

FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE LEARNER

Schooling for Tomorrow Finland

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From the Viewpoint of the Learner

1. Introduction

The Finnish National Board of Education FNBE took the lead initiative in launching the Finnish Schooling for Tomorrow (SfT) in winter 2006. The Finnish project was named Koulutus Tulevaisuuteen! (KT! = *Education into the Future!*) with a principal objective to strengthen future-oriented work at national level (with the FNBE as the key player), as well as at regional and municipal levels and in schools and educational institutions. The project has worked on establishing alternative scenarios for the education of the future with views about their respective impacts on learning outcomes as well as the profitability and functionality of educational services in different population and age groups and in various parts of the country.

More specifically, the aims of the project were set to:

- produce background and research data to support FNBE’s planning and decision-making as regards the development of education;
- increase visionary and innovative capacity at all levels of educational system;
- introduce key foresight methods into the development of education;
- and further introduce them into educational development projects;
- develop and strengthen futures education at different levels of the education system.

The FNBE nominated an expert board to supervise the project, chaired by the agency’s deputy director general.

As already suggested, the project operates at three inter-linked levels: national, regional and school levels (Figure 1). Co-operation with a variety of interest groups is encouraged at all levels, including NGOs, the media and international co-operation partners.

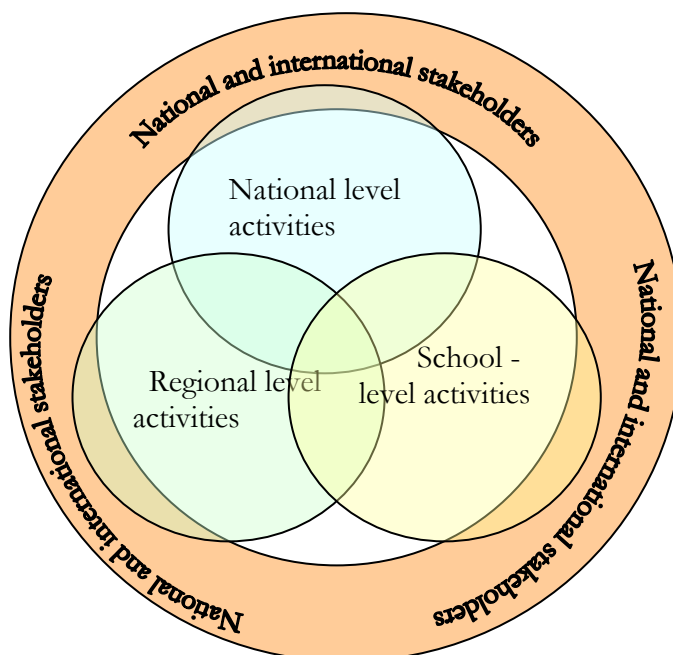


Figure 1. Operational levels of the *Education into the Future!* project

2. KT! in action - Promoting futures capacities at four levels

This interim report will concentrate on national level actions with some observations concerning the activities already started at other levels; schools, regions and international.

2.1. Activities for schools and educational institutions

KT! at school level was planned to support the implementation of futures pedagogy in schools and educational institutions with a specific futures pedagogy project where students and teachers would study together futures thinking, the use of futures tools and ways of taking responsibility for building up a sustainable the future.

Education providers and educational institutions participating in the project are planned to utilise the results and practices of existing future-oriented projects. Cooperation with teacher training department(s) is planned to be another cornerstone of the project.

In early 2006 contacts were taken to a small group of educators (head teachers and administrators) in Helsinki and in Espoo who had been working on futures pedagogy development since 2000 both nationally and in an international framework. The Helsinki-Espoo team was invited to work as motivators and key informants in the KT! launch forum in June 2006. Respectively, KT! took part in the final seminar of the futures pedagogy project in the autumn of 2006. During 2007, the Helsinki-Espoo team has prepared a teachers' manual concerning futures pedagogy, to be published by one of the major publishing companies in Finland in 2007-2008. The team (through their cities) have received financial support from the FNBE both for implementing the project as well as to draw up a final report, to be made available through FNBE channels to all schools in Finland, but also to be translated into English, to be available through the KT! and potentially the CERI SfT websites.

Again, with FNBE financial support, the Helsinki-Espoo team are invited to organise a series of futures capacity building seminars in order to disseminate the experiences and insights of the team to teachers, head teachers and administrators in Finland. The first seminar in a series of three or four events will be organised towards the end of 2007. The team's report will be used as a manual for the training, which is planned to be practical, hands-on oriented. The FNBE support coming from the so called internationalisation state grants, implies that there is a clear international element in the training which in this case could be linking the training with best practices in other SfT countries.

