

Special Features of the Finnish Education System

Helsinki Conference 31.3.2008

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN FINLAND



FINNISH NATIONAL
BOARD OF EDUCATION

Mrs. Irmeli Halinen
Head of Pre-School and Basic Education Development
Finland 2008

For learning and competence

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF EDUCATION

Equity, equality, high quality and inclusiveness
are basic principles
both in education norms and in practice

Short History of the Present Education System

- ◆ Comprehensive School Reform 1970-1977 and birth of the present Upper Secondary System 1975
 - parallel school system replaced by nine-year comprehensive education, same basic education for all
 - flexible, non-graded upper secondary education
 - responsibility for organizing education lies on municipal authorities, municipal autonomy
- ◆ National Core Curriculum has been renewed in 1985, 1994 and 2003/2004

Curriculum Reforms in Basic Education

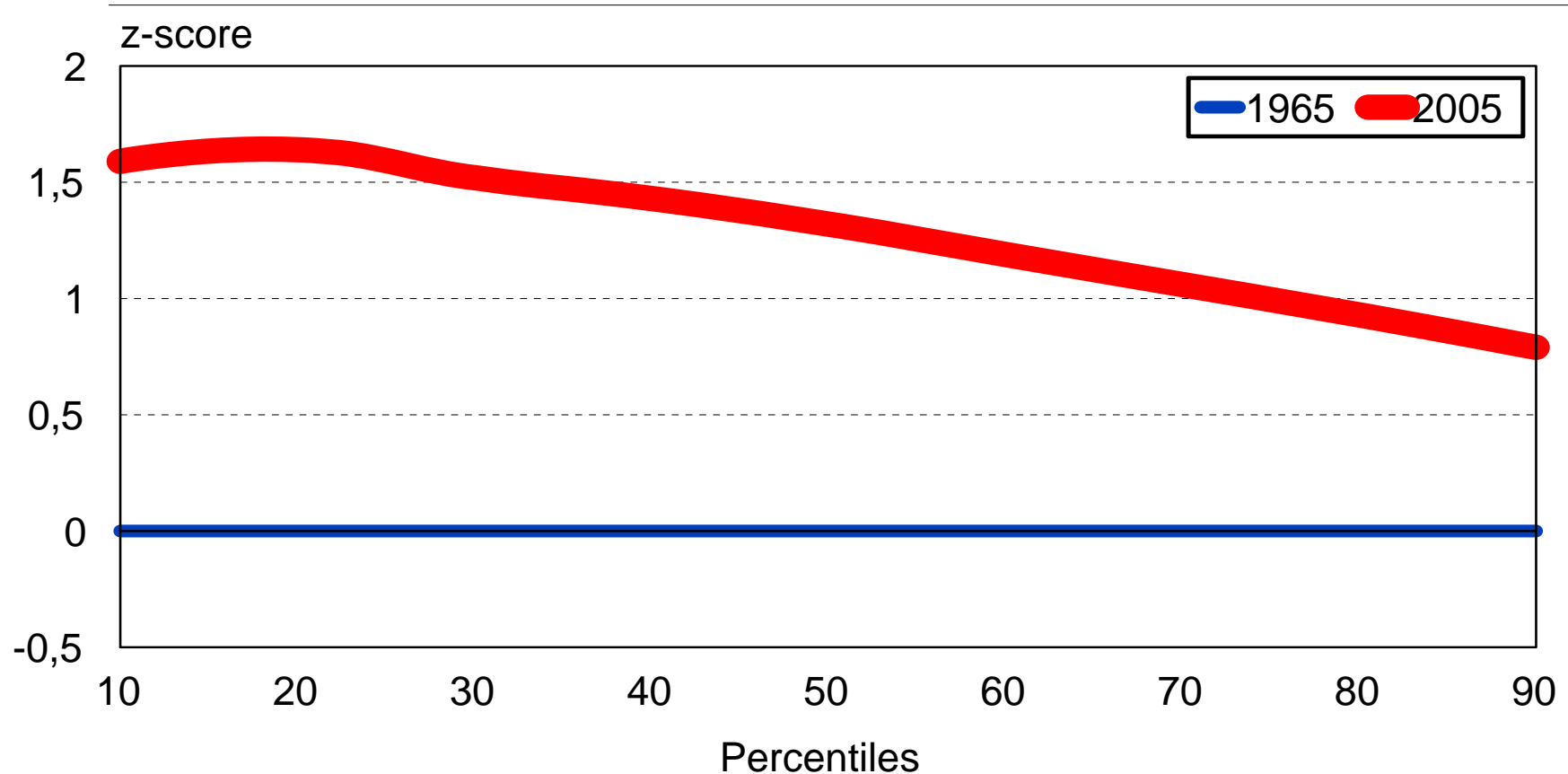
- ◆ **1970**
 - the first national curriculum, strongly **centralised** guidance
- ◆ **1985**
 - the national **core curriculum**, the role of the municipal curriculum more important
 - ability grouping was abolished; eligibility to further studies opened to everyone
- ◆ **1994**
 - **delegation of power** to municipalities and schools, inspection system abolished, very “thin” core curriculum, cooperative way of working
- ◆ **2004**
 - strengthening the national core curriculum, **more guidance and support** to municipalities and schools
 - new distribution of lesson hours, emphasising goals instead of contents

CULTURE OF COHERENCE, TRUST AND SUPPORT

- ◆ Steering system based on commonly accepted values, goals and high expectations for teaching and learning
- ◆ Support and cooperation instead of control – no inspections or national tests
- ◆ Trust on municipal responsibility in providing education and autonomy in implementation of goals
- ◆ Vivid interaction between schools, municipalities and national authorities
- ◆ High status of teachers

Reading comprehension performance of Finnish 9th graders by percentiles in 2005 compared to that in 1965.

