Subject module project in Cultural Encounters E2022

Questioning Authority:

Education, Teaching and Society

Comparing French and Finnish Student-Teacher Relationships in upper-secondary school level with Jacques Rancière

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Abstract

This project theoretically and empirically examines the dynamics of the student-teacher relationship in a school setting with the support of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. Between the French educational system and the Finnish educational system, we gather data through class observations and interviews with teachers and students and compare the French traditional education to the Finnish progressive education by looking at two case studies. Based on our data, we demonstrate the differences and similarities between both educational practices, and examine how they are experienced. We observe how power dynamics in which they are embedded contributes to shaping their perception of themselves and the world.

Introduction

This project is transdisciplinary in the sense that it combines a philosophical critique of democracy and education with a cultural anthropological perspective, that is aware of the contingency and constructedness of cultural and social practices,[1] with a political view on social relations.

It was our own experiences in the school and university that led us to the shared research interest that we first vaguely called “questioning authority”. The flipside of that question was: “How does democratic education look like?”. Growing up in different European countries, France, Denmark, Germany and Romania, the experience of authority in school was one we could all relate to. The experience that you as a student have to obey rules and defaults and that your needs, opinions and own will do not count in the decision-making process in the classroom. Having accomplished our A-levels we had proven that we could match a bar that others had set for us. But due to the fact that we had different teachers we had different experiences of student-teacher relations. On one hand we all shared the experience that the quality of the student-teacher relationship was very important for our success as learners. On the other hand we know that the practice of a certain way of social interaction in the classroom

[1] See for example Richard Jenkins (2008) or Gregory Bateson (1972).

has also shaped us as political subjects.[2] Our guiding interest for this project can be carved out of this background: We want to understand teacher-student relations from an educational and a political standpoint. Therefore, we wanted to find two very different educational systems on the macro-level with the hope to observe very different educational practices of the teacher-student relation. At the same time, we engaged in finding theories that cast their view on the teacher-student relation combined with an awareness for the socio-political dimension of education. As we will show in theory and practice the teacher-student relation that is created in the classroom is always connected with a certain way to think and speak about education by the participants of the educational interaction. And it is at this point where the theory and methods of our field of study "Cultural Encounters" come into play. On one hand we will use discourse analysis, a method that is aware of the interconnectedness of language and cultural practices,[3] to analyze the interviews we did with students and teachers. On the other hand, the teacher-student relation does not take place in a vacuum-like purely intellectual room but in a physical place, the classroom. It is through the interaction with the objects and the design of the elements of the classroom that the teacher-student relation is communicated and (re)produced situationally. And it is already the design of the classroom that incorporates cultural ideas about education and the teacher-student relationship at that French or Finnish place in the geography of cultures. A brief discussion of the classrooms we encountered will therefore be part of this research as well.

To take the teacher-student relation into focus we will use the theoretical view of Jacques Rancière laid down in his book *The ignorant Schoolmaster. Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1991). To expand our focus from the teacher-student relation to a teacher-student-classroom environment relation we will draw some inspiration from John Dewey's short book *The School and the Society* (1956). Combined with a thorough look into the theory of Rancière a mixed-method research design with a classroom observation and qualitative single and group interviews was built around one case study of French educational practice. The initially planned second case study of Finnish educational practice couldn't be carried

[2] More on the connection of pedagogy and politics: Freire (2005), Sternfeld (2009).
[3] "Language is intertwined with how we act and how we maintain and regulate our societies. Language is part of the way that people seek to promote particular views of the world and naturalize them, that is, make them appear natural and commonsensical. Through language, certain kinds of practices, ideas, values and identities are promoted and naturalized. Institutions such as schools become one site where such knowledge becomes disseminated and regulated. What we think of as our culture is inseparable from language." (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 2-3)

through so we decided to replace it with data from already existing interviews with a Finnish teacher and the Finnish Educational expert Pasi Sahlberg and literature research on Finnish Education. Based on our findings an attempt is made to answer our research question: What are differences in current French and Finnish educational practice and how can these practices be evaluated democratically?

Theory

School, Society and Reproduction

Schools around the world host a range of activities that are attributed to what is called "education". These interactions that take place in schools always include teachers and students.[4] While the former is assigned with the task to teach, the latter has the complementary role to learn. With the term "educational practice" we are referring to the interactions that are taking place between teachers and students. These practices can of course look very different. The overall aim of education might vary culturally as well as the image of what a teacher and a student is supposed to do.

The reasons to analyze and to try to improve educational practices in European countries have been coming more and more from an economic standpoint. See for example the "White Paper on Education and Training" of 1995 with the title "Teaching and Learning. Towards the learning Society" written by the Commission of the European Communities. This economic focus on education is linked with the changes of globalization: "[I]n the imagined global 'learning society' greater emphasis and space were given to the acquisition of certain types of knowledge and the development of cognitive skills that would be instrumental for the productive employability of the worker, for economic growth and the accumulation of wealth, and for national and global prosperity." (Kazamias, 2001, p. 7)

These economic reasons are accompanied by sociological reasons to improve the equality in society, through supporting the equal access to education. With the rise of critical pedagogy, the socio-political reason to equally represent the perspectives and knowledge of different social and cultural groups in the teaching is added (Friedrich et al., 2001, pp. 61-62). But they are also socio-cultural reasons to look at educational practice in the education system. Especially in some European societies where the family loses more of its importance in the process of reproduction in exchange for the educational system (Bourdieu 1994). The case of the development of the educational system in France can further illustrate these different reasons and help to understand the reason to look at educational practice we take in this research project.

[4] Different expressions are used, for example the rather out-dated word "master", the word facilitator as well as pupil, children or learners. In this work we will use the terms "teacher" and "students".

A short view on the history of French Education

"In France, the history of schooling can be regarded as a quest to achieve uniformity. […] With the creation of the *college unique* the school system was said to be unified. The French school system is therefore a three-tiered structure composed of the primary school, the *college* and finally the *lycée*, with the latter including three types of education – classical, technical and vocational." (Cousin, 2001, p. 207) This creation took place in 1975. Nevertheless, the process of democratization goes back to the French Revolution. Fox (1958, p. 65) writes: "*since the Revolution the republican ideal has been to offer 'every child free and equal opportunity to develop his talents in state schools.'"* This understanding of democracy as equal access was achieved by several reforms in the 20th century (Cousin, 2001, p. 207). But new challenges emerged:

Inequality is now to be found in the choice of options and courses. The unification of the school system has resulted in the introduction of differentiation within the school itself. Previously, the difference was between those who continued their studies and those who did not. Today the difference is between those who have access to the selective streams and the others. (Cousin, 2001, p. 210)

Cousin (2001, p. 210) sees reasons for the difference in the access to selective streams in a mutual disbelief by the teacher and working class students in the higher achievement in education and in mutual belief by the teacher and middle class students in the possibility of higher achievement; the same reasoning applying to females in technological fields of study. While Cousin (2001, p. 210) takes this phenomenon as a reason to shift the focus from difference in access to schools to the difference in access to selective streams, we take it as a reason for the importance to look at student-teacher relations for educational success. But not just for the success of minority groups but of students and teachers in general as every student and teachers can enter the educational interaction with certain learned beliefs and presuppositions that influence how the student-teacher relationship is shaped and (re)constructed every day. We will argue in the following theory section that a closer look at the student-teacher relationship is not just important for educational success but always linked with the living and learning of democracy as a way of life. Regarding the fact that human beings

that grow into European societies spend up to approximately 8.200 hours in the first 8 or 9 years of general education (OECD, 2014, p. 428) the student-teacher relationship must be reflected in democratic states.[5] The process of democratization of schools and therefore also society cannot be continued by focusing only on questions of access that put equality at the end but must take a different focus and starting point (Simons & Masschelein, 2011, p. 1). The argument that leads to this conclusion and the different starting point can be found in the works of Jacques Rancière (1991, 2014).

Before we take a look at the student-teacher relation with the French thinker we will explore his understanding of democracy.

[5] Ca. 8.150 hours in France and 6.150 hours in Finland based on data from the OECD (2014).