Purposefully, some of the stakeholders committed to the scenario process to be described below, were teachers, students, and teacher trainers. Thus, even though there were not many activities launched regarding futures pedagogy in 2006, it was possible to accommodate school level expertise and insights into the scenario work. More weight and more substantial outcomes concerning futures pedagogy are envisaged starting in the autumn of 2007.

2.2. Activities at regional and local levels

Educational decision-making in Finland is largely decentralised and municipalities as the education providers play a prominent role. Thus, except for issuing the National Core Curricula for basic and secondary education, the FNBE has little regulative role at local and regional levels.

One stream of the KT! project is targeted to enhance strategic capacity at regional and local levels. Several activities were planned to commence with. Firstly, in order to utilise existing capacity and good practices, the FNBE has started to map out experiences of future-oriented projects within regional/local level educational administrations in order to analyse and disseminate the main findings. Secondly, 4-6 regionally and demographically different cities (with surrounding areas) were invited to join KT!, willing to introduce futures tools in the planning of their own activities. Representatives from these cities were involved in the national scenario work, and the experience attained is available for regional level planning. Thirdly, new future-oriented projects are encouraged to be launched locally, in order to identify alternative ways of meeting future challenges.

Four regionally and demographically different municipalities were selected to represent regional level futures work: Helsinki (the capital, southern Finland), Oulu (a rapidly expanding “high-tech” city, northern Finland), Mikkeli (a rural medium-sized city, eastern Finland), Lovisa (a Swedish speaking rural smalltown, south-eastern Finland). Each of the areas represented have some unique strengths and challenges. Helsinki has been very active in futures thinking – several future-oriented projects are ongoing at several levels of the city’s educational organisation. It will also, to suggest a different attribute, absorb most of the immigrants that are foreseen to settle down in Finland in the near future. Oulu has a long history of combining technological innovations and education. It is the largest and most rapidly growing city in northern Finland. Mikkeli is the centre of one of the typical rural regions in Finland with a strong downward trend in demographics as not only are there less babies born but there is also an exodus towards bigger cities. Mikkeli has been active in its anticipatory planning as well as developing new strategies to alter and re-structure the thinking and practices to face the times to come. Lovisa has similar demographic challenges as Mikkeli with the civil servants and teachers signalling a deep interest in finding new tools for futures thinking.

KT! has reached out to the four cities in order to compile a “What works?” type of publication based on their existing futures oriented projects. Starting in 2007, KT! plans to work on the publication in two phases: first, by collecting information/reports of closed projects and second, the information of ongoing or new projects. A first selection of “What works in Finnish futures projects” is planned to be ready for print in spring-summer 2008.

2.3 Activities at international level

Except for the crucial fact that the Finnish project KT! has been originated and is steered through negotiations with and seminars organised by OECD CERI Schooling for Tomorrow, it has been planned to link KT! with other Nordic SfT projects and the FNBE’s sister agencies with the common goal of developing the future learning environment.

The Nordic co-operation was launched during 2006 with a first meeting in Helsinki by Finnish, Norwegian and OECD CERI representation. A next meeting was organised by the Swedish SfT project heads in Stockholm in March 2007, with Finnish and OECD CERI representation. A practical orientation was agreed on including learning from each other’s experiences and providing expert opinions where needed. A local level liaison was initiated leading to a meeting in Lovisa, Finland two months later, in order to link the Finnish regional level activity in Lovisa with that in Borås, Sweden. The Lovisa meeting again had Finnish, Swedish and OECD CERI participation. A further, more comprehensively Nordic meeting is envisaged to be arranged in Norway towards the end of 2007.

2.4 Activities at national level

At national level, the main aim has been to support decision-making and development work through identification of emerging challenges and possible futures for the Finnish education system as well as ways to respond to the challenges. The FNBE planned to organise a capacity building programme with lectures and scenario workshops to inspire work at national and further levels. Representatives of students and other young people have been involved in the national level activities supported by student associations and national participatory projects. New channels and forums have been looked for in order to accommodate children's and young people's opinions about the future.

In 2006, KT! coordinators facilitated 18 different capacity building processes throughout the country as key note speakers, lecturers and/or organisers. No less than 1160 people representing different stakeholder groups were attached to these activities.