1965 averages standardized to be equal to 0



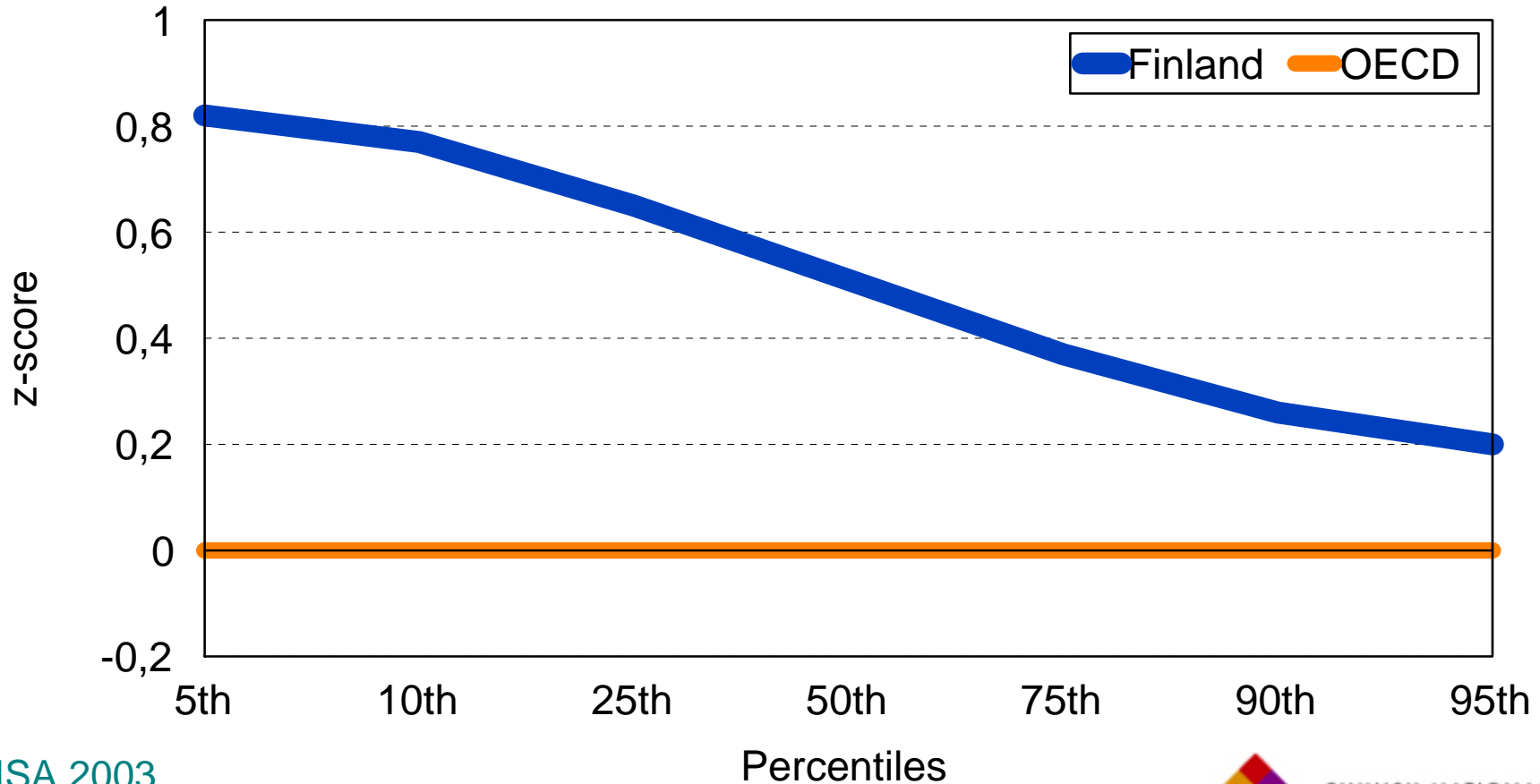
Source: Moberg, S. & Savolainen, H. 2008. Suomalaisten 9- ja 15-vuotiaiden Lukutaidon muutos 1960-luvulta 2000-luvulle. Kasvatus 39 (1). NATIONAL BOARD OF EDUCATION

THE QUALITY OF THE FINNISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

- ◆ Excellent learning outcomes
 - PISA 2000, 2003 and 2006
 - drop-out during compulsory education less than 0.5 %
 - class repetition 2 %
 - more than 96 % moves to upper secondary level
- ◆ Effective use of resources
 - 190 school days per year, 4 -7 hours per day
 - moderate amount of homework, no private lessons after school for "drilling"
 - 6 % of GDP goes to education

Reading comprehension performance of Finnish 9th graders by percentiles compared to that of the average of students in the OECD countries.