Democracy and Equality as practice - The democratic theory of Jacques Rancière

For Jacques Rancière democracy as a form of government is a scandal if we look from the point of view of authority because it is the title of governing that "refutes itself" (Rancière, 2014, p. 41). It is the title for power that knows that its power is essentially illegitimate and only given by chance (Rancière, 2014, p. 41). It knows this, because it does not take the presupposition that human beings are created unequally that would legitimate authority beyond chance.

> It [democracy] is the whim of a god, that of chance, which is of such nature that it is ruined as a principle of legitimacy. […] The scandal lies in the disjoining of entitlements to govern from any analogy to those that order social relations, from any analogy between human convention and the order of nature. It is the scandal of a superiority based on no other title than the very absence of superiority. (Rancière, 2014, p. 41)

These analogies are for example the superiority of the old over the young in the family or society, of the high-born over the low-born, of the stronger over the weaker and "the authority of those who know over those who are ignorant" (Rancière, 2014, p. 40). At the heart of democracy as a form of government and as a way of life is therefore the presupposition of the equality of human beings as a starting point.[6] Not as a normative idea but rather as a descriptive idea, i.e., as a presupposition about the world, that can neither be proven nor disproven.[7] Rancière unveils every authoritative relation as a construction. This does take nothing away from the reality of authoritative relations or even states. It just argues that it must not be like that.

While every form of government or interaction that is built on strict social ideas, tries to control and reduce uncertainty, democracy is the form of government and human practice that embraces uncertainty. Friedrich et al. (2011, pp. 72-73) reflect with Derrida:

[6] This idea can be found explicitly in one form or another in the constitution of democratic states. "All men are created equal" (Declaration of Independence 1776), "Human dignity shall be inviolable" (Article 1 (1) Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany), "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights" (Declaration of the Rights of Man 1789).

[7] It is this descriptive idea that is also at the core of the social constructivist systems theory put forward for example by the german sociologist Niklas Luhmann. We must see the kinship of Rancière and Luhmann as Rancière states that every social relation is constructed together based on the equal importance of both parts in this interactive act. Both have to play their part for a social reality to be constructed. (Rancière, 2014, pp. 48-49)

> Democracy remains to come, he argues, first because democracy inherently has the structure of a promise, not as a certainty for something to happen tomorrow, but as the 'memory of that which carries the future, the to-come, here and now' (ibid., p. 331). Furthermore, democracy will never exist; it will always be aporetic in its structure.

Democracy can face this existential uncertainty – the knowledge that it will never exist – because it includes the idea that the other person is "my equal" and gains strength from the hospitality and solidarity of men.[8] To pay attention to this presupposition of equality in the interaction with other human beings in the here and now is therefore the main responsibility for the democratic being. (Friedrich et al., 2011, p. 72)

The story of Jacques Rancière and his doctorate father Louis Althusser gives some vividness to Rancière as one of the best to spot it then inequality is presupposed. The break of Rancière with Althusser was initially "for the fact that his theory was above all an educational theory that justified the eminent value and superiority of the masters (or the intellectuals) themselves over the workers (or the people)." (Simons & Masschelein, 2011, p. 2) It is for the same reason that Rancière critiques Bourdieu (Ross in Rancière, 1991, p. xi). Coming from a marxist theoretical point of view it was the discovery of the 18th - 19th French philosopher Joseph Jacotot that allowed Rancière to formulate his critique sharply. In his book "The ignorant Schoolmaster" he writes with Jacotot, that: "Equality is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified." (Rancière, 1991, p. 138). What he calls the "method of equality" (1991, 2014) is the move to put equality at the beginning.

"I think the point is that in any kind of human relation you have the choice between two presuppositions: the presupposition that we are dealing with somebody who is not your equal, or the presupposition that you are dealing with someone who is your equal, meaning that they are sharing the one capacity which is involved in the relation." (Rancière interviewed by Power, 2010, p. 81)

After this critique of the human relation in society, we turn now with Rancière and Jacotot to the critique of the pedagogical relation in an educational setting.

[8] The german philosopher of rights and constitutional judge between 1983 and 1996 Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde (2020, p. 68) writes: "Montesquieu, to whom we owe many insights into the nature and conditions of the state order, saw this connection when he said that the principle on which democracy is built was virtue. Precisely because the democratic order is constituted from the very bottom up, from the individual, it depends, like no other state form, on what the individual brings to it. Therein lies its possibility, but also its constant peril." And he continues: "Rather, in positive terms it [the democratic state] entails the unconditional acceptance of one's fellow humans as persons, in other words, an ethos of personal partnership also in the politico-social realm." (Böckenförde, 2020, p. 72)

The pedagogic relation - Rancière political philosophy of education

In sync with his conviction of the method of equality Rancière choses to write his critique of the pedagogic relation not in an explaining way but as a story that is told.[9] Here is the first sentence of the book "The ignorant schoolmaster" (1991, p. 1):

"In 1818, Joseph Jacotot, a lecturer in French literature at the University of Louvain, had an intellectual adventure."

This intellectual adventure took place because Jacotot was forced to move away from France. He got a position as a professor in the Netherlands without speaking any Flemish. His students were eager to learn French, so he tried to come up with a way to teach them French without the possibility of a common language to transfer his knowledge to them. A *thing in common* that they both could refer to had to be found. "At that time, a bilingual edition of *Télémaque* was being published in Brussels." (Rancière 1991, p. 2) He had the students to read it with the help of the translation, recite it and after they had done it, he asked the students to "write in French what they thought about what they had read" (Rancière, 1991, p. 2):

> And how surprised he was to discover that the students, left to themselves, managed this difficult step as well as many French could have done! Was wanting all that was necessary for doing? Were all men virtually capable of understanding what others had done and understood? (Rancière, 1991, p. 2)

This led Jacotot to question the traditional conception that the master's task is to *explain.*

> Consider, for example, a book in the hands of a student. The book is made up of a series of reasonings designed to make a student understand some material. But now the schoolmaster opens his mouth to explain the book. He makes a series of reasonings in order to explain the series of reasonings that constitute the book. But why should the book need such help? (Rancière, 1991, p. 4)

"So the logic of explication calls for the principle of a regression ad infinitum: there is no reason for the redoubling of reasonings ever to stop. What brings an end to the regression and

[9] Other authors have written on this quite unique approach of Rancière (Cornelissen 2011: 16, Ross in Rancière 1991: xxii).

gives the system its foundation is simply that the explicator is the sole judge of the point when the explication is itself explicated." (Rancière 1991, p. 4) The arbitrariness of the explicative order is quite obvious, but it is the assumptions about the world that give the explicative order its assumed legitimization. While the fact that every child has learned something with its own intelligence before entering the school – for example to speak or to walk – is to be accepted, this intelligence of the child, that moves along "blindly, figuring out riddles" (Rancière, 1991, p. 10), is devalued in relation to the intelligence of the master, that "knows things by reason, proceeds by method, from the simple to the complex, from the part to the whole." (Rancière, 1991, p. 7) "To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself." (Rancière, 1991, p. 6) The idea of explanation and the idea of learning that complements the act of explaining on the side of the student presuppose the inequality of intelligence. But there is hope, equality can be achieved, says the master. The student can eventually *understand.* Pedagogy for Rancière is the art to find better and better ways to make the student understand (Rancière, 1991, pp. 13-14). Such is the gesture of the explicative order from the standpoint of the student in relation to the schoolmaster:

I can't but you can. Please explain it to me, so that I can understand it too and that at one point I can take your place!

The student is the speechless, the incapable, the one who learns to obey in order to prove at some point that he is to be seen as an equal, as someone who is intelligent, who can speak, who is capable. For the explicative act or "real" learning (not childish learning) to take place, the student first must accept the presupposition of a world divided into "intelligent" and "stupid" (Rancière, 1991, p. 6) human beings. This means the student first has to accept the reality of authority. Every explicative act is "progress toward stultification" (Rancière, 1991, p. 8).

