*'We'll see the results later, but at least the process has been rewarding.
In this process, both the journey and the destination matter.'*

Stories of educational development in Finland

Development project of municipal education strategies 2013-2016
English summary 2016

Work group
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Foreword

KuntaKesu, the development plan for local education providers, was created at a time when several social issues affecting teaching and education in Finland were being discussed on the national level. These issues included the declining learning outcomes identified in basic education, the trend towards diversification, the need to modernise teaching methods and other methods used at schools, and the weak economic situation, which seems to impact education more than anything else. The discussion goes on, and these issues continue to be topical.

When discussing these challenges in the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) some years ago, we realised how much we wanted to support education providers in the development of education and in the activities they needed to undertake in response to the challenges. We came up with the idea of creating a tool for municipalities and federations of municipalities to support local and regional strategic development. As a result, we created two development models, one for general education and one for vocational education. With the help of these models, we can examine the educational situation in each municipality on the whole and make plans for the future. They are tools that municipalities can use if they wish to do so.

KuntaKesu, the development plan for general education, is a model of strategic planning that focuses on four topics that are central in education and learning. We think it is important to pay attention to *learning by pupils*, *employee competencies*, *sustainable well-being* and *leadership*. KuntaKesu offers us an opportunity to examine the entire education path from early childhood education to upper secondary level education.

After municipality-level strategic planning, we should take the next step to school-level planning. This means that every school should have a development plan based on the municipality-level plan. However, even this is not enough; development should take place on the teacher level as well. The next logical step is thus the preparation of a personal development plan for each teacher. Using such a model that takes all levels of municipal education into consideration, we could create development structures and generate a positive climate of development. Both are needed in the current difficult situation.

The FNBE started networking activities of school development for comprehensive education in 2014. The Majakka ('Lighthouse') development network currently has approximately 40 education providers and 190 comprehensive schools. The network is part of the municipality-level development model; the FNBE intends to use it to support these schools in the creation of new and innovative practice. When observing the progress of Majakka, it appears that Finnish comprehensive schools have great enthusiasm and motivation to develop their provision of education. We believe that development and renewal will also create new confidence for the future.

The development model was met with a positive response by municipalities, and plans have already been prepared in many municipalities around the country. It has been fascinating to see how various municipalities have adapted the model to suit their purposes. The resulting plans are very diverse, reflecting the current situation of each municipality.

The future is sure to bring further challenges to the provision of education. I wish all of you positive motivation and the strength to carry you through the development work.

Aulis Pitkälä

Director
Finnish National Board of Education

Foreword by Opsia ry

Dear Reader

Since 2013, Finnish Association of Educational Directors and Experts (Opsia ry) has an active role for creating the Development Plan for Education and Research, or KuntaKesu in Finnish. Commissioned by the Finnish National Board of Education, we carried out an introductory survey in 2013. Following this, together with our partners, we implemented an extensive training programme called KuntaKesuKuntoon in 2013–2014, and in 2014 we produced a research report titled Stories of Educational Development. The report is based on the account and research findings during 2013 to 2016. With this report, we wish to share our insights and new ideas about the significance of successful strategy work.

The project of KuntaKesuKuntoon supported the education strategy work of about 80 municipalities. In Opsia ry, we are very proud of this extensive project. In collaboration with the National Board of Education, Pro Practica Oy and a number of other partners we organised four training modules. As a whole, the project KuntaKesu was a great story of development.

I wish to extend my thanks to Markku Suortamo, my predecessor as president of Opsia ry, for his commitment. He introduced and coordinated the project KuntaKesu.

This English summary of the project report aims at sharing knowledge and research findings internationally. The original report was produced by a working group that included Peter Johnson, vice president of Opsia, Aija Rinkinen of the National Board of Education, and Hannu Laukkanen of Pro Practica Oy. Being the current president of Opsia, I acted as chair for the working group. Peter Johnson was in charge of the action research project. I wish to thank the group for their great work, both in producing the report and their whole commitment in the KuntaKesu project. I hope the readers will enjoy reading this summary!

Virpi Lehmusvaara

President
Finnish Association of Educational Directors and Experts, Opsia ry

1 The story begins: the FNBE's initiative on a local development plan

It was FNBE director Aulis Pitkälä who originally introduced the target of strategic municipality-level planning for development, and he proposed the creation of local development plans. In spring 2012, the board members of Opsia ry, Finnish Association of Educational Directors and Experts made plans regarding training the leadership of the local education.

In 2013 the FNBE ordered a survey specific to the starting points from Opsia, and Opsia surveyed its members to determine how directors of municipal education felt about the local development plans, what kinds of practices the municipalities currently had in place, and what sort of support would be required in the creation of local development plans. The survey committee consisted of chair Markku Suortamo, vice chair Timo Tiainen and board members Virpi Lehmusvaara and Peter Johnson from Opsia as well as Hannu Laukkanen from Pro Practica Oy.

The survey was carried out in April 2013. The majority of the respondents were members of Opsia and heads of municipal educational administration. The most important finding was that local strategic planning was truly needed. This supported the FNBE's initiative on local development plans. One in five respondents revealed that no strategic planning regarding education had been carried out in their municipality during the last decade. The respondents wished to receive support and guidance from the FNBE in carrying out the process. This positive feedback provided further motivation, and in the end the FNBE approved financing for Opsia ry's training programme 'KuntaKesuKuntoon', whose aim is to support the creation of local development plans. This geographically extensive training programme focused on the creation of local development plans, local and regional networking, and the implementation of the development process.