OECD averages standardised to be equal to 0

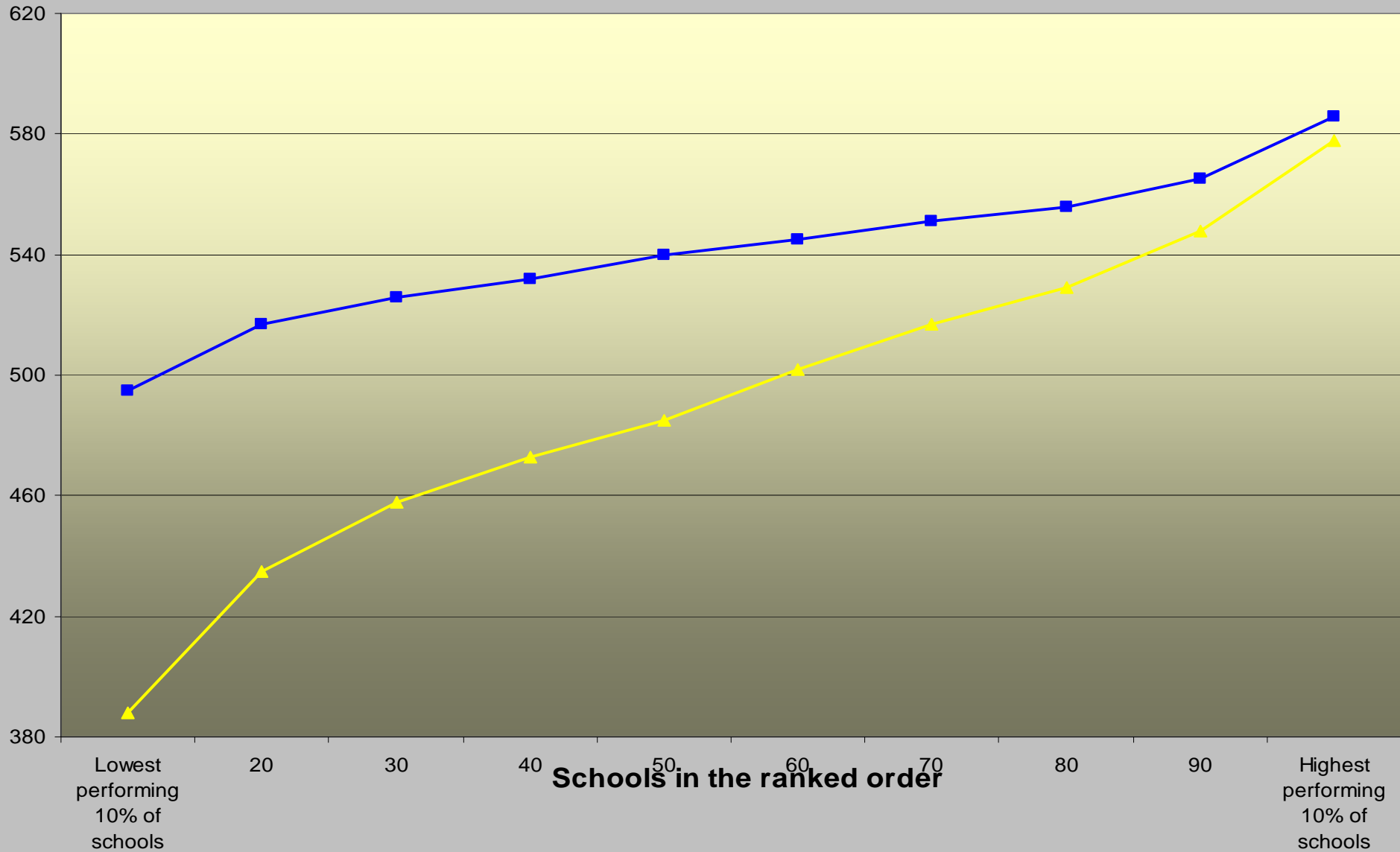


PISA 2003

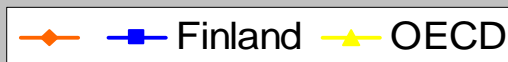


Source: Moberg, S. & Savolainen, H. 2006. Reading literacy and special education – The particular case of Finland.

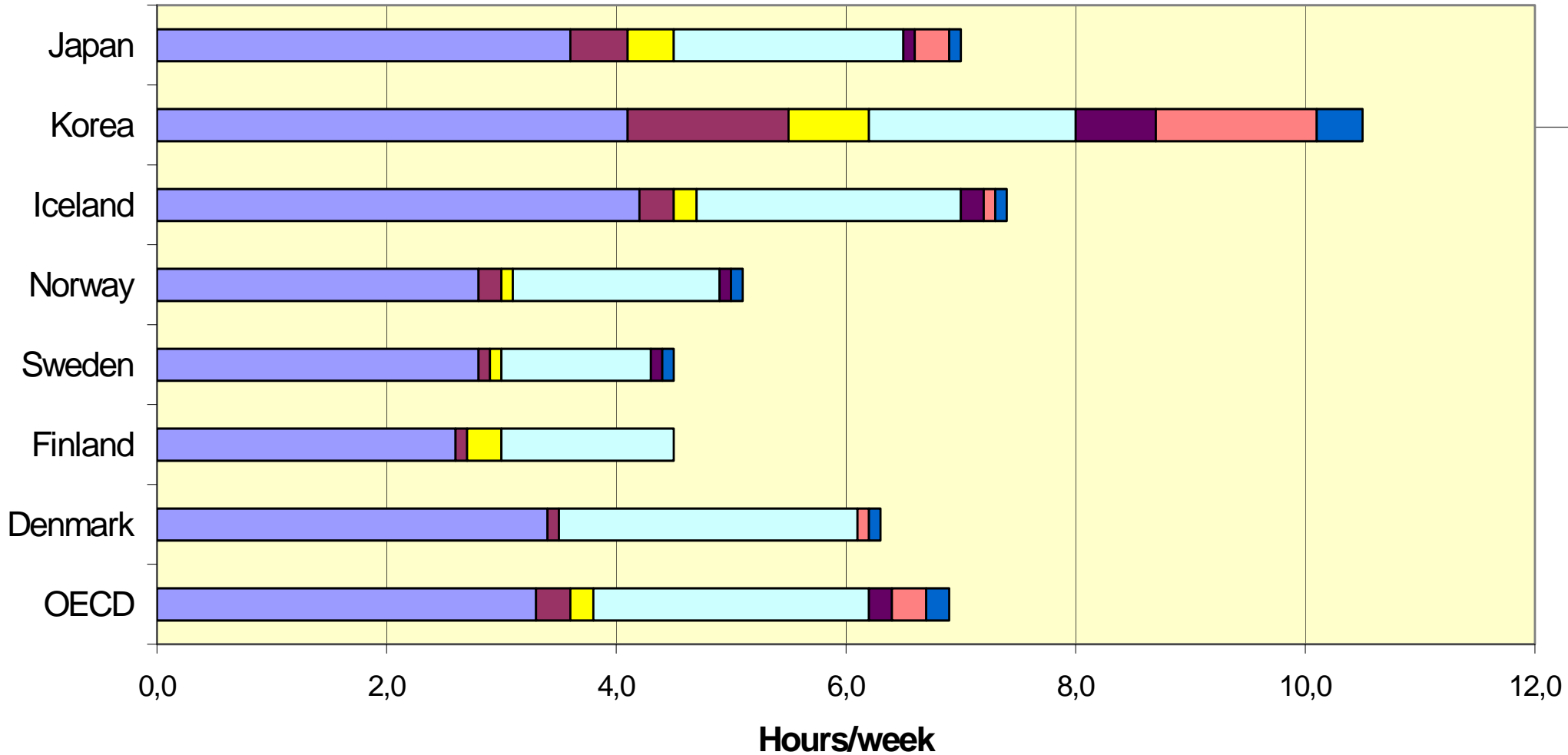
Mean scores of the schools on the mathematic scale