The educational experiment done by Jacotot turns all these presuppositions on its head. While the explicative master presupposes the inequality of intelligence, Jacotot presupposes the equality of intelligence (Rancière, 1991, p. 50); while the explicative master believes that one must proceed from the simple to the complex, Jacotot believes: "*everything is in everything*" (Rancière, 1991, p. 26); while the explicative master says: "you can't", Jacotot says:

> Don't say that you can't. You know how to see, how to speak, you know how to show, you can remember. What more is needed? An absolute attention for seeing and seeing

> again, saying and repeating. Don't try to fool me or fool yourself. Is that really what you saw? What do you think about it? Aren't you a thinking being? (Rancière 1991: 23)

Jacotot presupposes an intelligence in the student. This intelligence only needs to turn attentively to the *thing in common* that contains the use of human intelligence the student wants to learn as well. For example, the use of human intelligence by Fenelon, the author of *Télémaque,* to speak French. Based on this observation, Rancière (1991, p. 13) writes: "In the act of teaching and learning there are two wills and two intelligences. We will call their coincidence stultification." Jacotot is therefore careful. "[L]eaving his intelligence out of the picture, he had allowed their intelligence to grapple with that of the book." (Rancière, 1991, p. 13) "We will call the known and maintained difference of the two relations— the act of an intelligence obeying only itself even while the will obeys another will— *emancipation*." (Rancière, 1991, p. 13)

"Essentially, what an emancipated person can do is be an emancipator: to give, not the key to knowledge, but the consciousness of what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself." (Rancière, 1991, p. 39) This means the student or students first must accept their equality with the master, they first have to accept the reality of democracy. The emancipatory educative act is the verification of democracy in that moment. Emancipation is a step towards a democracy that can only be practiced time and time again.

But if the students have everything they need to learn and also show that they can learn by themselves, we can ask: Why do you even need a teacher?

> A person— and a child in particular— may need a master when his own will is not strong enough to set him on track and keep him there. But that subjection is purely one of will over will. (Rancière, 1991, p. 13)

What Jacotot, the ignorant master, brings to the educative act is his will, attention and belief in the equality of intelligences. The ignorant master, who is the emancipatory master, reminds the student, that he can already speak, that he is intelligent, that he is capable and he demands the student to be strict with himself; "he verifies that the work of the intelligence is done with attention, that the words don't say just anything in order to escape from the constraint" (Rancière, 1991, p. 29). In the end the emancipatory person, that we can also call the "*attentive*

master" (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 23), helps the student to complete the act of the intelligence. This act contains the response to the three questions: "what do you see? what do you think about it? what do you make of it?" (Rancière, 1991, p. 23) The act of the intelligence is a repeating cycle through the stages of perceiving, thinking and creating. This creation at the end can be the own words spoken to another or written down by the student inspired by what he saw and thought, or his way of playing a piano piece infront of another and so on. This is why every completed act of intelligence is also an act of *subjectification. "*Subjectification is about the appearance, a 'coming into presence', of a way of being that had no place and no part in the existing order of things." (Biesta, 2011, p. 38) The way of being of this particular student. But we can deduce more. The importance of the question "What do you make of it?" in the act of the intelligence lets us question another distinction that is usually built into the school. The distinction between the school not as learning-time but as free-time and work-time. (Rancière, 1988, p. 2) The distinction between the school as the place to "apprend pour apprendre" (Rancière, 1988, p. 3) and the economy as a place for productive work. When the emancipatory learning process of a student is only completed with a creative act of the student, this distinction seems to blur. The American educational philosopher John Dewey is introduced into the discussion. He writes in his book *The School and the Society* (1956) released in 1900:

> A society is a number of people held together because they are working along common lines, in a common spirit, and with reference to common aims. The common needs and aims demand a growing interchange of thought and growing unity of sympathetic feeling. […] The radical reason that the present school cannot organize itself as a natural social unit is because just this element of common and productive activity is absent. (Dewey, 1956, p. 14)

Dewey does not differentiate the school as free-time and the economic time in a democratic society as work-time. He writes that the same active social spirit that is witnessed in a democratic society should be witnessed in school. The following passage of the book puts Dewey's philosophy of education into dense and vivid words so we will leave it almost as it is:

> The difference that appears when occupations are made the articulating centers of school life is not easy to describe in words; it is a difference in motive, of spirit and atmosphere. As one enters a busy kitchen in which a group of children are actively engaged in the preparation of food, the psychological difference, the change from more or less passive

> and inert recipiency and restraint to one of buoyant outgoing energy, is so obvious as fairly to strike one in the face. [...] The mere absorbing of facts and truths is so exclusively individual an affair that it tends very naturally to pass into selfishness. […] Indeed, almost the only measure for success is a competitive one, in the bad sense of that term—a comparison of results in the recitation or in the examination to see which child has succeeded in getting ahead of others in storing up, in accumulating, the maximum of information. So thoroughly is this the prevailing atmosphere that for one child to help another in his task has become a school crime. […] Where active work is going on, all this is changed. Helping others, instead of being a form of charity which impoverishes the recipient, is simply an aid in setting free the powers and furthering the impulse of the one helped. A spirit of free communication, of interchange of ideas, suggestions, results, both successes and failures of previous experiences, becomes the dominating note of the recitation. (Dewey, 1956, pp. 14-15)

While Dewey puts the school and the society into a relation in this passage using the terms activity and passivity, he also reflects that the structure of the school can be supportive of individuality and even selfishness or communality. Besides that, the passage gives a hint for Dewey's awareness that the atmosphere of social interactions relates to the materiality of that place when he uses the metaphor of the kitchen. This inclusion of objects and places into the analysis of education shows his kinship with the practice of cultural analysis that shares the assumption that cultural practices, discourses, and memories are always connected with certain places and objects. One last anecdote about Dewey supports this point. Dewey had once desperately tried to find desks and chairs that he deemed to be suitable for the needs of children in school. At one point a helpful dealer stated: "»I am afraid we have not what you want. You want something at which the children may work; these are all for listening.«" (Dewey, 1956, p. 31)

The emancipatory educative act with Rancière already gave us the idea that normative social distinctions are becoming irrelevant in the moment when emancipation is lived in a classroom.[10] With Dewey we can expand that thought and see that also the normative distinction - free-time as the exemption of the necessity to work (Rancière, 1988, p. 2) as being

[10] Human beings can always be seen as different, and they are different. But these differences can be celebrated based on the presupposition that we are all "equal" in the Rancièren sense. They become normative when the attitude or presupposition in an encounter that the other is "not my equal".

of higher value than work-time - between the classroom and the productive outside world is blurred in the moment of activity in class.

> To act as if all intelligences are equal is a way of acting that produces its own effect. 'We can never say: all intelligence is equal. It's true. But our problem isn't proving that all intelligence is equal. It's seeing what can be done under that supposition. And for this it's enough for us that the opinion be possible—that is, that no opposing truth be proved' (ibid., p. 46). Rancière goes on to say: 'What interests us is the exploration of the powers of any man when he judges himself equal to everyone else and judges everyone else equal to him' (ibid., p. 57). (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 23)

In the last section of this chapter, we are having a deeper look at what that, "to act as if all intelligences are equal" can actually mean in the educational setting. This deeper understanding will further help us to analyze the different student-teacher relations that we have encountered in the classroom observation and the different views on this relation we were told by the students and teachers we interviewed.

The role of laughing in the pedagogic relation

First of all, it is important to stress that every human interaction is built in a physical world. The body therefore plays a crucial role in the realizing of a democratic or an authoritative human interaction as well as in analyzing and understanding these interactions in hindsight. A look at the role of laughter in the classroom will give some meaning to that.

Like a society the classroom can be seen as "composed of conventions that privilege certain contingencies over and against others" (Lewis, 2011, p. 126). Part of the ordering is for example who is allowed to speak and in what way to whom. The pregiven role of the teacher but also the clown in the class, the silent ones, the eager beaver etc. come to mind. "The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise" (Rancière, 1999, p. 29).

Tyson Edward Lewis (2011, pp. 127-128) who looked at the inclusion of laughter in the life and pedagogy of Paulo Freire with Jacques Rancière writes: "Laughing draws new lines of alliance that cut across the police order of standardization, introducing a surplus collectivity not necessarily reducible to predefined social roles within the structures that dominate standards of classroom behavior, etiquette, and notions of 'appropriateness'." While he (2011) differentiates three kinds of laughing, the naïve – a laugh that just shrugs off every catastrophe with a naïve positivity about the world, the superstitious – a laugh that is cynical at those who don't know, it is the third kind, the critical transformative laugh, that is a laugh together with the others verifying their equality.[11]

> The joy of the transformative laugh is the experience of an egalitarian community whose flesh has not yet been made into words. The laugh is therefore not so much the proclamation of a wrong (spoken through argumentative reason which gives the noise of pain a logos) but rather the affective verification of a surplus equality—it is the sensual pleasure of democracy. (Lewis, 2011, p. 129)

[11] It is therefore to be expected that the emancipatory educational interaction will include a lot of shared laughter between the student(s) and the teacher.