In comparison to the FNBE's other initiatives, the local education development project is exceptional. In fact, it is unique even on an international scale. The planning model is based on the publically financed Finnish municipal education system. Municipalities in Finland have autonomy, whilst the State governs education through norms, financing and informative guidance. The project is based on collaboration between the state and municipalities as well as on the municipal willingness to create a development plan.

The FNBE organised a kick-off seminar for the development process in the Paasitorni Congress Centre in Helsinki on 14 February 2013. In this seminar, learning by pupils, employee's competencies, sustainable well-being, and leadership were all determined to be the key content of the development plans.

2 Development plan for education providers

When organising education, we face challenges on both the national and local level. Various factors, such as the economic situation and changes in the municipality structure, force us to consider education from new perspectives. Despite these challenges, we need to continue the purposeful and persistent development of education.

The current national educational policies are outlined in the government plan and its implementation plan. New concerns on the national level include the decline in learning outcomes, the financial situation of education providers, and the trend towards diversification in schools and other

educational institutions. Municipalities establish their targets of development themselves, taking into consideration both national and local challenges.

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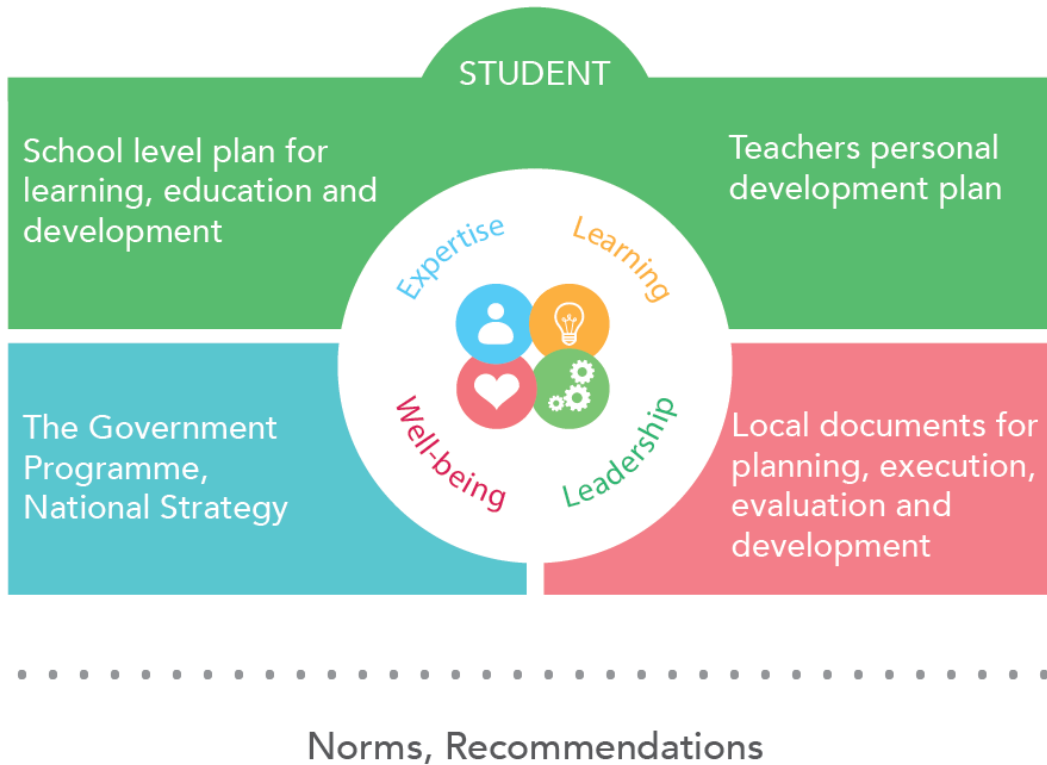
Figure 1. The local development model and its components.

The municipal development plan KuntaKesu functions as support to stimulate local discussions on educational policies. The purpose of the plan is to make education a key consideration in municipal decision-making and to help education providers determine the concrete targets for development to be addressed locally. The plan also helps education providers bring national goals closer to the development targets arising from local needs.

2.1 The four areas of development

The four key areas of development in the local development model are *learning by pupils*, *employees' competencies (knowledge and expertise)*, *sustainable well-being*, and *leadership*.

(See Figure 2.)

Figure 2. The four key areas pf development.

Table 1. Areas and targets for development in KuntaKesu.

Area of development	Target for development
Learning by pupils	Improvement of learning outcomes
Employee competencies	The development of new pedagogical skills, particularly with regard to the use of information and communication technologies
Well-being	Improvements in the safety of growth and learning environments at schools
Leadership	Improving the strategic leadership and financial management skills of the education provider

Education providers can also select other targets for development that reflect their situation better.

As part of the development of basic education, the FNBE established a school development network called Majakka in autumn 2014. It is a collaborative network of comprehensive schools in Finland, the purpose of which is to pioneer in the development of teaching through innovative and open-minded experimentation and development activities.

Whilst strategic planning of education on the municipal level is important, alone it is not enough. Schools are where the strategies are put into practice. They are the birthplaces of the skills and knowledge that development aims for.

The school development network includes comprehensive schools from around Finland. The schools involved in the network form *regional networks* or clusters, within which collaboration and networking take place. The idea is to empower, motivate and bring new ideas to the development work, and to spread good practice and results gained in the development work. The schools carrying out developmental activities on the same theme form a *thematic network*.

Schools from various parts of the country that have chosen to carry out developmental activities related to the same theme can collaborate in these thematic networks. The developmental themes coincide with the four areas of development specified in KuntaKesu.