Source: Sèvres 20 May, 2005



Time for mathematics



Instructional time

Remedial classes

Enrichment classes

Homework/other study by teachers

Working with a tutor

Out-of school classes

Other study

CURRICULUM STRATEGY

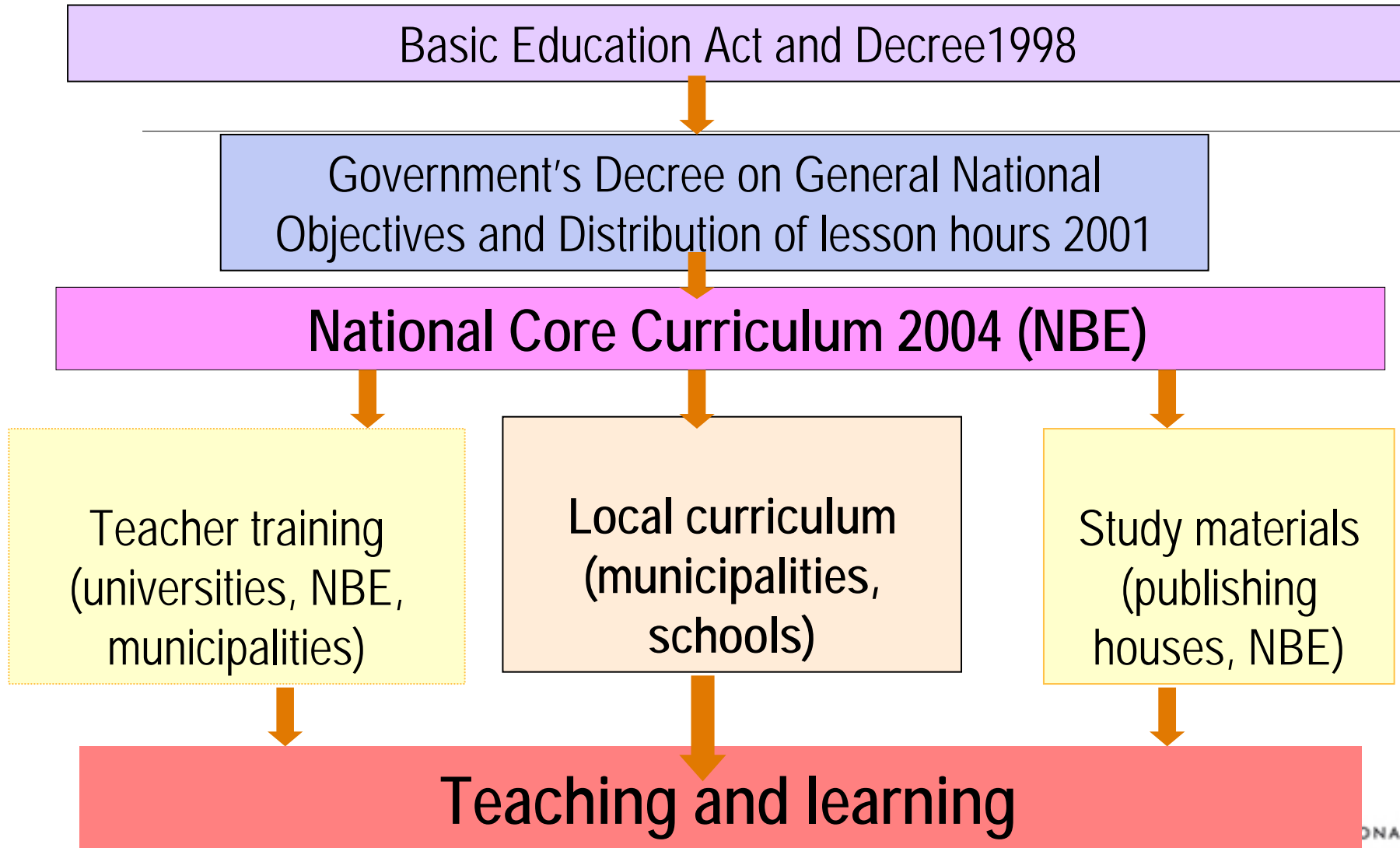
COMMON GUIDELINES AND EMPOWERMENT

- ◆ Consists of national core curriculum, municipal curricula and school curricula
- ◆ Curricula at all levels of action have been drawn up in extensive cooperation – curriculum as a process
- ◆ The Finnish National Board of Education as a central actor
- ◆ Principals and teachers have central role in curriculum work and in developing education
- ◆ Parents and students are also involved
- ◆ National agreement about the participation of other sectors, health and social sector especially



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STEERING SYSTEM OF THE BASIC EDUCATION



TEACHING AND LEARNING

SCHOOL CURRICULUM

MUNICIPAL CURRICULUM

Municipal

guidelines

National Core Curriculum

Government's Decree on the General National Objectives and Distribution of lesson hours