Theoretical conclusion on the student-teacher relationship

The student-teacher relationship can be based on the idea of the equality of all intelligence or on the idea of the inequality of intelligences that is at the heart of traditional pedagogy. In the first case the master is still needed as his will, encouragement and attention help the student to stay on track of using his own intelligence to answer the questions: What do you see? What do you think? What do you say or make of it? If this relationship from will to will is established in an educational setting, moments of democratic education are witnessed. In the second case the master needs the student to accept the premise that he does not know but the master knows and that he as a student cannot understand by himself. The explicative master needs to work with punishment and reward to make sure the student stays on track. If this relationship that chains one intelligence to another is established, moments of authoritative education are witnessed.

Besides that, we learned with Dewey that the educational structure can support passivity or a productive activity and individuality or communality. The rest of the paper will be dedicated to the empirical research we made.

Methodology

For the empirical part of our project we decided to focus on the upper-secondary level of school, the *lycée* in the French system. Although it would be interesting to have a look at student-teacher relationships on all levels of school, the upper-secondary level is the step before the students are "released" into society. The upper-secondary level is the last impression of students in general education, also in regard to human interactions in a public institution and therefore can be said to be the most connected to society.

As our aim is to understand the student-teacher relation, we decided to get qualitative data through class observations, individual interviews and group focused interviews. What is said in an interview must not be what is actually practiced. And what is practiced can be misinterpreted without an insight into the background and way of thinking about and seeing the specific context of that person. Indeed, the observation class gave us an objective perspective because it allowed us to see for ourselves certain clues, patterns, ways of approaching, ways of responding that we were able to analyze, meanwhile the interviews completed our analysis by giving us a deeper, subjective angle.

As students with a limited budget and a short time to complete the project our goal to find a French and a Finnish case study where we could do observations and interviews was quite high. The compromise was to find a French School in Denmark and the attempt to do online classroom observations in a Finnish school. While we managed to implement the French case study, we were not that lucky with Finnish schools. Having written and called to more than ten schools with no fixed interview or classroom observation in sight, we decided to find already existing interviews that at least partially address the student-teacher relation.

This was quite a setback to our project and desire to understand different educational cultures as the fact that we were able to be present in the French school, visiting different parts of it, experiencing the active classrooms, engaging with mostly French students and French teachers really added to the cultural understanding in regard to our project. Entering the French school, we spoke to the first two teachers we met. They were willing to be part of our research. After the first classroom observation in the French school, we asked the students who would be willing to be part of an anonymous interview. This way we found three students. We decided to do a group interview with them in order to avoid any pressure or intimidation that one-on-one interviews can sometimes bring.

We strategically decided to do the observation class before the interviews, so that neither the teacher nor the students would be influenced by our questions and risking for them to project their answers during the observation hour. Two of the three of us did classroom observations which took one hour in the afternoon on separate days. We were aware that our presence in the room could influence the dynamics. We sat at two tables in the back of the classroom and spread our paper notebooks and pencils just like the students, who weren't allowed any digital devices during class. Being in our early mid-twenties further helped us to fade into the background of the around 15- to 16-year-old students. We had prepared guiding questions that helped us to focus on the student-teacher relation during the act of observing. Here is an extract of the questions we agreed on using.

How is the session opened / closed?

What is the teacher doing?
What objects is he using? How? How long?
Who does he communicate with? How? How long?

What are the students doing?
How do the students communicate with the teacher? How long?

What is salient within the interactions between the students and the teacher?

In connection to the interviews, it was important for us to interview both parties (teacher and student) to understand both perspectives.[12] For the interviews we used a semi-structured approach that gave us the freedom to inquire into interesting aspects. We carefully designed our questions around the student-teacher relationship with the aim of personal, subjective answers that let us understand the teachers and students' perspective. Which is also why we asked them to describe the student-teacher relation with a metaphor in one question and prominently formulated questions that start with the words "in your opinion".[13]

[12] This decision is in line with the theory of Rancière that both sides mutually construct the reality respectively quality of the relation that they experience.
[13] The guiding questions can be found in the appendix.

The emphasis on this procedure is because we wanted to avoid answers based on what the students or teachers “should” answer, since we afterall touch upon a theme that we are aware, can be sensitive because we come to question certain roles (the school, the teacher, the student) founded in an ancient, traditional educational system. Those roles have been determined by and anchored deep within the French educational system and therefore, critically approaching it and questioning it can be risky. It is relevant to mention here that the director of the French school requested to specifically see our interview questions before giving us a green light. The thought process we have had behind our questions and the way we formulated them helped extract honest, personal and critical thinking-based answers. Though, we are aware that due to the limited number of interviews and study cases, we cannot imply that we have enough data gathered to understand with certainty the influence of the dynamics within the educational practices we have studied during this project. What we did gain, is an idea, a “sneak peek” on their ways of doing, which was enriching to be a witness of.

Analysis

This chapter contains an analysis that is built upon the data we have gathered from our interviews. The purpose of our questions has been to gain clarity on how our participants view and position themselves inside the school, considering that this would give us a bridge of understanding towards the larger scale, the latter being the traditional French educational system.

In line with a critical discourse analysis approach (Machin & Mayr 2012) our focus in the analysis of the student and teacher interviews will be to outline their view on the student-teacher relationship and the power dynamics embedded in this view. By looking at their choice of words and the images and metaphors embedded in them we will highlight the discourse they use to see each other, what they expect from each other but also expectations they have towards themselves in the school setting.

Following that, we discuss the role that school can have, again from the perspective of our participants. In this subchapter we also touch upon the general associations that they make in relation to school. This subchapter will help us gain an understanding of their motivations, hopes and their intentions in relation to school. To finish with, we will discuss our participants' personal thoughts and opinions on the French schooling system to understand how they mentally position themselves within it.

Together with the classroom observation in the French case we will try to reconstruct a coherent picture based on the different data we got of what happened in the classroom in regard to the student-teacher relationship. What similarities but also differences can we find in the two classes we observed in the French case and how are they different or similar to the Finnish case? The theory of Rancière and Dewey will be used to put the observed differences and similarities in one frame and to make concluding remarks.

The French School - Case Study

What did they say?

When we asked the following questions “in your opinion, what is the role of a teacher” and “what is the role of a student”, it was because this was an effective way to get into
what they expect of each other within their school setting. What is a good student? What is a good teacher? Through understanding what they expect of each other, we gain an understanding where they come from and how they are culturally embedded in the educational system in which they are a part of. For instance, the teacher Paul seemed to have no doubts on what the role of the student is. Without a hesitation, he said “So, the role of a student is obviously to fulfill his role as a student. It is to listen in class, to take notes, to get results, the best he can get according to his possibilities. Not to bother his classmates, not to bother his teachers.” Paul has shown himself to be well aware that he was more in the traditional scale of French education. According to him, the French system is “shaped like that” and he even says that it would be “hard to get out of that”. Although we felt a certain detachment and unwillingness to actively change the fact that it is “shaped like that” from Paul’s side when it came to how the French educational system is built, we did notice an underlying knowing that the educational practice that takes place within the French system might not be the most modern one.
When we in turn asked the same question to the students, we got a surprisingly, almost frustrated response back. This is what Charlotte had to say on what she thinks the teachers expect of her and her classmates: “That you learn everything by heart for no real reason, they want you to learn everything by heart. And there’s no thought behind it in general. They want us to do what they want us to do.” She finished her sentence by saying “They’re kind of like the army in the end”. On the other hand, we had our other student, Giroud, who leaned towards the practical aspects of his teachers' expectations. In his own words, the expectations of the teachers are more “based on achievements” as well as “participation to succeed”, and although he believes that their workloads is more consequent than in other national systems, he still believed that his teachers “want us to succeed” referring to his classmates and himself. At least, this is the dynamic he expects for a teacher-student relationship.
What was interesting to witness was the very different opinion that Francois, the philosophy teacher had when it comes to what he expects of his students. He was well aware though, that

his discipline (philosophy) could be a factor for this exception. While Paul said very clearly "the teacher's role is to transmit knowledge", Francois said "I think my role is not to help them to have more knowledge, but maybe to have less.". Francois has almost the opposite view of what we would categorize as a "traditional French teacher" (A lecture where the teacher is at center and is a strong contributing factor in the educational practice that is taking place in class). The role of a student according to Francois is most importantly to have the drive to come to school to learn. While discussing his expectations on the role of students, he said "You come here because you want to learn something". Indeed, the philosopher teacher puts an emphasis on the role of the student in a class setting. In his classes, he is interested in what the students have to say. He wants them to learn to have a critical mind, rather than indulging information. He thinks of them as beings that "always have something to say". The difference between the two teachers' perception of the role of a student is quite interesting.