The main national activity was a substantial **scenario process (SP)**. It will be reported in detail below in order to illustrate a complex national level procedure for future oriented strategic planning and capacity building. The method chosen by the FNBE was "Critical actions scenarios" which was suggested by the FNBE's methodological adviser in the process, Futures Research Center, Turku. The method combined the two traditional approaches to scenario processes, namely, normative SP starting from the "Futures" (on the basis of images of the futures – how did we get there?) and, explorative SP, starting from the present (this is the world – if everything continues as it is, what will be our possible futures?). The methodological standpoint is different from that of the OECD SfT scenarios, which are more like "images of the future" – in the KT! approach the focus is not only in obtaining preferred images of the future but in elaborating plausible paths to reach there.

Pre-scenario work

The SP was launched in June 2006 with a national seminar – **Futures forum of Education** – hosted by the FNBE, SYVE (Finnish network for comprehensive schools), and OPEKO (National Centre for Professional Development in Education). The aim of the seminar was to open the discussion for a futures debate and to launch the Finnish SfT project. Some one hundred participants were invited to participate, representing a wide variety of stakeholders, such as national, regional and local authorities, school leaders and teachers, universities as well as the social partners. The first day was organised with key note presentations from OECD CERI, Australia and New Zealand as well as Finnish key notes from the involved regions and the FNBE. The themes included complexity thinking, futures challenges in the Finnish context as well as megatrends and scenarios for schooling. Five work shops were organised to discuss the futures of primary, lower secondary, general and vocational upper secondary as well as adult education.

A second national capacity building session was organised to train chairs and rapporteurs for the planned SP workshops. This one-day session was called **Education for Driving Force Agent** and it was open also for all interested officials of the FNBE. Planned and chaired by the methodological adviser, the session included both theoretical and practical guidance to look for emerging drivers in education.

Before the first actual SP workshop, there was a process where the main goals or unconditional aims set for Finnish education in the future were developed. The key idea was to select a number of "Critical Actions Scenarios", a restricted amount of basic goals of education which, at the national level, would be crucial to achieve regardless of differences in any possible scenarios of the future in general.

The goals were elaborated by using a modified Delphi technique with two panels, the first one being the expert board that had been nominated to supervise the KT! project and the second one was formed of a number of key stakeholders. The Delphi panels were organised and run by the KT! project coordinator.

To facilitate the work of the panels, the methodological adviser had collected a number of futures visions or objectives expressed by the Ministry of Education, the FNBE, and the Confederation of Finnish Industries, for example. Arguments were given for all the objectives. The panel members were then asked to study individually the list of the given objectives and to reduce their number into 8-10 main goals. Following the Delphi technique, the project coordinator edited the suggested lists and sent them back to the panel members for a second listing. However, no changes appeared in the second round – probably due to a tight answering schedule. This phase was closed with a committee-type of decision with ten goals to be spread out for a larger group of stakeholders.

At the second phase several stakeholders were contacted and invited into the scenario process. The stakeholders represented were

- Board of FNBE (n = 8)
- Directors and heads of units at FNBE (n = 27)
- Selected experts from different units of FNBE (n = 23)
- Finnish Parliament: the Education and Culture Committee, and the Committee for the Future (n = 2)
- Directors of the Ministry of Education (n = 8) and representatives from other relevant ministries (Ministries of the Environment; of the Interior; of Labour; of Social Affairs and Health, n = 4)
- National welfare and research organisations (n = 9)
- Heads and experts of education departments of selected municipalities (n = 29)
- Teachers' unions (n = 6) and other social partner organisations (n = 5)
- Organisations and stakeholder groups for sustainable development (n = 40)
- Regional authorities (n = 5, one for each province)
- Universities, including teacher training units (n = 11)
- Futures experts (n = 5)
- Youth and student organisations, parental organisations (n = 10)
- "Youth council" members from different municipalities (n = 25). Youth councils did not participate in the preliminary SP work, but they formed an important stakeholder group in later workshops.

The preliminary task for the stakeholders was to alter or comment the list of ten goals. The participants were asked to add some more important goals, but not to exceed the given number of ten. They were also asked to give grounds for any alterations they wished to suggest to the list. Furthermore, they were asked to rank the goals on the basis of their importance. Of the 183 individuals who were e-mailed this Delphi task, only 34 suggested some alterations. Most feedback was given just to re-shape or clarify the original goals. The comments were analysed (qualitatively and quantitatively) and a modified list of goals was sent back to the panelists for further comments. This time there was no further feedback.

With the help of the Delphi rounds, the KT! steering group finally modified and reduced the ten original goals into four main categories which will be regarded as the goals to be accomplished in the Finnish education system regardless the challenges of different possible scenarios:

- I Equity and high quality of education,
- II Support to healthy growth and well-being,
- III Life-long and life-wide learning as well as opportunities of learning as the overarching idea of schooling, and
- IV Futures learning /know-how & securing the international competitiveness of the society.