Each school in the network chooses 1–3 themes and commits to the development of these. The selection of the themes is based on the needs of each municipality and school. It is crucial that the development theme is topical and important to the school. The FNBE provides the schools with guidance and support in their activities. In the early development stages, besides creating and maintaining a network, the FNBE provides help in communication, the coordination of collaboration, organisation of training and meetings, and evaluation and follow-up of development activities. The network collaboration helps in the creation of school-specific development plans.
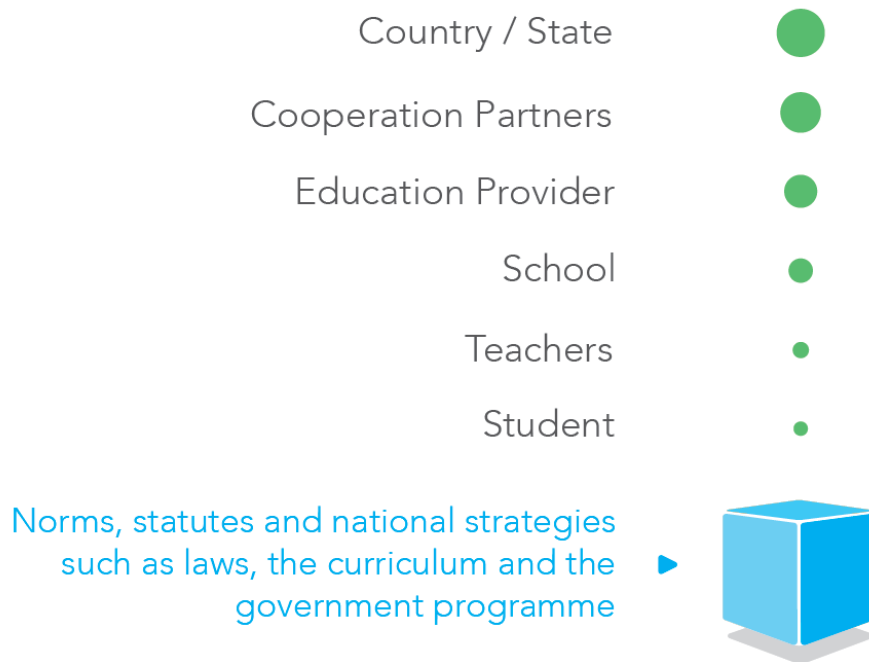
3 KuntaKesu in the Finnish educational environment

Providing education is an important national task. In Finland, it is a joint responsibility of the state and municipalities. The state governs education by setting key goals, specifying content, and allocating resources for education from government funding. Municipal goal-setting and the practical implementation of education are enabled through local decision-making.

The state governance, planning and goal-setting specific to general education are based on the governmental programme drawn for the period of office. In addition to education-related governance by the state, municipalities have their own strategies which are re-established during each council's period of office.

According to the new Local Government Act (2015), the municipality must draw up a strategy covering the council's period of office. Besides a general municipal strategy, departmental strategies or development plans are created for various departments. In the preparation of strategic documents, municipal educational administration usually takes into consideration the targets for development, changes in legislation or financing, and other matters included in the government's plans of education policy.

Country / State

Cooperation Partners

Education Provider

School

Teachers

Student

Norms, statutes and national strategies such as laws, the curriculum and the government programme ▶

Figure 3. Finnish educational environment.

4 Connections to international trends of development

Michael Fullan, the famous educational reformer from Canada, suggested that a three-level systematic solution is needed in order to reform education. The state, regional administration and the school or school community should all aim for the same targets of development. Fullan claimed that system-wide change would not take place unless the State shows the direction of development (Fullan 2005).

Similarly, Sir Ken Robinson wrote in his book 'Creative Schools' (2015, 72) that the interdependence of the different levels is a significant factor. According to Robinson, it is important to create grassroots conditions for interactions between the pupil and the teacher. On this most essential level, the school must to create conditions of pupils' motivation and ability to learn. The school needs to focus on this process. Secondly, the teachers have to enable their pupils to learn. To enable good learning is an art form. On the other hand, the principal's main role is to create conditions in the school for the teachers to succeed completely in their own roles. To accomplish this puts great demands on leadership and school culture. Thirdly, it is the decision makers' role to create these conditions and be responsible for them, either on the local, regional or national level, so that principals and schools can fulfil their task. This is what Robinson means when he talks about the grassroots revolution of education.

While these ideas coincide with the idea of KuntaKesu, one must keep in mind that the educational systems in Finland and North America are very different. In Finland, the educational system is municipality-based and completely financed by public funds. Moreover, municipal autonomy, a high level of professionalism and a culture of trust are key success factors of the Finnish system.

Starting in 2013, the KuntaKesu training scheme offered a series of seminars and gathered the heads of municipal educational administration into a professional learning community, in a manner which was unprecedented in Finland. Collaboration and teamwork were preferred methods of operation. These methods have their roots in the North American theories of the learning organisation, professional learning communities and cooperative learning (Senge et al. 2000; Stoll et al. 2006; Johnson & Johnson 1989).