Another important point worth including in our analysis is what our participants believe are the role of school. Through those questions, we wanted to understand what they believe their institution does for them. Again, our two teachers had two different opinions. Paul's answer was a similar statement than his previous ones. When we asked him what the role of school is, one of his answers was "so that they can have a toolbox afterwards to succeed as well as possible in their professional life. Assuming that success comes through professional life". While Francois responded "I think that, what it should be is a place where you come because you want to have a certain knowledge and certain skills, not necessarily to find a job. I think the problem of school is that everything is made so that they have a place in society, which means "a job". So again, Paul has a detached way of being an active teacher, fulfilling his role as a teacher in the traditional ways the French schools seem to be. The question we would like to point out here is who is "assuming" that success comes through professional life? The French educational system? The schools in general? In his answer, Paul is aware of the general, traditional thinking behind the role of school, which would be to have a job later. Rather, he uses the term "should" to explain his theory on what the role of school should be. According to him, people should go to school because they are interested in learning something they enjoy. The students on the other hand also associate school with success and work. Charlotte answered "Because I'm kind of the only one in the family that's going to have to support everyone in terms of money and everything so I have to at least manage to have a job to support my whole family later on, so that's also what motivates me", while Alex gave us a similar response: " it's also important for the future, so we do it to be able to succeed later in life".

We would like to dedicate this last part to our participants' personal opinions on the French educational practice because we believe they are important to understand how they personally position themselves within the school setting.

What seemed predominant to us when discussing the relationship between teacher-student, was that in a class setting, both parties are aware of the existing power-relation between the two. “It's clear that there's a bit of a dominant to dominated position.” said Paul in regard to the student-teacher relationship. Alex, the student is also aware of this dynamic - he said, “Teachers still expect respect from the students and just that they have authority.” He proceeded “I think it’s really kind of built into the students minds that there’s a form of respect for the teacher”. But what really surprised us was Charlotte using this following image to explain how she experiences her relation with teachers. “The child at the table, who has to look at his notebooks with a kind of shadow of a teacher who sees the finger a little bit like that” (she pointed her finger down like she was the shadow of the teacher pointing down his finger at the student,). She sounded pessimistic about the progress of French educational practice. “The French system will not change, it will take time because it has been like that for 100 years. And all systems evolve. Most systems evolve while the French system evolves very slowly.” That is however not how Francois, the philosophy teacher, pictures their relationship in his mind. When asked about a metaphor that represents the teacher and the students in a learning process, Francois came with this answer “I had pictures of a boat, for instance, and the students appear from behind controlling the direction” he proceeded “But we are on the same boat, but we don’t have the same role on the boat. The boat couldn't move without them, but I just try for them to find the right direction” he finished his sentence with “We are on the same boat, but i am the captain”.

By looking at our participants' expectations, associations, and opinions, we managed to find similarities and differences in perspectives. For instance, Charlotte and Francois share to a certain extent similar ideals and frustrations in regard to the French educational practice, while Paul and the students are aware that they are a part of a traditional system that places value on knowledge, evaluation and structure. Despite this traditional practice, François seems to actively encourage his students to become more critical minded, and he does so by placing them at the center and letting them express themselves freely during class.

What did they do?

M. Francois:

Regarding the student-teacher relationship M. Francois says part of his task is “to guide” the students and that “we are all on the same boat”. As a teacher in philosophy, he sees his task not in transferring more and more knowledge but in training “critical minds”. The ability to think and to express yourself is crucial for the students to learn in his view. His assumption is that they are in general able to do it, and that “they always have something to say”. To get the students attention and to find something interesting together he “first” has to establish “a good connection with the students”. In the following analysis of one hour of educational practice of M. Francois and his students, we will highlight how he achieves what he wants to achieve and where he might contradict his own words with his actions.

The first observation that struck us, was the amount of smiles and laughs on M. Francois' face – they could be observed in every minute that passed – as well as his loud, clear, and lively voice. He was barely seen on his chair. Most of the time he stood and walked in front of the green blackboard, sometimes coming closer to the students, or sitting on one of the desks in the front that weren’t occupied by students. His movements were very connected to what was going on. Leaning forward or moving towards the students who were speaking. Even while he was writing something on the blackboard, he used his fingers to point in the direction the student's voice was coming from, reacting to his words, and signaling his attention. Because they were correcting a test together at the beginning, he was asking a lot of short questions to the students with the goal to collectively correct their mistakes. We counted that half of them raised their arm in the first five minutes and almost every student had said something by the end of the hour. He used the student’s forename to give them the word, said “Daniel, je vous écoute”, or pointed with his hands or gaze and head to give the word to someone. He always reacted to what a student said, usually repeating an important word and then adding something himself. Most of the time all the students were looking at the person who said something, no matter if it was M. Francois or another student. There was an atmosphere of wanting to hear and to participate in what was said and done and to contribute to it. A collective spirit that reminds of Dewey. Part of this atmosphere were moments of laughing together with the students throughout the whole session, as M. Francois made some jokes especially at the

beginning when correcting the tests. M. Francois always made sure that everyone in the room could hear each other. To calm the class and to reduce the chatting of two or three students, he said: “äh, äh, äh” or “sh, sh” in a strict voice or “s’il vous plait!”. At other times he snipped towards the direction of the noise and once he stopped talking, raised both arms, looked at the students that chatted and asked: “What are you saying?” During the one hour that we observed, it always worked for him to get the attention back to the common thing that was going on. We also observed brief moments of humorous interaction with a student by M. Francois. Once he took up a snip of a student by responding with a snip, another time he responded with his posture to the facial expression of a student. M. Francois was not afraid to use his whole body in this rather small classroom to build a connection with the students. Signaling his attention and responding in a serious but often humorous way.

Classroom 1 - M. Francois

After the correction of the test, they talked about wages and connected it with the French philosopher Blaise Pascal. Again M. Francois showed a lot of interest in the students as he repeatedly asked: “Qui est d’accord?” (Who agrees?) or “Cela m'intéresse, qui pense …?” (I

am interested, who thinks …?). Another situation is telling for the amount of attention and time he gave the students to express their thoughts: The way he closed the session and opened the break. One student presented a personal argument, and some more hands were still up as the bell rang. M. Francois reacted to it but then signaled to the student who was speaking to continue. Everyone continued but he claimed that after the next student there will be a break and there was. Almost everyone went outside. A sign that a break was actually needed after a very focused session was created together by M. Francois and the students?

One last observation is telling for this educational practice that included many elements of the emancipatory attentive master that Rancière is talking about: At the end of the session a student who was the only one who sat alone, because he was doing a test during the session, in the back and who seemed rather disinterested, tried to communicate with another student who sat 2,5m away from him. The second student briefly looked at him, responded in a short and blocking manner and continued to listen to and look at the student who was currently speaking in the class. The observation of this mutual interest in the student-teacher relation but also between the students fits very well to the practice of emancipation of Rancière. The social background, the color of the skin (which was diverse with white students being the big majority), the age all that did not seem to matter as almost everyone engaged in creating this session together with M. Francois as the approved captain, wanting to be part of it, wanting to listen, to speak and of course to not miss a shared laugh.

We could not find a telling contradiction of what he said to what he did.