At the third phase of the SP, the panelists were sent a list of suggested means to accomplish the goals (attributes) with possible alternatives (levels). The methodological adviser provided the panelists with a list of 20 critical actions, means, and sub-goals to achieve the goals.

	Conservative A	... something between B	... C	Liberal or Radical D
Combining work with education	Work and education are kept separate	Studies can include some working-life experience. The world of work will be entered only after completion of studies.	Work and education are combined during upper secondary education (academically or vocationally oriented training)	Work and education are combined during lower secondary education (7 th to 9 th grade)
Preferred form of education	Face-to-face teaching in a fixed classroom		Students are free to change school – and compare which kind of teaching-learning suits them best	Distance learning, learning on-the-net (no fixed classrooms; no face-to-face contacts necessary)
...

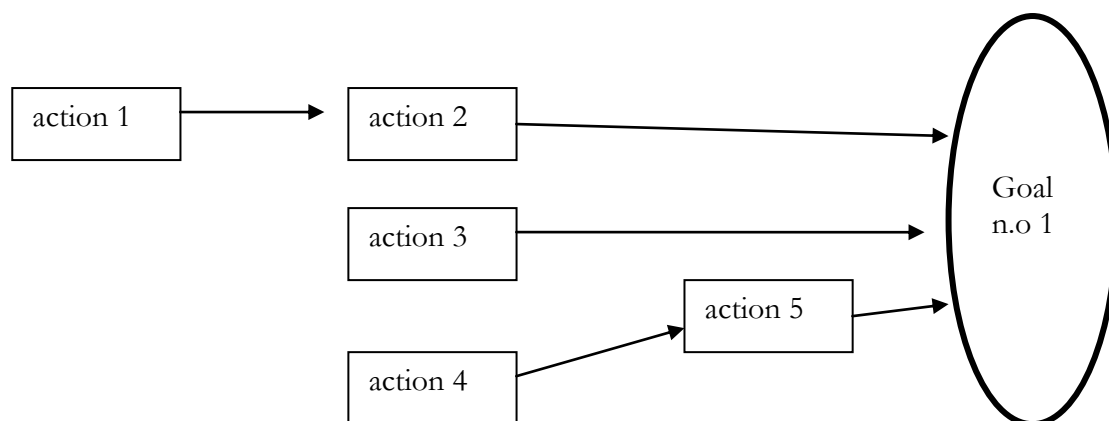
Again, the list of attributes was modified on the basis of feedback from the panelists. After the first round there were 31 critical actions for the first scenario workshop – thus eleven possible actions were added to the preliminary list. Again, there were no comments on the list on the second Delphi round.

Scenario workshops

The scenario workshop process was planned to be run in three seminars. The stakeholders mentioned above were committed to work all through the process. The youth forum was piloted as a model – thus young people were given their own space and possibilities to create new ways of communicating with the other stakeholders.