From the point of view of sustainable development, the combination of municipal level development plans and development of schools on the basis of those plans is a successful solution. It leaves room for cultural development both in the municipal educational organisation and on the school level. At its best, a plan based on sustainable development both makes use of existing skills in the local organisation and renews resources. (Hargreaves and Fink 2006)

'Uplifting Leadership' by Andy Hargreaves et al. (2014) discusses the needs of organisations, teams and communities to improve their performance. The central requirements for improvement include the organisational ability to identify and articulate an inspiring dream that is meaningfully connected to the best of what the organisation has been before. A sustainable foundation should be provided to pursue that dream. The organisation should monitor the progress by using various methods of measurement and varied indicators, both consciously and purposefully. The key is to create teams or groups that naturally attract people to a change process rather than to push them through change. (Hargreaves, Boyle & Harris 2014, 14–16)

There are two different approaches related to improvement of leadership: hard and soft. The best performance is not achieved by using only soft approaches; various combinations of soft and hard must be created. On the basis of the ideas presented in 'Uplifting Leadership', many positive results can be expected from the development processes outlined in the local development plans. These processes will increase and improve the significance of leadership in municipal educational administration and provide a concrete tool for strategic leadership.

5 Special characteristics of municipal educational administration and school management in Finland

The FNBE report on the changing leadership of educational institutions provided an overview of the research on and recent history of Finnish school leadership as well as in related phenomena. (Alava et al. 2012) The report highlighted the relationship between the state and municipalities – particularly the fact that the municipality is the primary operating environment of municipal educational administration employees and the principals – after all, the municipality is their employer. Municipalities' attempts at long-term strategic development are hampered by the fact that all in all, there are few employees in municipal educational administration and school administration.

The municipality is a challenging operating environment for principals because their official position is formally undefined. This results in a workload that many principals feel to be too heavy. Today, a principal's official position is more defined by the general legislation than special legislation related to education. Principals' job descriptions vary greatly. The principals of smaller schools spend the majority of their working hours teaching. Yet they have the same responsibilities as their colleagues in other schools. Undefined working hours also result in controversial situations in practical education work. On the other hand, hardly anybody expects the restoration of closely defined task lists that were previously specified in the legislation. (Alava et al. 2012, 15–17)

Many Finnish dissertations on school leadership discuss pedagogical leadership, but linking this comprehensively to school leadership is difficult. In practice, pedagogical leadership is often considered a separate part of a principal's job, and one that there is not enough time for. Extensive pedagogical leadership by a principal takes place in a network of interaction and development. It includes both direct and indirect pedagogical leadership. Direct pedagogical leadership by a principal includes leading teacher's skills development, and learning and supporting them in everyday activities as well as in development discussions. Indirect pedagogical leadership by a principal means the way he or she manages the key development processes at the school, which indirectly affect the skills and learning of the teachers and the school organisation as a whole. (Alava et al. 2012, 32–33) The school-level development plan and the related preparation process function as a tool for such indirect pedagogical development.

In the light of research and practical experiences, it may be said that local development of schools and other educational institutes is a complicated process, and it is difficult to get a complete and systematic picture of such development. It has been said that in a world of chaos and complexity, the development of schools is also complex and chaotic (Hargreaves 1998, 283). Although the process of change in schools is understood better and better and the theories related to changes are advanced, the results are often insignificant or changes take place in the form of cultural development in a manner slower than expected (Johnson 2006, 200–206). Paradoxically, a school's history of change can also be a story of how the school constructed and impacted change, rather than how the change impacted the school (Rajakaltio 2011).

6 KuntaKesu training in 2013–2015

From autumn 2013 to autumn 2015, Opsia ry provided training for education providers. Each group of participants had three training sessions, each of which lasted two days. Training was organised in ten localities and provided for a total of 508 participants from 82 municipalities.

The training focused on the performance and leadership of local development planning. It was funded by the FNBE and provided by Opsia in collaboration with the University of Jyväskylä's Institute of Educational Leadership, OAJ (the Trade Union of Education in Finland), the Association of Finnish Principals and Pro Practica Oy, which was in charge of the production and planning of training.

A key purpose of the training was to support education providers in the creation of municipal development plans. Another important function was to provide support related to the challenges of change management and to help the participants develop themselves as pedagogical leaders of their field. The goal was also to promote collaboration and networking in order to enable the sharing of skills and knowledge between professionals in the field and to promote well-being at work through peer-to-peer support.

On request of the participants, the training was brought to a further five localities in autumn, 2014 and 2015. Each training of two days took place twice and focused even more on interaction between municipalities and on the sharing of good practices. The participants in these training sessions were also asked to participate in the 'Stories of educational development' survey.

This is how a head of municipal educational administration describes the experience:

> *'The training was realised in a customer-oriented and encouraging manner. All participants were accepted as themselves. I hope that the municipal development plan*

will promote interaction between decision-makers, administrators and employees in the field in clearly discernible ways.' (A head of municipal educational administration with over 10 years of work experience)

The FNBE launched a website with the purpose of linking the prepared plans in one place for easy access: http://www.oph.fi/kuntakesu (available in Finnish and Swedish).

7 Surveys and interviews carried out in autumn 2014

Between 16th September and 12th December 2014, participants' experiences were explored about the creation and development of the municipal development plans. These were then used as basis for the 'Stories of educational development' publication and survey. The publication was created by a work group consisting of Peter Johnson and Markku Suortamo from Opsia, Aija Rinkinen from the FNBE and Hannu Laukkanen from Pro Practica Oy. Researcher Vesa Ilves from OAJ was in charge of the technical implementation of the online survey. Peter Johnson analysed the material and produced the research conclusions.

When examining the results, one should keep in mind that this was a narrative survey. The questionnaire included only open-ended questions, thereby encouraging participants to describe the preparation of the development plans. An advantage of this approach was that the responses were authentic.

In total, 72 responses were received. The largest group of respondents consisted of heads of municipal educational administration and similar officials. Of all respondents, 34.2% belonged in this group. The second largest group consisted of principals. Their percentage was 31.9% of the total, while 13.8% of the respondents were committee chairs.