M. Paul:

Regarding the student-teacher relationship M. Paul defined the role of the teacher as the task: “to transmit knowledge” and “a certain know-how, a certain culture”. The student's role on the other hand is “to listen in class, to take notes, to get results, the best he can get according to his possibilities. Not to bother his classmates, not to bother his teachers.” This suggests a centrality of the teacher in the educational practice that is taking place in the classroom. We observed one hour of his class which was also in the field of humanities but a different subject than that of M. Francois and with different students. We had already taken our seats in the back, as the first students came to the door which was in front of us to the left. They could see us before entering. The first two students that arrived waited at the door because they noticed that

something was different. It was Charlotte that simply entered. She was the first to take active interest in us while M. Paul briefly left the room before the class started.

M. Paul activated the installed beamer and cast a Powerpoint presentation in the front of the class while he started to talk, sitting in front of an old computer. The only one in the room as the students only had paper notebooks, pencils and some of their textbooks on their desks. After 15 minutes the textbook was used for the first time. M. Paul stood up, looked around and then gave the students the task to read and answer a question. The students worked alone for about 5 minutes, only interrupted by a short monologue of M. Paul about something that he thinks is important regarding the task without expecting an answer. Discussing the task, he pointed at students, said “Oui” or their forename to give them the word. His answers included usually a “Yes”" or “No” explicitly or implicitly in the way he reacted as well as his comment on the question. Most of the students wrote in their notebook or looked at him while he talked. Which was mostly done sitting; sometimes he stood up during monologues, looking around at the class and in a few moments also on the wall next to the students. His voice being loud and clear he sometimes but less than M. Francois made jokes and engaged once in a fun way of talking with Charlotte switching back by an “Alors!” that was followed by a more serious tone of voice.

Classroom 2 - M. Paul

For the second half of the session, he had prepared a YouTube-Video. Alex, who sat closest to M. Paul's desk was quick to help him get it started. Louder chatting and laughter and therefore a sense of relaxation was witnessed during this short technical break as most of the students were rather quiet during the class and every student spoke in a low voice then they had the word. These observations point already into the direction that M. Paul plays the most important part in the room. His knowledge gets a lot of time to be heard but it is his interaction with the YouTube-Video that is the most telling in this regard. Having the video on the screen M. Paul talked one minute before starting it. In the following minutes we observed several times that he stopped the video to add some information and to explain something. At the end of the session, M. Paul was sitting at his desk engaged in a monologue. He did not react to the bell as it rang but continued until he had finished. This observation further stresses the importance of M. Paul and what he has to say. All the students stayed in the room at the beginning of the break except one. He had never looked at M. Paul during the class, sitting in a bored posture seeming mentally absent, sometimes engaging with his smartphone behind the desk. He was one of half of the students who did not say a word during class. We used the break to ask for volunteers for an interview. Charlotte and Giroud were the first to raise their hand, followed by a rather hesitant move by Alex and another student.

Our observations of the educational practice of M. Paul and his students were in line with his presupposition that the students don't know yet and therefore have to listen and take notes and that his role is to transmit knowledge. Which puts this educational practice close to the one that Rancière calls the old master.

We observed two very different sessions of educational practice in a French school. The main difference was that in the session with M. Francois the students contributed to the course and quality of the session, having a lot of time to add their thoughts and arguments, while the students we observed together with M. Paul were less important from the beginning. A PowerPoint presentation was looming in front of their heads together with an opening monologue by M. Paul, who continued to be the one with the longest answers to questions that the students asked or that he himself deemed to be important. This difference in the teaching practice of both was supported by M. Francois' presupposition that the students have a lot to

say but have to train their ability to think and express themselves and M. Pauls' presupposition that they have to listen and take notes.

Finland

With respect to our detailed exploration of the French school system, our next area of research is Finland, which is a country that is said to have one of the best school systems in the world, which is a bold claim and catches one's attention. Therefore, we ought to note what their approach is all about to see this research further.

Finland is a country in Northern Europe with a population of over 5 and a half millions (Tilastokeskus, 2021), which is quite small in comparison to other countries, yet they are recognized all over the world and noted in such a positive light when it comes to education. It can be that Finland has totally different values or understandings of how knowledge can be shared and or transferred, which is why they are so different from other school systems, such as the French one. Finland strives to ensure that children will continue to have excellent knowledge and skills in the future. The country has provided pedagogical guidelines to assist schools in developing their operating procedures in order to boost students' desire and interest in studying, which appears to be one of their core values. Perhaps that is why Finland has no standardized testing, there is a lack of competition between students as one might find elsewhere, school starts much later during the day as opposed to in other schools and the hours a child spends in school is very limited, whilst being provided with frequent and long breaks. Though this is only a part of how their school system is so unique.

Key aspects which stand out

The Finnish education style is to aim to increase student involvement, make learning more meaningful and thus feasible for every student to succeed in their endeavors. The students are encouraged to take on the expected responsibility in school, while being consistently supported and helped when doing so by appropriate individuals and with plenty of resources. The teaching style motivates the children to take on challenges and be evaluated in their progress in rare ways, ones which are much less likely to cause a child to feel as if they are not sufficient, rather to learn more about their own special skills and be able to apply them well. The learning is built on the experiences, emotions, interests, and interactions of the students, and thus by taking into account said individual talents, the teacher's job is to train and mentor the students in

becoming lifelong learners. Therefore, the Finnish school results in being very different from what most are usually familiar with to be the standard.

Standardized testing is omitted

Based on our experience and exchange with students in Europe, standardized testing is the primary method used to assess subject comprehension, giving out the feeling that competency can be measured by answering replicated questions. What most students are used to is to prepare for a test, with a well-known system that evaluates them based on the answers on their test only, which is constructed in a way that is questionably efficient. This could reinforce the feeling of not being skilled-enough, thus unable to compete with others in the class, which inevitably means that competing between the students is being enabled. With the premise of a test, many might get the feeling that the teacher is teaching with the goal of the students filling a test to check their knowledge, rather than to teach them for the purpose of learning something. With the consistent threat of grades being the ultimate deciding factor on whether or not the student is skilled or can advance, a child might feel that they need to cram information in order not to fail, rather than to perhaps be brought into gaining knowledge that could be interesting and valuable. Therefore, Finland has chosen to omit this approach and implement a new one. The sole standardized test taken by all students is the National Matriculation Exam taken by the students at the finish of the upper-secondary education, and at said exam, every child in Finland receives an individual grade according to a system specified by their instructor. (Ministry of Education and Culture), (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018), (Loveless, 2022), (Colagrossi, 2018), (Education Finland, 2020), (Nikamaa, 2021).

“Less is more” – hours and breaks

How many hours should a child spend in school and on homework? How many exams should they have? How many subjects should they have in each semester and even how many breaks would be appropriate? Examining the Finnish school system allows for the observation of a high contrast between the most commonly known practices and those in Finland.

A regular week in a Finnish school would be no more than 20 hours in total (Alano, 2022), with mandatory 75 minutes dedicated to breaks between each class and for lunch time (Colagrossi, 2018). In addition, the meals for the students are completely free), (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018), (Loveless, 2022) . Most commonly, a school day would start no earlier than 09:00 o'clock, though most commonly at 09:45 o'clock (Colagrossi, 2018) – that leaves much room for the child to be able to wake up and get ready, have their first meal of the day, and comfortably reach their school on time for their lessons to start. Perhaps such practices and habits could stimulate a better overall physical and mental health for a child, as well as a higher likelihood to be productive and develop further cognitively, emotionally, and academically. The school day concludes most commonly between 14:00 and 14:45 o'clock (Colagrossi, 2018), which equally allows for a child to return home safely, be able to do their limited and digestible homework, spend time with their family and friends or do something they find fun, have dinner and be well-rested. The classes are longer, but so are the breaks. A student would spend a total of 4 hours in their school a day (Alano, 2022). The homework is not overwhelming and there are no surprise tests or exams throughout a regular day, or at all.