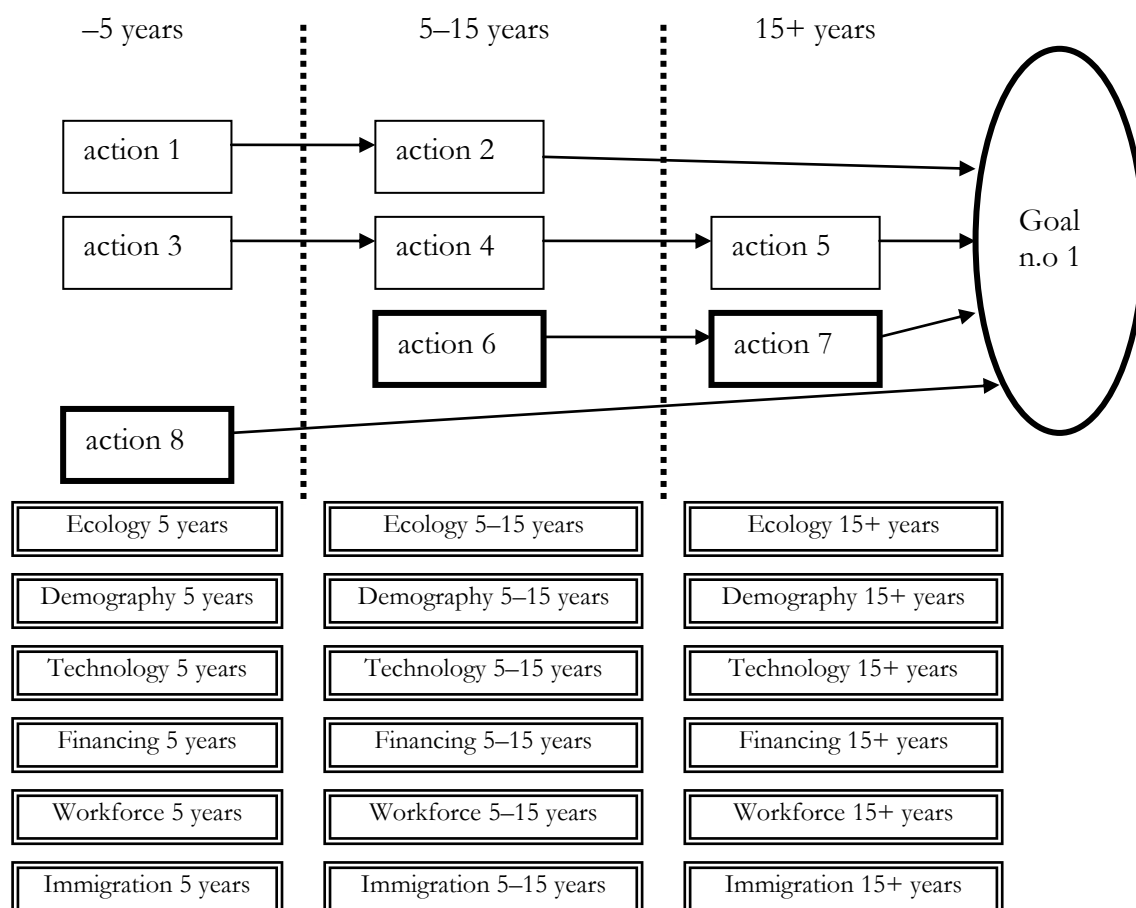
Except for the youth forum members, the participants (100 – 120) attended the workshops without any fees, per diems or travel expenses paid. It is worth noting that some participants came from several hundreds of kilometers away, paying for flights and hotel accommodation just in order to be able to join the futures work.

The first workshop (29.11.2006) was a full-day seminar with international and national key-note speakers with opening words from the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Education and the director general of the FNBE. Keynote presentations were given by prominent Finnish and OECD CERI experts. The seminar divided into workshops to discuss and finalise the educational goals as well as to settle the means to reach the goals, in order to produce a rough “road map” to show which actions would lead to the educational goals in question:



The second workshop (18.12.2006) was run with the idea to combine two different groups of stakeholders to discuss and find common ways to achieve a certain educational goal. Another aim was to draw up a timetable for the critical actions to achieve the educational goal – what should be done within 5 years, within 5–15 and 15+ years. To facilitate the groups’ work, a first sketch for the timetable was produced by the methodological adviser and the project coordinator.

To further facilitate the predictions and scheduling, some more or less fictitious foresights were presented within six areas of life: ecology, demography, technology, financing, workforce, and immigration. The themes were selected as they provided fairly plausible – though not necessarily true in every area – predictions to illustrate what kind of futures might emerge within 5 years, within 5–15 and 15+ years:



The groups were not able to finish their work during the set time as the new forms of grouping took more time than was expected – discussions started all over again in several groups. The groups completed their tasks by using closed shared work spaces (platforms) and emails, as they had done in the previous rounds. The trained chairs and rapporteurs were responsible for managing the groups' work as before.

Before the third and last seminar several processes were completed by the methodological adviser. Firstly, all the four “roadmaps” produced by the groups were collated into one draft of critical actions and goals. Secondly, two sets of analysis of the roadmaps were carried out; a **synergy analysis** was used to examine which actions were mentioned in more than one group. If mentioned several times, the action would be preferable as it might have positive consequences to reach several different educational goals. Thirdly, **conflict analysis** was used to examine which actions might have negative impacts regarding other actions. A chosen action when implemented, could affect positively to achieving Goal 1 but simultaneously, it could stop Goal 2 from being achieved. No conflicting actions were found, however – this may be due to the moderate amount of new, innovative actions that had actually emerged in the discussion rounds. Fourthly, a small qualitative analysis was made to group the actions into several (8) classes or clusters.

In addition to the analyses mentioned above, the KT! expert board met to finalise the wordings of the clusters as well as the scheduled actions. The proposed actions were then classified into eight (8) categories on another logical basis, consisting of categories of action regarding Teachers (and learners), National (Parliamentary) level, Local (Municipality) level, Evaluation and monitoring, Financing, Leadership, Learning environment, and Curriculum development. A summary of the scenarios is in Appendix 1. This paper was called “scenarios for critical actions”, later called scenarios though they are not scenarios in an ordinary sense as discussed earlier.

