. For example, the organizations offer global educational materials in an electronic format via the Internet. They have also developed role games with global educational themes.

The most important forums of global education for the adult population are the work place as well as free time- and hobby activities. Many employers offer their employees courses with global educative topics. In addition to formal courses and training, multi-

ethnic teams have been formed at work places to advance multicultural understanding and tolerance.

Global Education and the NGOs

The NGO sector in Finland is exceptionally active compared to many other countries. There are a fairly large number of various organizations that have global education as a main task, or as one of many. These include religious organizations, development organizations, political organizations, youth organizations, labour organizations, hobby or free time organizations, to name a few. The most important areas of global education in Finnish organizations are cultural, development and equality education. The democratic Finnish society provides a relevant and important context for organizational work. It ensures a relatively non-restrained and open working environment for the organizations.

In December 2001 the Service Centre for Development Cooperation, Kepa, and its member organizations initiated a network project to strengthen global education in Finland. The project has aimed at supporting the work that the organizations are doing. This has been done, in particular, by facilitating co-operation and networking between organizations working in this field. As part of the project, Kepa has collected global educational material, and offered training and consultation for the NGO's involved. The project has received funding from the EU, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education, and Kepa itself.

YLE helps is an example, in a Finnish perspective, of an innovative and exceptionally wide-reaching global educational project. It is a joint fund-raising project of the Finnish Broadcasting Company, YLE, the Finnish Red Cross, Finnchurchaid and Unicef Finland. It consists of a number of separate campaigns, each with a specific theme. The funds collected in the campaign are channelled through the organizations involved. YLE's national radio- and TV channels have played an important role in the global educational aspect of the project. In addition to campaign advertising, they have broadcast several documentary programs introducing the relief targets.

Global Education in Government

With the growth of ethnic minorities in Finland, the national government has had to address the issues of human rights, equality, and racism to a larger extent than before. The cabinet of 1999-2003 launched a program to combat ethnic discrimination and racism in Finland. In the same period, education in human rights began for main officials of the various ministries. Another all-inclusive governmental program was focused on sustainable development, another line of policy which has increased in importance during the past decade.

The different ministries have distinct ways of including global education in their own fields. Particularly important are the Ministry of Education, which e.g. distributes subsidies for projects promoting tolerance in the society, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, whose Department for Development Policy as well as Development Policy Information Unit do various kinds of global educative work, and the Ministry of Labour with major projects in immigrant affairs, and cultural and tolerance education. The Ministry of Labour is also the seat of the Ombudsman for Minorities who monitors and promotes improvement in the status of ethnic minorities in Finland.

Local government also plays an important role in the field of global education in Finland. Global education again takes various forms in different areas, depending on local circumstances and resources. A central coordinating organization, The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, has paid special attention to multicultural issues and the promotion of sustainable development on the local level. In 2000 the Association initiated the North-South Local Authority Co-operation Programme to improve development co-operation in the municipal sector. The Association is also an active member in JOIN, an EU-funded project that concentrates on developing mechanisms to confront discrimination.

Global Education and the Church

The Evangelic-Lutheran Church is the main religious organization of Finland. 85 % of the Finns are its members. Its traditional area of global education has been in connection with missionary work. Missionary organizations have been informing the Finnish public about the target countries and their conditions over the years. However, there are other forums for global education within the church. Finnchurchaid carries out development, relief and inter-church aid projects in about 60 countries. As part of the central organization of the church, special committees have been formed to promote peace education and human rights – in particular those of the unemployed and women. The church arranges many annual fund-raising projects. Of these, Yhteisvastuukeräys, (Common Responsibility Collection), is the most important. These projects also aim to have an impact on people's attitudes.

Local congregations do many kinds of grass-root level global education. They organize missionary circles, exhibitions on international topics, social work, school visits etc. The congregations offer many activities for children and the young. Perhaps most important are the confirmation camps and classes, which some 90 % of the 15-year-olds attend. Confirmation classes deal with a number of global educational topics, such as protection of the environment, tolerance and peace.

Global Education and the Businesses

As the Finnish business world grows more and more international, companies are faced with challenges of the multicultural environment, and differences in culture and ethics in various parts of the world. Global education takes various forms in companies. In addition to listening to actual lectures, employees have opportunities to practice and improve their intercultural and ethical skills in multiethnic work teams formed specifically for educational purposes.

A popular approach to global education in Finnish companies has been to publish an ethical code that sets out the attitudes and values which the employees are expected to express in their work for the company. These ethical codes tend to take a moderate stand in issues like human rights. This careful profile is in line with the political neutrality of the Finnish government.