To give further perspective, a regular week in the French school system would consist of 40 hours, which is double the amount of hours of a school week in Finland, with a 15 min break in the morning, a 1 hours lunchtime and 10 more minutes in the afternoon – spread throughout an 8 hour school day (additionally, the meals are not free) (Muller, 2020). That means that 80 minutes of break are used for an entire day, which is twice as long as a Finnish school's day. On average, French school days begin between 08:00 and 08:30 o'clock, and they commonly end around 17:30 o'clock (Muller, 2020). Each day, homework is given, which can vary depending on the subjects or the ability of the student to complete their exercises during the day, though it is mostly very overloading and excessive, as it can take hours to complete after an already exhausting 8-hour work day which ends in the evening, and that is without considering how long it would take for the child to return home. That leaves plenty of room for one to consider when a child would fit their need to socialize outside of school, attend any activities of their own interest, or even have dinner with their family. According to one of our authors, Josefine, oftentimes, there are examinations every week, with additional surprise tests, 2 to 3 times a month, depending on the teacher and the subject. Either way, there is no day without homework, no week without examinations, and there is always a chance and suspense to receive a surprise exam, appointed by the teacher at their own will.

It appears that the basic pattern in Finland's approach to its educational system is way less anxiety inducing. Regimentation is not as heavy, and compassion is being consistently expressed to children. Equally so, the students have multiple opportunities to eat, engage in outdoor activities and simply unwind as they would need, as well as physically beneficial exercises like simply getting up from their desks, stretching outside and going out for some fresh air (Colagrossi, 2018). This is made possible in consequence of those 15–20-minute breaks throughout their school day. Likewise, teachers too require similar resources and are respectfully granted so – oftentimes lounges are made available where all teachers are able to warm up for their day and comfortably settle in their workplace, while also taking breaks and resting as the day progresses (Colagrossi, 2018). After all, in order for the teachers to fulfill their duties, they too require to be accommodated, assuring them to maximize their potential whenever they come to teach their pupils.

Consistency in one teacher

It might seem rational to have a teacher for each subject, and it is the most prevalent method applied in most schools. In Finnish schools, however, the circumstances are different.
Classrooms in Finland consist of 19 students on average, and they have one teacher for up to 6 years, who will take on all subjects for them (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019), (Loveless, 2022), (Colagrossi, 2018). The teacher and student relationship is built over a long period of time, and it is meant to create a safer space and a deep bond between the two parties involved, as to maximize the final outcome for both the educator and those who attend to learn. The classrooms are of fewer students, and each school has fewer teachers for multiple reasons, and besides the intent to create a fond relationship and a good learning environment, it is also to create a more constructive dynamic. This would refer to the ability of the teacher to be able to handle a smaller number of students, but teach more effectively, due to the fact that the teachers not only cover all subjects the children need to be taught, but equally so, they provide lots of support and guidance to each child, while simultaneously learning more about each of their individual talents and needs. With a smaller group of children, this becomes way more plausible.
Within the French school system, the average size of a classroom consists of 25 students (The Local, 2016). Moreover, Josefine explained that each subject is taught by a different teacher and the teacher position can be subjected to frequent changes, depending on the school and

which grade the students are in. It is of course possible to receive support by teachers when there is need for additional assistance with some of the material, though it is not as available as it is in Finland. It might prove to be more challenging for a single teacher to be able to utilize their talents best, should the number of students be larger – there are only so many resources a single teacher would have, and each student is equally worthy of the teacher's attention, assistance, and guidance. Moreover, a stable and safe environment can be achieved if the teacher-student relationship is well-established, thus frequent changes from one educator to another can be more mentally demanding on the student. In order to cooperate well, it makes sense for the teacher and the student to get to know one another and form a bond and trust with each other over time, which would likely require more than one or two years.

The implications here are that a teacher's role could be to follow the students' development more closely, achieve breakthroughs with them and act as a mentor of a kind, but it would not be necessary for said teacher to be considered as an authority figure at the same time. Both parties can be aware of each unique demand and need they have, to create a smooth collaboration.

Shifting the focus – from math to essential

That which stands out often in most schools is their structure, which includes elements such as the curriculum and their overall environment. Most commonly, the subjects which are taught and the manner in which the students are evaluated are heavily oriented towards high performance in mathematics, science and/or learning English as a foreign language, though it is observed that many students feel as if the material is overwhelming and the knowledge they are meant to gain might not be as beneficial to their own unique plans for their careers and lives. At the same time, there is the general sense that students tend to be pressured to increase their grades, while being considerably neglectful to some of their most vital human needs. If one could put this in perspective, they would make the connection that in order for someone to operate as they are meant to or required to in an academic setting or otherwise, they would need to personally, internally, feel well and have enough resources. Moreover, many would appreciate the existence of diversity in the curriculum instead, so perhaps instead of insisting on certain subjects being of the highest importance, an alternative would be offered. What of the number of years children must complete to achieve their primary education, the types of

schools they can attend and their future opportunities as a result? The Finnish education system operates differently.

There are almost no private schools in Finland - education is publicly funded and the schools are made available and equal for all, so there would be no need to compromise with the quality of the education, as it is the same in each school (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018). The only difference between the schools is their style of teaching, the teachers who are employed and who are very unrestrained with the curriculum (but not so much that there is a huge contrast with all schools) and the student activities (New Nordic Schools, 2022). In terms of languages, students learn Finnish and English, but English is not viewed as the learning of Swedish (Loveless, 2022). There is an observation that by the age of 13, children are also interested in a 4th language (Loveless, 2022).

What applies to all schools is that the children all get free meals for the entirety of their compulsory education, access to proper medical care, guidance and counseling, as well as consistent assistance by the teachers whenever there is a struggle of any kind with the material or performance (Colagrossi, 2018), (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018). There is also always support for disabled children. This way, the students are more likely to be mentally and physically well, and therefore be as productive as they can be when it comes to learning (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018). Finnish schools choose to use more resources towards creating a healthy environment and allowing more academic freedom at the same time.

Furthermore, there are only 9 compulsory school years only for all children, where at the age of 16 they are free to leave (Loveless, 2022), (Colagrossi, 2018), but they can equally stay and explore their options, which they almost always do, as the rate of students staying for their final years of high school and continuing their academic path as adult is over 90% (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018, p. 20-21). In fact, it is not only that all education is free - it is also that it is made perfectly accessible to all citizens and residents, no matter their age or their academic background, whether or not they chose to go to a vocation school rather than getting their university degree, as they get the same opportunities (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018, p. 20-21).

Teachers – as prestigious of a job as the one of a doctor

Many jobs are not viewed as highly as those of doctors or lawyers, and a teacher's job is one of them. To many, being a teacher seems like it would be too challenging, due to how many responsibilities are tied to the job, such as working with many children at the same time, some of which could prove to be not as respectful as they should be towards their educator, or when the well-known stereotype of a teacher not being compensated enough (financially or otherwise) proves to be true. It is no coincidence that there are oftentimes strikes by teachers, demanding to be heard and seen, as to receive the support that they deserve. Moreover, everyone has their own story of a teacher, who treated them poorly. Some instances can be quite extreme, as the role of a teacher is authoritative, which allows many to potentially misuse the power that their position allows them. It is discussed in this project work, how the student-teacher relationships can be tense or at the very least complicated. It might be why in Finland teachers are treated differently.

Becoming a teacher in Finland is a very sophisticated process. A master's degree in teaching is mandatory in order to attain this profession, and to be enrolled within the program is very difficult task (New Nordic Schools, 2022), Education Finland. (2020). Each year, approximately 8500 people apply in 8 different universities in Finland (2000 in the university of Helsinki alone), and only 10% of applicants are accepted (Sahlberg, 2015). These statistics are intense, though that is simply how highly the position of a teacher is held by Finnish people. What makes this process unique, however, is that one does not need to have been through the exact same academic path or to have the exact same characteristics, as well as academic merits. The opportunity to become a teacher is not gate-kept for university graduates only – it is available to anyone who is passionate about the profession, with their own special talents and background (Sahlberg, 2015), which is one of the reasons why the education in Finland can be so great – allowing a diversity of teachers, who love their profession and work hard to be as good as they can be for the children's development and growth, is what makes for a successful education system . Never replicated, and never one and the same. And as this occupation has so much prestige, teachers are ensured to be compensated well (Economic Research Institute, 2022), which is one amongst many perks of this job.