Education Act and Decree

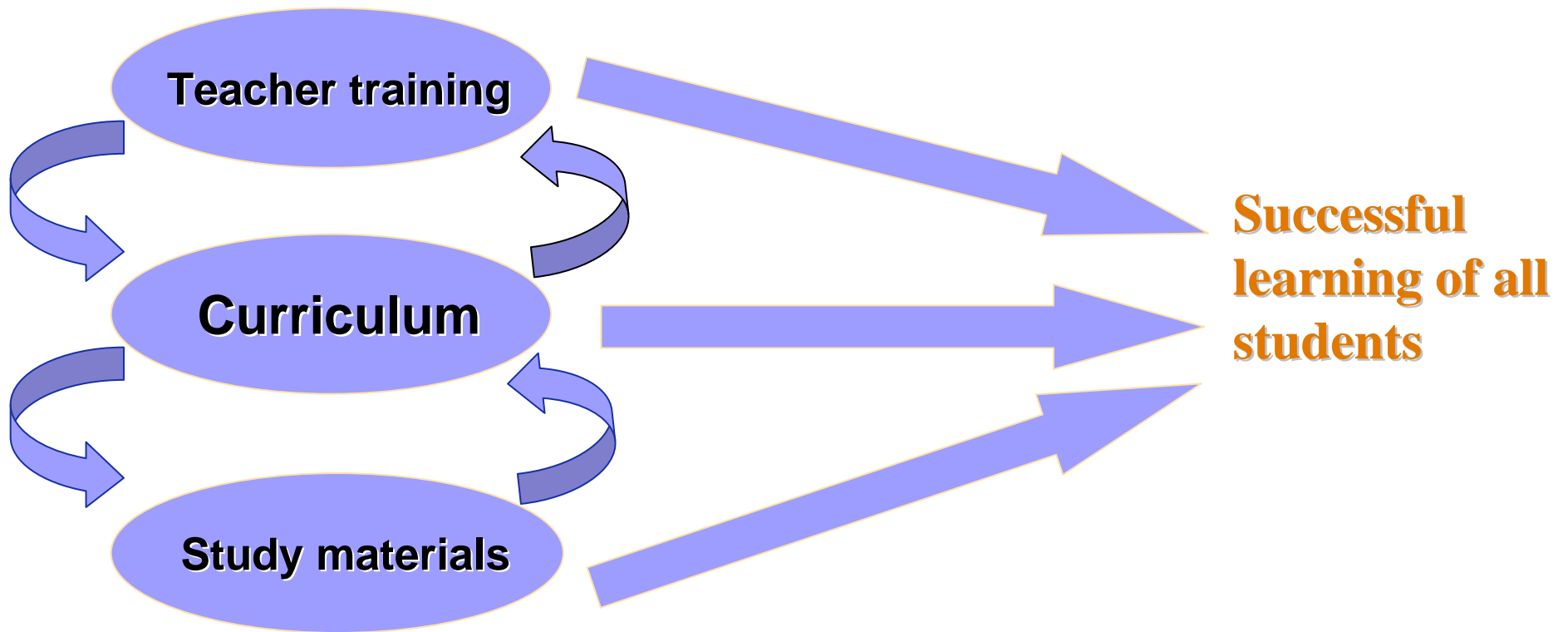
Teacher training

Study material

Finnish Steering System 2008

Irmeli Halinen 2008

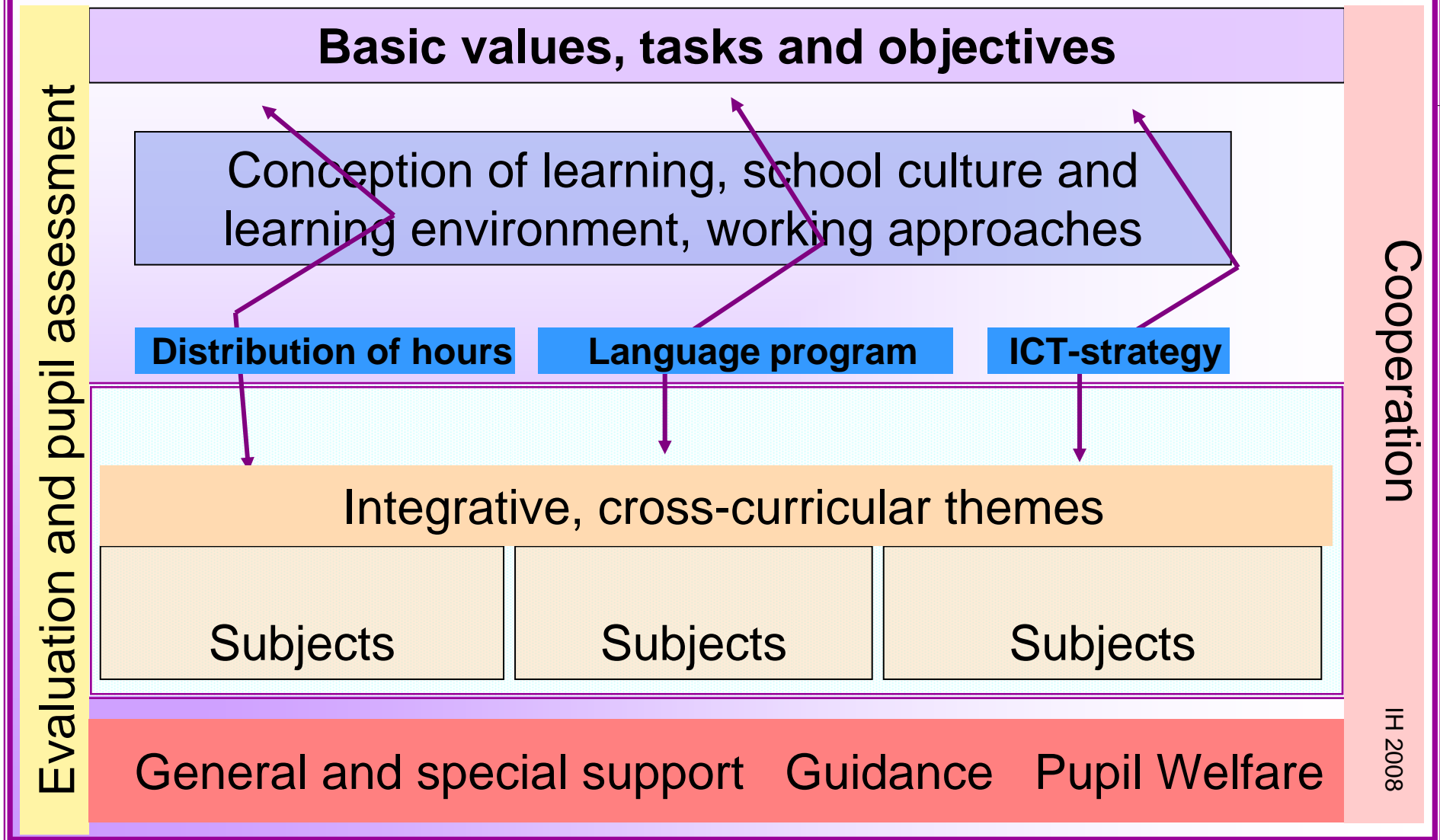