The third SP workshop was again a full-day event with top presentations by, for example the spokesman of the Finnish parliament and the former Danish minister of education gave a presentation. A special feature was a high-level panel representing Finland's leading political parties who discussed the futures of education.

The program focussed again on workshops this time in order to challenge what was already suggested in the scenarios. The workshops represented six specific interest groups, those of 1) learners, 2) teachers, 3) education providers and 4) politicians on one hand, and on the other hand such requirements as could be envisaged to be posed by 5) the welfare state or, the needs set by 6) a sustainable development. The chairs for each of the workgroups were selected from outside the FNBE and contacted well in advance in order to ask them to prepare a draft for a statement which was then debated in the workgroup. A common statement was then modified by each group to be shared in the plenum and eventually for the further use of the FNBE.

Critical comments about the process

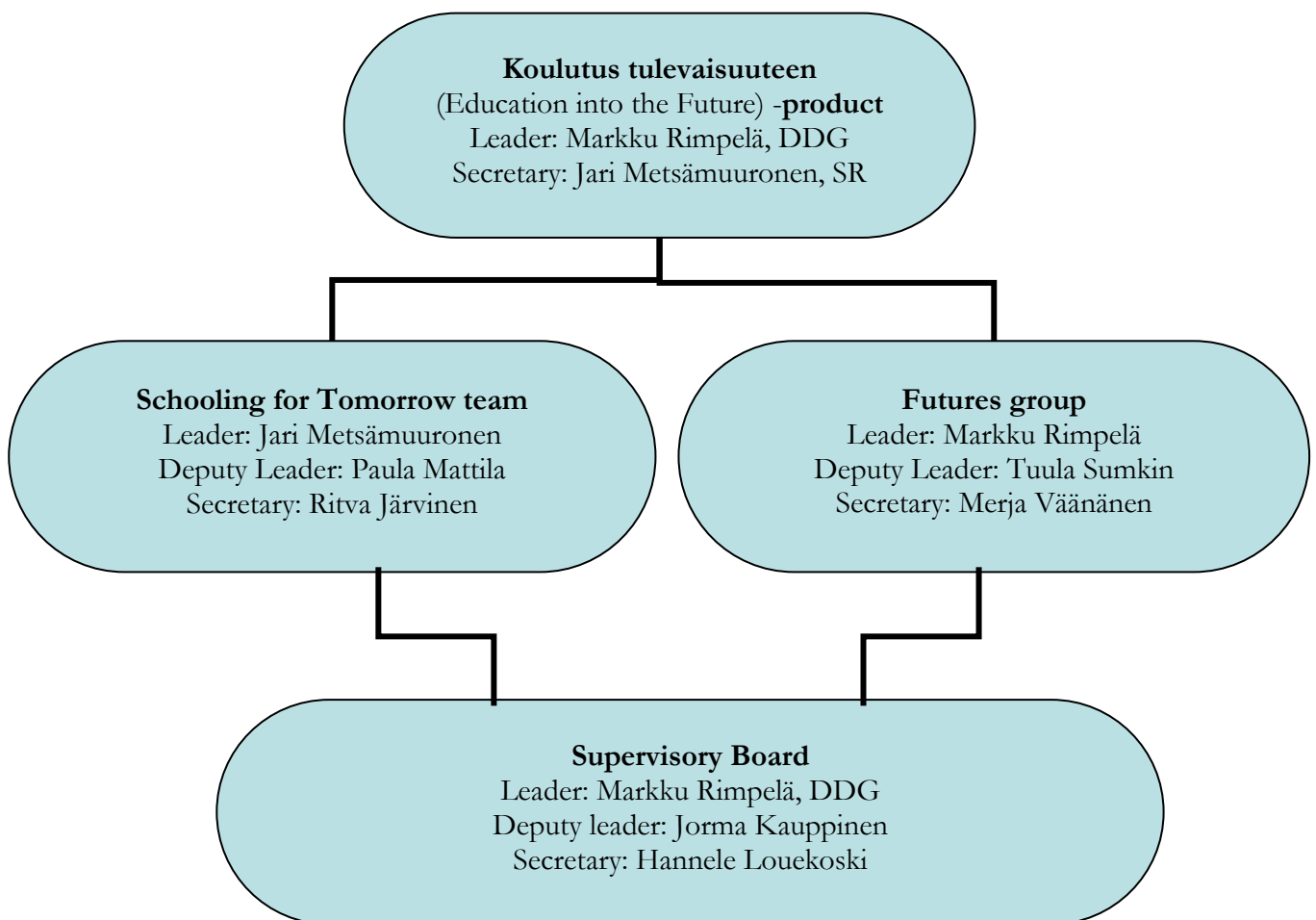
The outcome of the scenario work met with a number of critical comments at the FNBE. Most of the ideas taken into the scenarios came from stakeholders outside the agency; however, some of the ideas for actions were so radical that the experts in FNBE were not willing to keep them in the list (appendix 1). On the other hand the experts who participated in the process were realistic enough to recognise that most of the ideas for the actions were either not feasible or they were not within the sphere of educational decision making. There were also differences between the understanding of certain terms and level of discussion/discourse – thus the interpretation of some statements is not unambiguous. Another critical notion came from the youth forum: some younger panelists were disappointed as in