On average, the respondents had 8.5 years of work experience. Taking part in the survey was voluntary. The questionnaire survey was followed by four interviews, which took place between 5th and 12th December. The interviewees were three heads of municipal educational administration and one head of a general education division. In what follows, quotations from these interviews will be given while reporting on the data gathered in the survey.

7.1 Use of time in the preparation of municipal development plans

The respondents revealed that various municipalities had started the preparation of their development plans **at very different times**, during the first half of 2013 or later. Therefore, the progress pace also varied greatly from one municipality to the next. Of the total of 72 respondents, 61 said that the municipal development plan was being prepared at the moment, whilst eight said that the plan had already been approved in autumn 2014. One respondent said that the preparation had not yet begun or that the document would not be created in this format.

The time used for preparation varied from six months to two years. The average preparation time was around 18 months. The preparation time also depended on whether earlier plans existed that could be used as the basis and whether the preparation was implemented in conjunction with the process of a municipality-level strategy or other preparations whose schedule affected the preparation or processing of the development plan.

The interviews revealed that some heads of municipal educational administration departments were not intending to have the municipal development plan approved as an individual document; instead, it would be used as a collective document or as background material for budget planning.

7.2 Factors facilitating or hampering the preparation of the municipal development plan KuntaKesu

The survey material highlighted **factors facilitating** the preparation of the KuntaKesu development plan on both a personal and organisational level. By far the most important organisation-level factor mentioned by the respondents was the training that they had participated in. It seems that the process was smoother if the municipal educational administration had enthusiastic officials or if the president of the committee became interested in the matter. Smooth collaboration or teamwork also helped in the process. Facilitating factors on the organisational level included good timing: the municipal development plan initiative came at a propitious time, because the need for organisational change had become apparent and an opportune moment for it came when the municipal development plan was being prepared.

Existing similar plans in the municipal educational administration were also mentioned as a facilitating factor. The need to clarify the relationship between earlier plans was also considered an incentive, as was the desire to increase dialogue within the organisation and to improve systematic planning.

> *'The incentive to the preparation came from the need to predict the future from the point of view of information and communications technologies, for example. The preparation promoted dialogue between various operators in the municipality and improved understanding of the goals of activities. The development plan and its goals were met with extensive approval.'*
> (Head of a general education division with less than one year of work experience)

> *'I liked the KuntaKesuKuntoon training very much. It supported me in my duties. It gave me ideas and time to reflect on things. The entire process had a recurring theme.'*
> (Head of a local education and culture department with two years of work experience – an interview excerpt)

Factors hampering the preparation included rush and the concurrent completion of municipal structure analyses or other challenging plans. The interviews revealed that municipalities and municipal educational administration departments had previously prepared several plans, and that it had been difficult to determine the role of the KuntaKesu plan in the municipal and educational strategy. It had therefore been hard to find motivation for the creation of the plan in large growth centres with a large organisation. On the other hand, smaller municipalities with a small number of employees had also faced difficulties, because it has been difficult to allocate resources for the preparation of the KuntaKesu plan.

> *'A busy work schedule [has hampered preparation]. Even so, it's been done, so it all depends on attitude and prioritisation.' (Head of a local education and culture department with nine years of work experience)*

The planning of financial adjustments also took place at the same time. If financial adjustments translate into changes in service networks, they take a lot of time away from the development work.

> *'Continuous financial adjustments undermine the credibility of development work.'*
> (Education planner with over 20 years of work experience)

> *'I guess it's this atmosphere of uncertainty: we're having discussions about the school network all the time, schools are under threat of being closed down, the situation of the upper secondary school is unclear... Everything is so uncertain. So there's not much motivation for making development plans and such when you don't know your operating framework... Then again that's just when development work is needed... And the consideration of options.'*
> (Head of a general education division with six years of work experience – an interview excerpt)

Nearly all respondents said that the **high points** of the process included the training, enthusiasm, meetings and discussions related to the matter. This indicates that people in supervisory positions in the municipal educational administration operate alone as leaders. Participants felt that meetings with other people within the organisation and training with colleagues were important. The new ideas that arose during conversations were considered high points, and development work was considered pleasant.

> *'Examples and insights from other municipalities as well as good introductions. The evening meeting of the leaders of the municipal educational administration department in my own municipality with the purpose of working on the municipal development plan.'*
> (A supervisor in the field of early childhood education with less than five years of work experience)

While respondents did not mention many **sad moments**, they did say that the preparation of the municipal development plan had been very challenging because it came on top of busy people's other duties.

However, some found it sad when another party was not interested in collaboration related to the preparation or when there was not enough time.

> *'Not exactly sad ones, but of course strategic work is challenging. There are strange gaps between organisational levels, though we all have a common cause. Each level wants to monopolise expertise in matters related to it. This narrows the perspective on various matters and consequently limits the abilities to come up with common ideas.'*
> (Head of a local education and culture department with over 10 years of work experience)

Open sharing of expertise is central in multiprofessional development work. The planning of a development process and the maintenance of constant commitment is also challenging.

7.4 Impacts of the preparation and approval process of KuntaKesu

Because the municipal development plan process is still in its early stages – even in those municipalities where the document itself has already been approved – it is very difficult to judge its impacts at this point. The respondents thought that the process had at least brought some clarity to the planning and development of education. The expectations regarding the impacts of the KuntaKesu plans were high:

> *"Hopefully [the municipal development plan] will function as a basis for highlighting focal points of development work, and thus also for controlling costs. That it will highlight the importance of municipal educational administration (basic tuition and early childhood education) in the municipal framework.'*
> (A head of early childhood education with less than five years of work experience)

> *'We'll see the results later, but at least the process has been rewarding. In this process, both the journey and the destination matter.'*
> (Head of a local education department with over 10 years of work experience)

The impacts of the KuntaKesu plans will not become evident until the plan has been approved and the development activities are underway and being carried out in practical educational work. However, even the preparation process can be rewarding.