Analysis of the Finnish interviews:

The research on the Finnish educational system and practice gave us insights into their core principles behind education. The focus on the student's individual growth supported by the omittance of standardized test but rather a close student-teacher relationship especially during the first six years in classes of around 20 students. This personal growth is further supported by less pressure respectively more breaks during school-time but also less demand of the school in the life of the student which gives space for the student to find and develop own interests. In the upper-secondary level the students are granted a lot of freedom of choice in terms of what they want to study.[14] This fits well to the core principles of Finnish Education that the Finnish Ministry of Education calls "Trust & Responsibilty" (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency of Education 2018). Trust insofar as standardized controlling mechanisms are a sign of distrust towards the teachers and students and their capability to find a good way to learn together. Responsibility insofar as the relative few school-time and the bigger freedom of choice leaves more responsibility for their own learning and experiences on the students' side.
Having a look at the two interviews we will analyze how the Finnish teacher and educational expert think about educational practice and the student-teacher relation in Finland.

Interview 1 - Finnish Teacher Aila (2012)

On the informational side, the interview with Aila confirms many points we already discussed. "There's quite a lot of freedom for individual schools to organize their work and also quite a lot of freedom for individual teachers." (Aila in Hernández 2019) This supports the observation that trust and freedom is not just given to the students but also to the Finnish teachers. "We are responsible for the work we do, naturally, and it has to be in accordance with the national curriculum, but there is very little testing or control over our work." (Aila in Hernández, 2019) Regarding the student-teacher relationship, Aila states: "The student's role is much bigger and more active in class nowadays. Thinking and speaking your mind is encouraged more than it used to be! Also, the work in class involves more doing than just listening and/or writing. […] It's a huge challenge to keep everyone motivated (and busy) no matter what their skill level

[14] https://www.infofinland.fi/en/education/upper-secondary-school.

is!" Importance is given to the student in the classroom with an emphasis on the possibility of activity which reminds of Dewey. While one could expect an assumption of intrinsic motivation on the students' side the last sentence contradicts that thought. "To keep everyone motivated" suggests an activity on the teacher's side and a passivity on the side of the students. If the teacher does nothing, then the students will lose motivation and stop learning. This contradicts a belief in the students' will to learn which could be read in the first part of the quote. The last part of the interview puts this contradiction into perspective. While Aila is stating on one hand that her job as a teacher in Finland is "wonderful" and an "important one", she says as well: "In comprehensive school it's about so much more than just teaching your subject, it's also about bringing up these young people, which is something we should always keep in mind: we have a big role in their lives every day, and we are an example." (Aila in Hernández, 2019) More important than good PISA tests is: "being present for the students and treating them well WHILE teaching your subject." (Aila in Hernández, 2019) While the word "bringing up" suggests an importance and main activity by the teacher in this process of learning, she adds more information to it, as she reflects this importance in the sense that the teachers play "a big role in their lives every day" and are an "example" for them. It's not about dictating every step for the students but rather about "being present" for them. The teacher is viewed by her as a guiding person they can rely on and that treats them with respect.

Interview 2 - Finnish educational expert Pasi Sahlberg (2021)

"In Finnish classrooms today you can witness rather informal and friendly personal relationships between students and teachers. They communicate openly, trusting one another about issues related to teaching and learning but also about things that may go beyond them." (Sahlberg, 2021) This open and trusting communication even beyond matters of the curriculum supports the statement of Aila that a personal connection of being present for the students is built. The teaching practice of Finnish teachers is described by Sahlberg as: "Teach less, learn more." (Sahlberg, 2021) "Finland has chosen the way to keep the instruction time to children to a minimum and focus more on quality of teaching and learning during instruction time." (Sahlberg, 2021) This choice means a reduction of the importance of the teacher as an explicator and transmitter of knowledge. Earlier he writes: "Real benefit of not having external tests and relying on teachers in grading their students is that it allows schools and teachers to better focus on real learning." Finland tries to give teachers and students more time to focus on

the “quality of teaching and learning”, on “real learning” but what does this mean exactly? He writes: “In Finland school education focuses much more than elsewhere on supporting personal development, learning and growth of each and every individual student.” (Sahlberg, 2021) And that an attempt is made to “involve students more” and to link learning much more to the “student’s interests” (Sahlberg, 2021).

Looking through the eyes of Rancière, the choice of words in both interviews suggest that Finland has made a transition from the idea of the old explicative master towards an emancipatory educational practice. The will of the student is included much more in the educational process and the importance of and the role of the teacher as explicator is questioned and reduced. At the same time participating observations of the educational practice are needed to assess how Finnish teachers pursue their educational goals of “personal development, learning and growth of each and every individual student”. In recent times the idea of the teacher as “facilitator” was introduced increasingly together with the philosophy of “student-centered” approaches into education (Cornelissen, 2011, pp. 20-22). Cornelissen writes, that the idea of the facilitator critiques the old “stultifiying” master and his “conception of knowledge” (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 22) but that the idea of making sure that certain knowledge is transmitted is just replaced by the attempt to support the learning of certain “competences” that are deemed important in an interchange of the labor market and the individuality of the student (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 22). The facilitator still suggests to the student that the teacher is needed by the student to develop these competences.

A short classroom analysis

Design does not determine how people interact with objects and spaces, but it supports certain interactions and makes others more difficult.[15] It can privilege certain groups of people and support power dynamics.

The following analysis aims to highlight relevant aspects in the design of the classrooms in regard to the student-teacher relationship. It must be noted that a look at the design is never sufficient to understand what is happening as different uses of objects are always possible. Therefore the combination of the analysis with the classroom observation is important.

Finnish Classroom 1: https://finland.fi/life-society/building-an-even-better-finnish-school/.

[15] See for example the discussion of the idea of nudging in Thaler & Sunstein 2022.

Finnish Classroom 2: https://finland.fi/life-society/building-an-even-better-finnish-school/.

The two pictures of a Finnish classroom are taken from the official website of Finland - finland.fi. Placed in an article called “building an even better Finnish school” they are not to be seen as representative of Finnish classrooms but rather as examples of where Finland wants to head in terms of classroom design. This means that the French and Finnish classrooms we depict in this project cannot be properly compared. But they can still be used to highlight some cultural differences.

The first material detail that is salient are the black rubber bumpers on the chairs and tables in the Finnish classroom and their absence at the tables and chairs in the French case. In the former they are made to be moved around and to not damage the floor when doing it, while in the latter they are made to remain at their position. The second striking difference is the amount of space for the students and teacher to move around in the Finnish classroom and the lack of space especially for the students in the French school we went to. Together with the observation that it was M. Francois who moved freely in between and over the tables (and to some extent M. Paul) we can say that the design of the French classroom gives more freedom for moving to the teacher, centralizing, and making him superior in relation to the students. In general, the classroom design seems rather to confine the students and teacher behind their desks. At the same time M. Francois and his students showed that attentive, respectful, interesting, and fun

educational practice is always possible no matter the material circumstances and the classroom design.

Conclusion

The theoretical reflection of the student-teacher relationship with Rancière shows that the pedagogic relation is always political and that foundational assumptions about learning and the development of human beings and their intellectual capacity are embedded in it. With the description of the educational practice of the old "stultifiying" master and that of Jacotot, the attentive "emancipatory" master, Rancière shows the hidden authoritative power relation that is created in the former and the democratic power relation from will to will of two equals that is created in the latter.

Pursuing a mixed-method approach in the empirical research of French and Finnish educational practice in regard to the student-teacher relationship gave insights into a variety of cultural differences. There is the centrality of the teacher and the practice of explication in the French Case study and its design of an educational system with many hours in school and few freedom of choice for the student. But there is also M. Francois and his subject of philosophy which seems to be a special case in the French educational system. The relation of the curriculum to the philosophy teacher bears similarities with the general Finnish teacher-curriculum relation that grants a lot of freedom and therefore responsibility to the teacher. Trust and freedom are further trademarks in the Finnish student-teacher relation as the teachers and schools demand less attendance-time, proof of learning through examinations and space to move for the student. In a physical but also metaphysical sense when one thinks of the freedom of subject choice in the upper-secondary level. The Finnish educational practice includes many elements of the emancipatory practice Rancière describes but further research and observations would be needed to confirm that as their emphasis on learning skills can be viewed critically as still including the starting assumption of unequal capabilities that need to be eradicated in the process of education. But all these discussions of educational systems become relative when one is reminded of what matters: The student-teacher relationship. No educational system can guarantee that the actual educational practice of a teacher and his students is based on mutual interest in each other and the common will to learn with a *thing in common.* Let it be the French language, history or education.

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