some of the groups they felt their ideas were more or less neglected. However, in some groups their ideas were gladly taken into account. When comparing (by visiting) the workgroups it was evident that there were differences in how people voiced themselves in the scenario process. Some were quite traditional or cautious whereas some were flexible and innovative. A consensus seeking mentality seemed to prevail.

3. What happened after scenario workshops

The scenario process is still going on at the FNBE under the chairmanship of the Deputy Director General, who took KT! as his flagship project. Future orientation is now officially regarded as one of the main challenges or tasks of the agency. The expert board runs now in two parallel lines of futures work: the SfT project which is more closely linked with the OECD CERI cooperation, and a newly formed *Futures group* which is to continue the work of the scenario process. The latter will get a more focal role when the SfT project itself comes to its end sometime during 2008.

A new supervisory board was established to supervise the KT! and Futures group's work. This group consists of future oriented persons from within the FNBE as well as such key stakeholder groups outside the agency as mentioned earlier.



APPENDIX 1. CRITICAL ACTION SCENARIOS

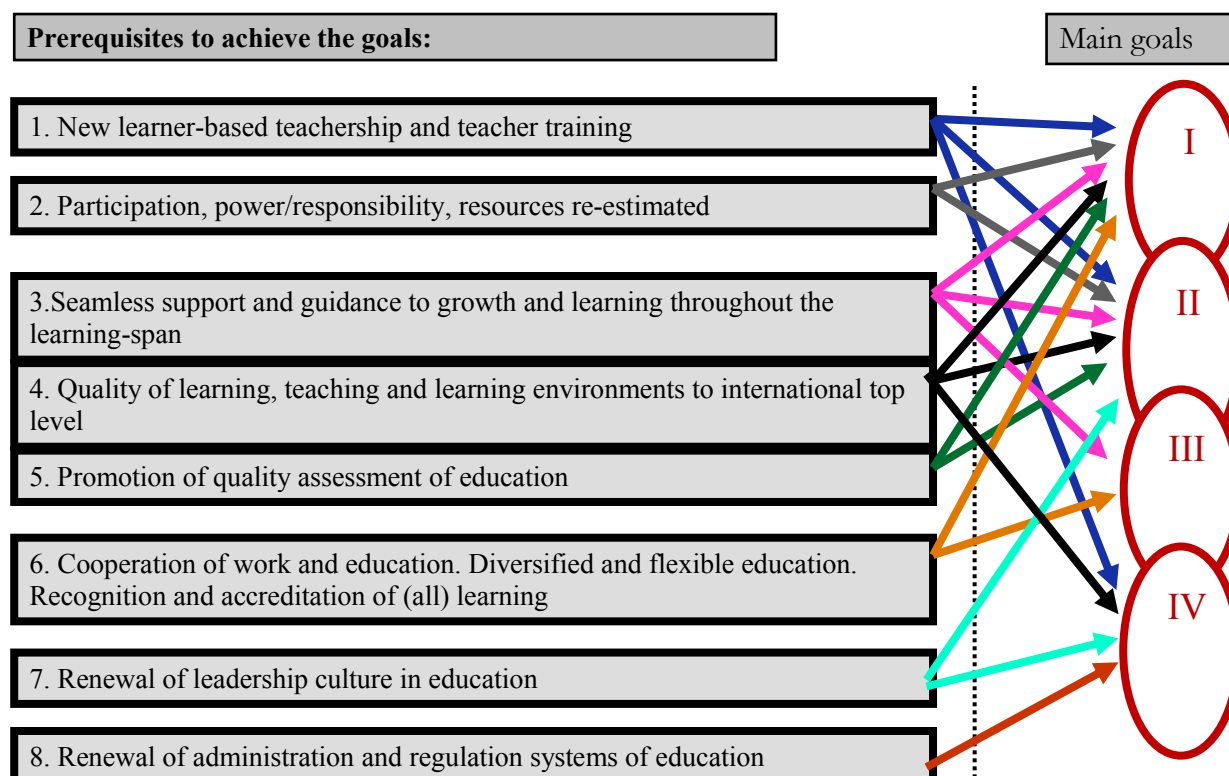
Main goals:

I = Equity and high quality of education

II = Support to healthy growth and well-being

III = Life-long and life-wide learning as well as opportunities of learning as the overarching idea of schooling

IV = Futures learning /know-how & securing the international competitiveness of the society



The arrows indicate the main goal supposed to be affected when carrying out the cluster of actions. Scheduled activities suggested by the panellists would be as follows.