> *'To me as a leader, things are simpler now – because it is easier for every supervisor to see the complete picture. That is, what the role of early childhood education is in municipal educational administration and in [our] city. This is important and the collaboration… And we would have carried out this sort of process anyway, but this municipal development plan was a good goal… A concrete goal.'*
> (Head of a local education and culture department with two years of work experience – an interview excerpt)

As the last interview excerpt highlights, the municipal development plan is primarily a tool that can be used to determine the goals of development and form a complete picture of local education. When the goals of development have been written down, the document in fact makes operative management easier.

8 Stories of KuntaKesu: interviews conducted in 2015 and 2016

In 2015 and 2016, research data was collected by narrative interviewing via telephone. The twelve interviewees were selected by systematic sampling. They represented, firstly, participants of 2015 training modules, and secondly, key persons involved in planning and implementing the training modules.

In order to generate as authentic narratives as possible, only one question was presented to the interviewees to begin with. The interviewees were each asked to share in their own story about KuntaKesu, from their personal perspective and the perspective of their own municipality, starting from the beginning of the development work and until the date of the interview. The analysis of the

interviews enriched the research data collected so far on the KuntaKesu project by providing an additional perspective of temporal development.

As in the previous research, almost all the interviewees of this research phase also told about the initial perplexity prevailing in the municipalities The strategy initiative issued by the National Board of Education was perceived as unusual by the education administration of the municipalities, and it provided a true challenge of strategy work.

The support materials of National Board of Education does not clearly instruct what kind of social structures the municipalities should be designed. For example, working groups or collaborative forums might be a good framework for to the planning of KuntaKesu and related discussions. This matter was left to be solved by the leaders of municipal education administration. As a result, a variety of solutions were made by the municipalities, depending on the size, prevailing organisational culture, administration structure, and persons in each municipality.

The interviews showed that the planning of KuntaKesu encouraged municipal office-holders to organisational boundary crossing and supported the creation of social structures that were novel. In particular, new dialogical connections and collaboration opportunities were created between pre-primary and general education. Concurrently, the traditional way of stressing individualism in leadership started to yield in favour of more collaborative leadership practice.

It is paradoxical how the lack of social skills or related exercise of power such as refusing to collaborate, or singling out the use of one's own time resources, can lead in terms of collaboration weakness. If collaboration runs smoothly, it also increases social capital and collaborative skills. The failure or lack of collaboration leads to non-growth of these competencies.

Research conducted in the previous stages pointed to that the social and administrative processes of KuntaKesu took more time than was expected. Scheduling with other planning processes such as curriculum reform is challenging. The completion of KuntaKesu could be made a natural part of the budgeting process and yearly setting of strategic goals.

Diversity including versatile solutions and practices is typical of the Finnish education system. This is enabled by broad autonomy, absence of inspection, and a low level of standardisation compared to many other countries. Versatile solutions were also created in the implementation municipal development plans. The instructions issued by the National Board of Education were indicative as it does not wish to set a strict framework for the content or practices of KuntaKesu.

The solutions of the KuntaKesu process can be regarded as creative connections since in these solutions, other areas are linked in the development process which are topical at the moment or otherwise found necessary.

Financed by the National Board of Education, training events were organised in various locations of the country starting in 2014, to strengthen the progress of the KuntaKesu project and to support the development of municipal education. In addition to providing opportunities for learning and discussions, the events backed up mutual trust among office holders in municipal education as well as trust between office holders and fiduciaries. Even spending time together and informal discussions help to create an atmosphere of trust.

Participation in KuntaKesu training was very much highlighted in the stories of the interviewees. The training gave rise to significant learning experiences and implemented the principles of collaborative

and peer learning. Learning about the other municipalities' decisions and progress in KuntaKesu was found to be very important, although theory-based learning was also regarded as significant.

9 Three typical stories of the municipal development plan

Three typical development plan cases were constructed on the basis of narrative analysis: **an invisible development plan, connective development plan and start-up development plan**. These typical cases can be used as points of comparison for a certain municipality's creation and approval process.

The reader should note that these three cases are not concrete examples of a municipality's local development plan process. Even so, they provide a framework within which to interpret the organisational culture of one's own municipality or the municipal educational administration (or department), as well as compare the operating methods being used. This is a starting point for individual and community reflection as well as professional development.

An invisible development plan refers to a municipal development process that is never carried out because of its superficiality, lack of commitment or poor preparation. The impact of the completed plan in the development of the organisation is minimal, and not enough time or energy is reserved for its implementation.

During the preparation process, **a connective development plan** brings together various levels of the school organisation, several areas of responsibility in the case of municipal educational administration or officials, and decision-makers in the municipality. However, the process comes to a halt when implementation begins, or if significant structural changes take place that create controversy between parties having different interests.

A start-up development plan is a successful plan whose preparation and implementation stages take place one after the other. The municipal educational organisation and services develop as expected and in an inspiring manner. The impact of KuntaKesu in the development of municipal educational administration is clear, and the related progress is assessed constantly.

KuntaKesu competes for priority in the municipal educational organisation with many other activities, plans and strategic documents. The more significance is placed on the plan in the organisation, the more impact it will have on the development of the organisation.