Coherence: Interaction and common direction



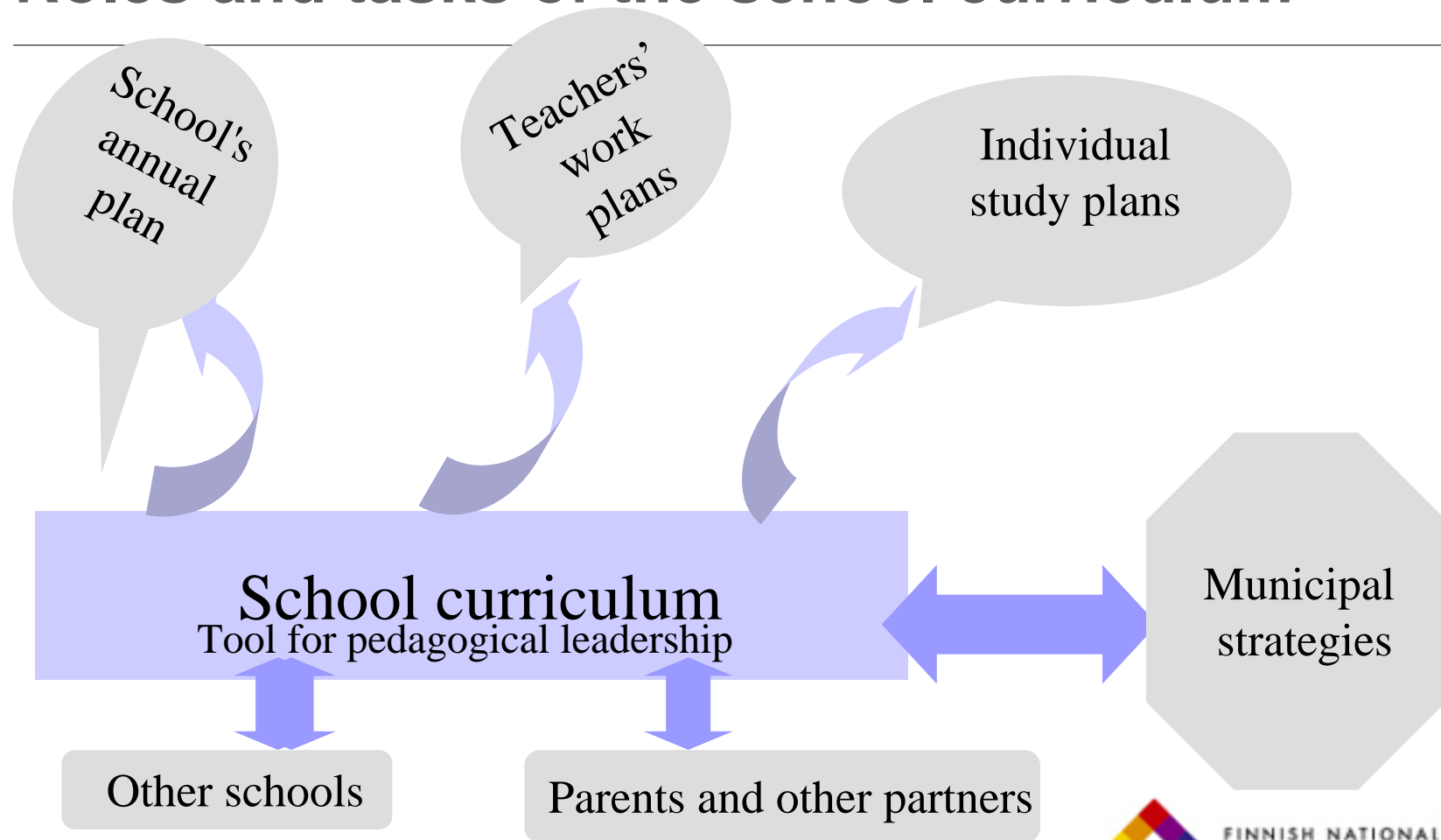
INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE CURRICULUM

