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Well, all in all, at least in Finland, the level of what my generation considers general knowledge or general culture is going down. Of course, part of it depends on changing parameters and the changing world. There is, however, a clear problem both in STEM and humanities, especially languages, which used to be the strong thing at Finnish schools, as they are taught now in Finland. And we at the university, we have a big problem in not getting enough candidates to apply for the entrance exam because we have had numerous clauses in humanities ever since the 1960s. So we take about 50 students per year. Struggle to get enough candidates, let alone good candidates. And so the school, which has been continuously reformed in the sense of giving much more freedom of choice and flexibility to students, is now in a kind of crisis, despite our past very good reputation in the PISA study.

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So, while it was a huge leap to leave school and enter university, even in the 1970s, I had my A-levels in 1977 and then went to the university. The gap between these two institutions, school and university, is even larger now and it is not likely to get more reduced. And despite all the excessive, I would say, freedom of choice at school, that school children or their parents, our future students, should be quite familiar with after secondary school. The students we get, they need much more guiding than earlier, and why not?

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We are here for that, and we've been working very hard for decades. However, at some point, a student has to assume their responsibilities, because we will not always be there as mentors later in life. Another problem which has been developing over the past 10, 15 years is a strange underachieving mentality with students. It's getting deplorably more common. Maybe it's a bad habit learnt at school because, I mean, as soon as French gets difficult, that is after one semester at school, then you just leave it because there's too much grammar, you don't want to continue. Whereas in the school system where I grew up you chose your subjects and then you had to take them to the bitter end, that is the A-levels. So they have a lot of freedom of choice but they need much more guiding. And of course you really learn completely new things and apply that knowledge is very, very demanding.

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And of course, you have those who are very motivated and very brilliant. They hardly need any kind of guiding or directing. They are ready to put in all the work needed because they are authentically interested in learning, but then you have many, many students who are simply not prepared to work hard enough to reach the goals. And so this might also be tied up to the problem of burnout hitting quite a few school children and university students as well. So students will probably go on needing a lot of support, even psychological support, which we are already providing. We have special counsellors for students who feel they are not up to scratch in university life.

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