10 Discussion

The purpose of the report 'Stories of Educational Development' was to describe the experiences of participants in training for the preparation of local development plans of municipal educational administration. While gathering information for activity analysis in order to develop training, we also gathered interesting stories. The results provide encouragement for further follow-up studies using the narrative method. The method was a successful choice for the follow-up study, and we managed to accumulate versatile and authentic material. When analysing the material, it was easy to find interconnections and to construct narratives of the development of municipal educational administration.

Our key findings include the following: enough time (from 18 months to two years) was needed to prepare a KuntaKesu plan, and the municipalities were uncertain about what methods and ways of inclusion should be used in the planning of the process. While sufficient skills and expertise seemed to exist for determining which actions should be used to develop education, training and guidance were needed to ensure sufficient development skills. In other words, the municipal educational administration departments seemed to have enough pedagogical know-how, but extensive pedagogical development and leadership thereof required more work.

10.1 The preparation stages of the municipal development plan

As mentioned above, municipalities came up with many different solutions regarding the preparation of the KuntaKesu plan, and more know-how will be needed in process management. The data received in the survey and interviews can be used to create a model of an optimal preparation process. The FNBE's guidance has focused on contents and themes, and it needs to be completed with a model of the preparation process.

The question of what kind of a platform should be provided for discussion about KuntaKesu arose in the survey and interview data. The usual solution was having matters handled in principals' meetings or seminars or, in smaller municipalities, in staff meetings. The optimal solution would be to put together a special development team consisting of members of the municipal educational administration committee, leading officials, principals, teachers and representatives of the trade union, whose responsibility it would be to prepare the municipal development plan and monitor its implementation. Such a development team could help to negotiate different views in its meetings and to engage all in open dialogue.

Open communication dispels potential suspicions concerning the development work, and public discussion highlights the importance of the municipal development plan in the organisation. The more often the matter is discussed in the local media or by staff and pupils through internal communications, the more familiar people become with the targets of development and the problems related to decision-making.

The preparation of the municipal development plan is followed by the implementation stage, during which the schedule for the development activities becomes clearer. These activities can be specified in more detail on the basis of evaluation and follow-up information. The municipal development plan

cycle follows the municipal strategy approval cycle, approved by the council during every period of office. According to the principles of productive evaluation, the strategies for the council respective to each period of office should be based on the evaluation of the success of the previous council reign.

10.2 The dynamic story of the municipal development plans

The main discovery in the study carried out by Opsia in 2013 on the starting points for the municipal development plans was that the heads of municipal educational administration had a positive attitude towards the creation of such a plan. The stories of the preparation of the KuntaKesu plan confirmed the above-mentioned expectations regarding the starting points. Even those municipalities that have not yet started the preparation of their development plan expect to be able to do so in the near future as curriculum or strategy work is started. The importance of the municipal development plan in relation to other strategic documents in the municipality must also be determined locally. This requires courage and a sense of direction from the heads of municipal educational administration. If the municipal development plan becomes an invisible document in daily management or decision-making, the time and resources used in its preparation are wasted.

The training related to the plan satisfied the participants' training needs. The participants considered the training sessions a highlight in the process. They found meetings with representatives of other municipalities in the region and the comparison of the development work stages and implemented solutions particularly useful. The training sessions also promoted voluntary networking between municipalities. The heads of municipal educational administration from small municipalities found the meetings with colleagues particularly important because they do not have a collegial community; they typically operate alone.

Heads of municipal educational administration have relatively few opportunities for training that truly promotes professional development or provides continuity of training. In this respect, the KuntaKesu training was unique. The results of the TALIS 2013 survey were taken into consideration in the planning of the training of municipal education personnel. The TALIS 2013 survey, carried out by OECD, concluded that the development of teaching and school leadership in Finland should be supported through training models that strengthen community spirit. (Taajamo et al. 2014, 45). Whilst the development ideas from the TALIS 2013 survey focused on the improvement of the development skills of teachers and principals, a similar need for training exists also amongst the heads of the municipal educational administration and early childhood education. The high turnover of principals and heads of municipal educational administration, and the need for orientation, mentoring and continuous competency development of new officials should also be taken into consideration in this context.

Participants were happy with the KuntaKesuKuntoon training programme, because it was based on the idea of active learning. The training took place within the context of a topical development project, and it promoted collaboration. The training in its entirety seems to have hit the target with both its themes and the way it was implemented on the regional level. Even though the continuation of training is guaranteed until spring 2015, there will be a call for similar training also after that. As more municipalities adapt the local development plan process, similar guidance, support and training will be required from the FNBE as offered in this early stage.

The number of employees in municipal educational administration in Finland is small, which results in heavy workload and a lack of time. However, paradoxically, if the municipal planning process is successful, it will make the work of the heads of municipal educational administration easier in the

long run. The preparation stage has been found to be burdensome, but good preparation helps in the implementation stage because the entire organisation is aware of the goals, and there is no recurring need to return to the basic questions regarding the direction of the development.

Now that the preparation stage is completed, future development work is expected to be easier. From the point of view of both the organisation and the individual, the process is about experimental learning and professional development. Whilst these are promoted by the offered training, each municipality and its educational administration have a unique organisational culture. Consequently, general advice on development work is not sufficient but local adaptation is also needed. Instead of old-fashioned, stagnated leadership and confined expertise, inclusive leadership and open expertise should be relied on as creative and successful solutions.

In the future, it is important to achieve a clearer field of municipal educational administration and development. If and when the municipal development plan is created as a strategic development document, its priority in relation to other tasks and documents must be determined.