- ◆ The broad based curriculum – deals with the whole area of school work
- ◆ Inclusive curriculum – covers education for all students
- ◆ Balance between academic achievement and student welfare
- ◆ Importance of school culture and learning environment
- ◆ Future orientation – competence-based thinking
- ◆ Curriculum is a tool for leadership and for professional and school development

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN FINLAND



Roles and tasks of the school curriculum



BASIC EDUCATION ACT

“Education shall be provided according to the student’s age and capabilities and so as to promote all students’ healthy growth and development”

BASIC EDUCATION ACT AND DECREE

- ◆ Minimum teaching hours for every grade
 - 19 hours for grades 1-2
 - 23 hours for grades 3-4
 - 24 hours for grades 5-6
 - 30 hours for grades 7-9 (10)
- ◆ Maximum daily working hours for students
 - 5 hours for pupils of 1-2 grades
 - 7 hours for pupils of 3-9 grades
- ◆ At least 45 minutes/hour must be used for teaching

ORGANIZING TEACHING AND LEARNING

- ◆ **Basic Education Act and Decree**
 - general goals for education, subjects, general principles for providing education
- ◆ **Government's Decree**
 - more detailed general goals of education, allocation of teaching hours
- ◆ **National Core Curriculum**
 - basic principles in organizing teaching and learning, central goals and contents in different subjects, cross-curricular themes, guidelines for student assessment, description of good performance and final-assessment criteria
- ◆ **Municipal/school curriculum**
 - implementation of the national guidelines, allocation of hours, goals and contents of subjects in different grades, organizing instruction and other activities of the school

NEW DISTRIBUTION OF LESSON HOURS IN BASIC EDUCATION

The minimum number of lessons in annual weekly lessons

Subject	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Mother tongue and literature	14		14			14			
A-language	-----		8			8			
B-language	-----		-----			6			
Mathematics	6		12			14			
Environmental Studies	Environment and nature								
Biology and Geography	studies	9			3			7	
Physics and Chemistry					2			7	
Health Education								3	
Religion/Ethics	6						5		
History and Social Studies	-----			3			7		
Music	Arts, crafts and physical		4-				3-		
Visual arts	education 26		4-		30		4-		
Craft, Technical work, Textile work			4-				7-		
Physical Education			8-				10-		
Home Economics	-----		-----			3			
Student Counselling	-----		-----			2			
Elective subjects						(13)			
Minimum number of hours	19	19	23	23	24	24	30	30	30
Optional A-language	-----					(6)		(6)	



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Integrative, cross-curricular themes in lower secondary education

- ◆ Growth as a person (human being)
- ◆ Cultural identity and internationalism
- ◆ Media skills and communication
- ◆ Participatory citizenship and entrepreneurship
- ◆ Responsibility for the environment, well-being and a sustainable future
- ◆ Safety and traffic competencies
- ◆ Technology and the individual

ORGANIZING TEACHING AND LEARNING

- ◆ Flexibility and school/teacher autonomy in curriculum implementation, allocating time and resources, selecting teaching methods and materials and forming study groups
- ◆ Importance of goals which can be reached by means of different contents, methods and materials
- ◆ Goals and criteria for good performance are expressed mainly as competencies
- ◆ Teachers are encouraged to take into account the various needs of their students and to emphasize good basic competencies

EXAMPLE: VISUAL ARTS

- ◆ The meaning and task of the subject
 - The tasks of visual arts instruction are to support the development of the students' visual thinking and aesthetic and ethical awareness, and to make students capable of their own visual expression etc.
- ◆ Objectives
 - The students will learn the skills and knowledge necessary in visual expression: making observations, processing ideas, imagining, invention, and creative problem solving; making and justifying aesthetic choices; and setting one's objectives etc.
- ◆ Core contents
 - visual expression and thinking, artistic knowledge and cultural expertise, environmental aesthetics, architecture, and design, the media and visual communication
- ◆ Description of good performance
 - the students will know how to give visual form to their thought, feelings, and ideas, and to transform their observations to images etc.

