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### The Finnish Journal of Education

Marjanen, Jukka. 2015. **The commensurability problem of matriculation examination grades and the method of averaged standardised sum scores as its possible solution.** *The Finnish Journal of Education* 46 (4), 317–333.

The Finnish matriculation examination board has decided to adopt a new grading method based on Averaged Standardised Sum Scores. The use of this method is valid only if the ability structure affecting students' success in different examinations is adequately unidimensional. This article examines whether this is true in the Finnish case, that is, whether the unidimensionality assumption is met. The need for the new method stems from the problem of commensurability of grades achieved in different subjects' examinations. In the old grading system the best performances in each subject were awarded the same grade regardless of the general academic ability of the students participating in each examination. The degree of grade incommensurability across different examinations therefore depended on the magnitude of performance differences between the student populations concerned. In this study I examine whether some examinations have attracted more competent students than others, that is, whether the change of grading system is truly called for. The data used in the analysis consists of the course and matriculation examination grades of 4,155 students from 34 randomly selected upper secondary schools. The data was analysed using structural equation modelling, logistic regression and one sample t-tests. The results show that there were substantial differences in the general academic ability of students participating in different subjects' matriculation examinations. In general, science and language oriented subjects attracted more able students than other examinations. The results also indicate that the ability structure affecting student performance was not strictly unidimensional. Nevertheless, a strong general factor, which correlated strongly with success in all study subjects, was found.

*Descriptors:* matriculation examination, grades, grading, commensurability, standardisation

Kosunen, Sonja – Haltia, Nina – Jokila, Suvi. 2015. **Preparatory courses and equity in university admission.** *The Finnish Journal of Education* 46 (4), 334–348.

Competition over study places in universities is tough and many applicants take a preparatory course when preparing for the entrance examination. This study focuses on preparatory courses (n=233) and the preparatory course market in terms of costs and required investment of time from the applicants. The courses of medicine, economics, law and educational sciences were analysed. The results show that the provision and accessibility of these courses vary across disciplines. The longest and also most expensive courses were provided in medicine whereas the relatively least expensive courses were offered in educational sciences. The differences in costs across disciplines become part of the discussion around equitable chances of enrolling to different fields of study. We ponder the position of preparatory courses in student admission to university: is there a social pre-selection to preparatory courses prior to meritocratic selection to universities, and how does it link with the discussion of equity in higher education?

*Descriptors:* preparatory courses, cost, university, equity, justice

**Kiiskilä, Kati – Tuomaala, Sanna – Aunola, Kaisa – Lerkkanen, Marja-Kristiina – Kiuru, Noona.** 2015. Parenting styles and school-related guidance practices: Connections to children's school engagement. *The Finnish Journal of Education* 46 (4), 349–363.

The aim of this study was to investigate the connections between parenting styles, mothers' practices for school-related guidance and children's school engagement. The study is part of the broader Alkuportaati 2 follow-up study. The participants were 509 sixth-graders and their mothers (n = 509). The mothers completed a questionnaire concerning their parenting styles and school-related guidance practices. Children filled in a questionnaire about their school engagement. The results showed that with regard to parenting styles, particularly maternal warmth was related to children's higher school engagement. As for the guidance practices, support for children's autonomy for their homework, especially when accompanied with a low level of behavioural control, was connected to children's higher school engagement. The results suggest that by supporting appropriate school-related guidance practices at home, it might be possible to increase children's school engagement. Higher school engagement, in turn, may promote positive attitudes towards education and eventually prevent dropout and social exclusion.

*Descriptors:* parenting styles, school-related parenting practices, guidance at home, school engagement

**Tainio, Liisa – Siponmaa, Emilia.** 2015. Therapy dog doesn't criticise. Therapy dog, child and adults as participants in a reading event. *The Finnish Journal of Education* 46 (4), 364–378.

The reading literacy results of Finnish children have been deteriorating in recent years. According to socio-cultural approaches, reading motivation can be strengthened by sharing the reading event with others, and by supporting the reader. Our empirical data consists of video recorded events where children read aloud to a therapy dog. The method of research is conversation analysis. We analyse the overall structure of the reading event as well as the development of the participation framework, particularly from the point of view of the dog and the reader. By analysing references to the dog we found out that the children first talk only about the dog, but later on to the dog, and finally they verbally interpret the dog's feelings. During these literacy activities, the children get positive experiences and learn new literacy practices, including talking critically about texts and selecting material from the point of view of the recipient.

*Descriptors:* therapy dog, reading event, reading literacy skills, interaction, participation framework, conversation analysis