The municipality's strategic policies and the Ministry of Education and Culture's national Development Plan for Education and Research play a part when determining the goals of the municipal development plan. These goals are included in the annual budget planning of the municipal educational administration. Subsequently, they also affect the school-level development plans. The school-level development plans in turn determine the development goals for each school year. The curriculum determines the learning and development goals for the long run (longer than one period of office respective to the council). The new curriculum for pre-primary and basic education will come into force in 2016. The national basic education curriculum approved in December 2014 will presumably remain in force for the next ten years or so.

The monitoring and evaluation of implementation is an essential part of the planning. In accordance with the principles of productive evaluation, the information received from evaluation should then be used as the basis for planning the next stage. In an ideal situation, information would be available from different levels of the organisation and it could also be used in municipality-level planning.

Table 2 summarises the essential questions of KuntaKesu used for ensuring the success of the process. The questions cover three stages: planning, implementing and solidifying KuntaKesu. The solidifying stage includes evaluations to provide a starting point for planning the next new KuntaKesu.

Table 2. **The stages of the KuntaKesu process with the essential questions**

STAGES OF KUNTAKESU	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
Planning	1. Are the right persons involved in the KuntaKesu process? 2. Are the resources allocated and the rules of the game agreed for the planning stage? 3. Are the frameworks of participation and the discussion forums planned? 4. Has project communication including responsibilities been designed? 5. How will the present state of affairs be analysed? 6. How will the reform be outlined? 7. How will the reform and its steps be prioritised?
Implementing	1. Is the clarity of strategy ensured? 2. Is the significance of the reform clearly explained? 3. Are the measures of development realistically scheduled? 4. Is the priority of development targets clear to all? 5. Is impact assessment with explicit measures outlined? 6. How is the follow-up of KuntaKesu planned?
Solidifying	1. Is there a plan for continuous, structured evaluations? 2. Are the interim stages of evaluation scheduled? 3. How is reform based on evaluations agreed? 4. How are reward measures designed? 5. What kind of symbolic or economic rewards will be used? 6. How will the accomplishment of outcomes reported and the next KuntaKesu cycle introduced?

Table 2 may also provide as a basis for creating a simplified model where the stages of planning, implementation and solidifying establish the schedule and order of proceeding.

11 The KuntaKesu process advances based on its strengths

The work done in KuntaKesu provides orientation in the future with its planning, anticipation and even forecasting of operations. This is one of the strengths of KuntaKesu success. A look in the future of education is interesting, and at its best it gives rise to inspiring discussions in work groups, as well as in various forums and training events.

> *'Process-related collaboration with other people is rewarding. Thinking through and elaborating on matters related to the process is a pleasant endeavour.'*
> *(Head of a local education and culture department with 10 years of work experience)*

At its best, KuntaKesu was conducted based on multisectoral broad-based collaboration where, right from the first stages of planning, the heads of education administration as well as municipal decision makers, employees within municipal education, pupils and interest groups were involved. This kind of broad interaction and participation was clearly motivated. Similarly, KuntaKesu functioned well as a strategic tool, regardless of deviations from the support materials issued by the National Board of Education. It is important to note that flexible adaptation of even good plans is in order, but if there is no plan at all, no implementation nor deviation is possible.

KuntaKesu also challenged to reform the routines of developing and leading municipal education leadership. As a result, more participatory and co-operative methods and principles of collaboration were introduced both in training and municipal planning (see Hellström et al. 2015, 185–199). This is one of the impacts of the KuntaKesu process, which came about as a spin-off following the original development work and increased interactions.

It is good that the National Board of Education did not direct the content nor form of KuntaKesu too strictly, which made it possible to modify it creatively to suit the needs of each municipality or even the region. Thus KuntaKesu, overall, increased the confidence and trust of municipal education providers in the National Board of Education and its operations. A core element of this success was also that KuntaKesu continues to be an opportunity and a challenge in developing municipal education, without establishing a norm or a standard

In summary, we can conclude that KuntaKesu proceeds with the momentum of its strengths, the most essential of these being (see Fullan & Quinn 2016, 133):

Strengths of KuntaKesu

- *Provides orientation in the future, challenges the present state of affairs, and inspires for new ideas.*
- *Increases interaction, education policy discussions, and collaboration in networks.*
- *Generates learning together and accumulates social capital.*
- *Clarifies the goals of education administration and evaluations of achieving the goals.*
- *Creates structures of strategic development in the municipal organisation and within the education administration.*
- *Functions as a basis for regional, municipal and single school development.*
- *Creates shared experiences of strategic development.*
- *Builds up and increases trust in many ways.*
- *Enables creative and diverse solutions in a flexible way.*
- *Provides opportunities for the development of education administration without establishing a norm.*

Based on the findings of this follow-up research (2014–2016), it is recommended that more municipalities should introduce KuntaKesu for its education administration. The municipalities which already initiated and established their KuntaKesu processes, are advised to proceed evaluate

the impacts and to solidify KuntaKesu as a core strategy planning element for their education administration.

On the basis of this follow-up survey, it can be recommended that even more municipal educational administration departments should start the preparation of a municipal development plan. From the strategic perspective, this is a demanding task, and conflicting interests cannot be avoided. As a social process this planning provides a platform for development discussions in the municipal educational administration, bringing together participants with different starting points. The municipal decision-makers will eventually need to decide what direction the development will take, but a well-prepared document always provides a better basis for decision-making than assumptions and hearsay. At its best, the municipal development plan will make decision-making easier and provide a new direction and fresh energy for the development of educational services.

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