IMPORTANCE OF GOOD BASIC COMPETENCIES

- ◆ Good basic literacy in reading, mathematics, science, foreign languages, history and social studies, culture and religion, arts and crafts and home economics
- ◆ Health and welfare competencies
- ◆ Learning to learn, self-regulation
- ◆ Cooperation, interaction, communication and negotiation
- ◆ Accepting and coping with the diversity, managing conflict situations
- ◆ Creative and innovative way of thinking and working, problem solving
- ◆ Responsible attitude towards oneself, other people, nature and society
- ◆ Future orientation

CONCEPTION OF LEARNING

- ◆ Student as an active and responsible learner
- ◆ Student participation during lesson hours and in other school activities
- ◆ Learning process as an individual and communal process of building knowledge and skills
- ◆ Important role of student assessment and feedback
- ◆ Important role of the learning environment and school's working culture
- ◆ Valuing and using the diversity of students in heterogeneous study groups, systematic individual support

TEACHERS ARE THE KEY

- ◆ Comparison of 25 education systems, explored what the good systems have in common and what tools they use to improve student performance:
- ◆ Three things that matter most:
 - getting the right people to become teachers
 - developing them into effective instructors
 - ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child

“The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction”

Reference: “How the world’s best-performing school systems come out on top”
(McKinsey & Company, Sept 2007)



IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION

- ◆ Respecting every pupil by setting high expectations and by giving individual support when needed
- ◆ Creating friendly atmosphere, promoting teacher and pupil participation in everyday school life
- ◆ Combining individual and group/community orientation in teaching and learning, valuing and using diversity in learning processes
- ◆ Supporting teachers so that they are able to recognize individual strengths and difficulties of students and to plan and implement differentiation and support
- ◆ Developing flexible teaching arrangements and versatile learning environments
- ◆ Developing pedagogical leadership



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TO THE FUTURE

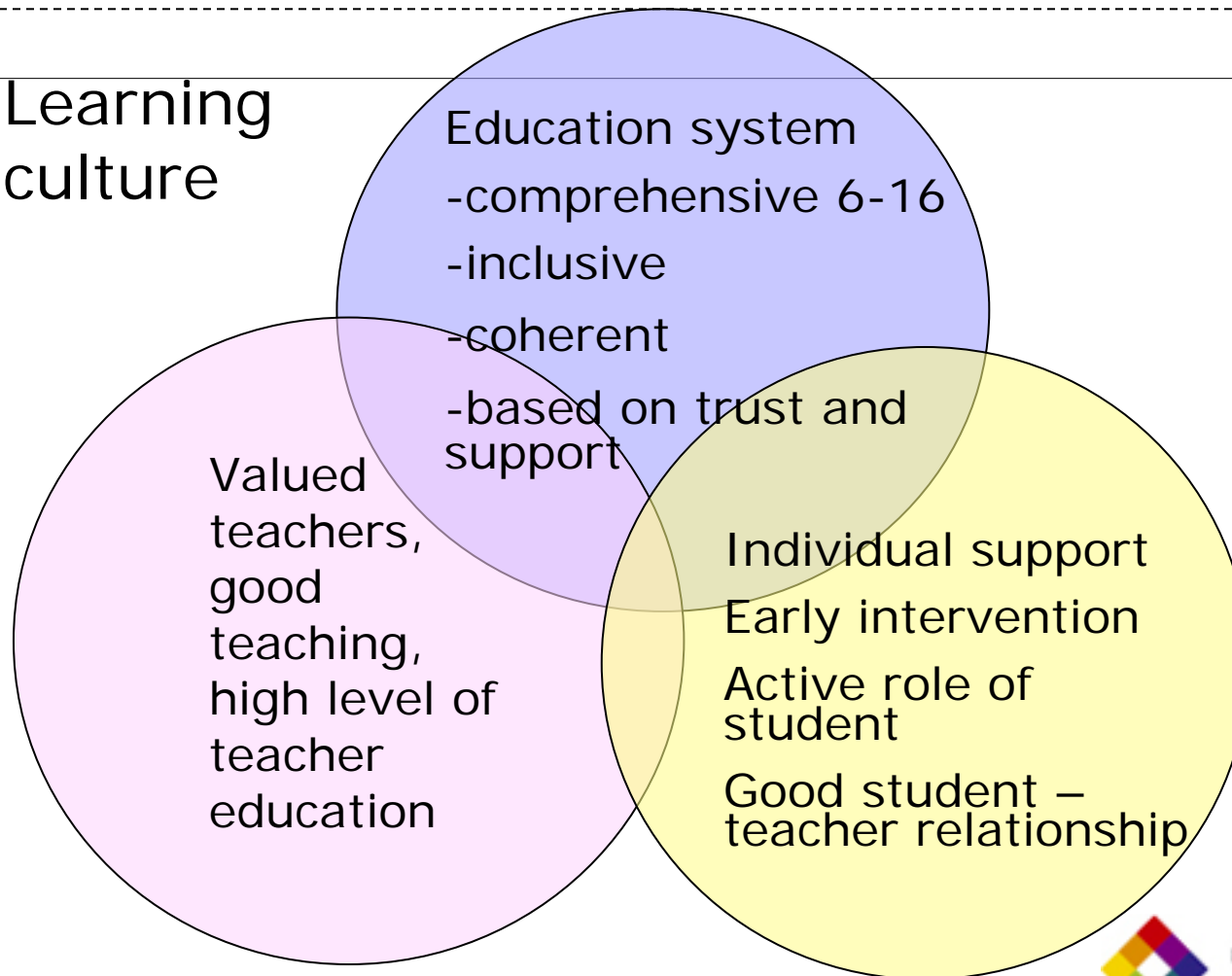
It is our task to equip all children
so that they are ready to enter
into an uncertain future
with good competencies and
with hope and anticipation



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KEYS TO SUCCESS IN FINLAND

Learning
culture



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