In 5 years:

Regarding teachers (and learners)

- in teacher training, focus from subject teaching to support of learners' growth processes
- systems of guidance and counselling recognised and improved.
- enhanced guidance training to teachers, students, working life partners.
- peer counselling skills taught from basic school on
- holistic view of man → harmonised teaching; more opportunities to self-expression and creativity; equal status of academic, arts and practical subjects.
- More support to learners' identity building in a multi-cultural, rapidly changing world.
- learning cultures renewed by setting the learners in focus.
- recognition of emotional and social processes as strong drivers of learning.
- on-the-job learning developed at all levels of education.
- Systematic reform of teachers' salaries.

At national (parliamentary) level:

- A ministry for children and youth affairs and a national forum for children and youth.
- State responsibilities vis-a-vis municipalities to be re-estimated.
- Wide societal participation in the development of an equitable education system.
- National rules and criteria for quality management.
- National plan of school leadership training.
- National outlines for local evaluation.

At local (municipality) level:

- Children and youth councils in all municipalities.
- Cooperation of different stakeholders – parents, education, youth affairs, social services – shared expertise as the starting point of the development of education.

Evaluation and monitoring

- Objectivity of evaluation to be increased.
- Continuous assessment of effectivity/efficiency in all decision making
- Better comparative data for the decision making of providers of education
- Monitoring: Local best practices to support national level development.
- Practical effective models and tools for local level self-evaluation.

Financing

- More equality to allocation of resources.
- Check-up of per capita state subsidies.
- Economical steering: adequate resources for education – education is an investment in the future.

Leadership

- In a leadership reform, first step will be to define which way to develop leadership and related objectives.
- Joint goals, joint interests, high motivation, positive outlook, culture of dialogue.
- A learning organisation calls for a leadership training with HR and change management as focal points.

Learning environment

- learning environments to openly support a sustainable and creative way of life.
- Optimal use of new technologies.
- Networking, partnerships, stakeholders.

Curriculum development

- Curriculum as a quality handbook
- Core competences in focus (learning to learn, thinking skills, communication, futures thinking)
- Curriculum as a continuum from early school years to higher education.

In 5-15 years:**Regarding teachers (and learners)**

- Teaching and learning cultures fully support innovative learning.
- Guidance and counselling skills belong to all. There are resources for personalised learning
- The Finnish learning path is the top standard of European learning.
- On-the-job learning is part and parcel of all qualifications.

At national (parliamentary) level:

- In secondary level education equality and mutual appreciation prevail
- High quality education is accessible to all.
- Finland is our learning centre.
- Finnish qualifications are coveted top diplomas globally.
- Clear division of labour between Ministries of Education and Labour.

At local (municipality) level:

- Genuine influence and democracy through empowerment of student bodies.

Evaluation and monitoring

- New practical models and tools of evaluation. Comprehensive development of the evaluation system through utilisation of feedback from systems evaluations etc.
- National and local evaluation are sustained by a strong steering system of learning

Leadership

- The learning field is managed by a strong visionary approach.
- The holistic leadership prevails with capabilities to manage processes of giving in.
- Marketing one's own school is part of the leadership.

The learning environment

- Some schools are really large. The freedom of choice is bigger for the learner.
- The functional structures of schools have been reorganised in order to add flexibility.

Curriculum development

- New core curricula have been passed.

In 15+ years

Regarding teachers (and learners)

- Adult students trained to peer counsellors.
- Alumni are used widely in careers counselling.
- Tailored support services in all transition stages of education.
- Elderly people are mentors to young students
- All segments of talent are recognised and fully used to support learning.

At national (parliamentary) level:

- Non-formal learning is maximally recognised within the national system.
- New job qualifications are created based on recognised needs at the job market.
- Social partners have agreed on terms of combining work and study for most.
- Citizen salary in some form.

The learning environment

- Every student has up-to-date facilities and skills for virtual learning.

Curriculum development

- A strong counselling system to support learning is in place.
- Evaluation and development of core curricula.

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