

# The finnish appreciation of education

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The Finnish Appreciation of Education How is it that Finland, a country that mandates its young students have at least 15 minutes of recess between each class (Doyle), can have one of the highest performing educational systems in the world? At a glance, the question seems counterintuitive.

The traditional belief is that success is achieved solely through hard work, and that students who succeed in school spend much more time in a strict, classroom environment than other students. The reality of Finland's situation is quite the contrary. Schools in Finland give their students lots of free time, and assign minimal amounts of homework until high school (Doyle). So how is it that Finland consistently performs so well? Through careful analysis, it is easy to see that Finland's success derives how highly they regard quality schooling. Their appreciation of education is shown through treatment of teachers, equal education throughout the country, and modern "phenomenon" based methods of teaching. Though many admire the Finns' modern day system of education, the country's schools weren't always this way.

The improvements to their system came in 1963, when Parliament enforced reforms to national education in hopes of repairing their economy that had been damaged by war (Hancock). Since then, Finnish students have performed remarkably high in international tests such as the PISA. In the year 2000, 15 year old Finnish youths led the world in reading. In 2003, they led the world in math, then science in 2006. In 2009, they were second in science, third in reading, and sixth in math (Hancock).

These scores are truly impressive considering how liberal schools are in Finland. There are multiple reasons explaining how the nation's children perform so well; the reliability of their teachers being one of them. One of the greatest traits that separates the Finns from the rest of the world is their behavior towards teachers. Unlike other nations where educators are undervalued and seen as an average profession, the teachers in Finland are greatly appreciated. According to Pasi Sahlberg, an expert of education in Finland: "When we compare teachers to other professions in society, we compare them to lawyers or doctors or architects" (Tung). In fact, after the education reforms in Finland were enforced, the profession of teaching was granted such a high social status that many applied to become teachers, not due to an enticing salary, but because of the reputation teachers earned (Hancock).

Since the Finns hold teachers to such a high regard, students coming out of high school see teaching as a valid career path: one that would set them on par with elite jobs such as lawyers and doctors. While the salary of Finnish teachers isn't extraordinarily high, the pay isn't the factor that attracts students to the field, but rather the social status that teachers receive is. Because of the Finnish perspective towards teaching, there are an abundance of students applying to become teachers. To create a school system that performs as consistently as Finland's does, it takes more than just a reliable quantity of teachers. In order for the quality of instruction from their large pool of teachers to be as good as it is today, Finland has decreed several intense requirements towards becoming a teacher.

To become an educator in Finland, it's required that the prospective teacher must earn a master's degree in education (Hancock). This education is not easily obtained, as only 1 in 10 students applying for teacher education programs are accepted (Jackson). According to Sahlberg: "It's harder to get into primary school education than a medical program" (Tung). In Finland, the requirements for being a teacher are so high, that it is almost ensured that teachers are qualified to be in their position. The abundance of teachers combined with the extensive training they undergo means that Finland has an immensely large pool of highly-trained educators teaching the youth of the country. With such a reliable source of instructors, the nation has developed a system of equally distributing the teachers to every school in the country, as well.

The Finnish emphasis on equality in education is high. Logically, they want to ensure that every child who could have the potential of becoming successful, is granted the opportunity to do so. To achieve this objective, the Finns have devised a formula for dispersing resources and money to every school in a fair manner (Strauss). In addition, every school in Finland is run by the "same pool of university-trained educators." The result of this is that children receive equal education opportunities no matter where they are. Since every school receives fair funding and highly-trained teachers, the socioeconomic status of students does not affect the opportunities they receive from education.

The result of this is that Finland has one of the lowest gaps between weaker students and stronger students, according to a study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Hancock). What's more is that <https://assignbuster.com/the-finnish-appreciation-of-education/>

college in Finland is tuition free, meaning no student is restricted from higher education due to their family's wealth (Jackson). The Finnish virtue of equality in education is one of the defining factors to their success.

According to Pasi Sahlberg, the Finnish perspective on equality was born when Parliament was planning on entirely reforming the educational system. "It was simply the idea that every child would have a very good public school.

If we want to be competitive, we need to educate everybody. It all came out of a need to survive" (Hancock). When the Finnish government reformed national education to repair their economy, they knew that their best option was to give equal education to a large demography of their students. What this resulted in was a system with minimal detriments to a child's education because of their economic background. Siilitie, a low-income neighborhood in Helsinki is a good example of the equality in Finland's schools.

Over half of the 200 students there possess some form of learning disability, yet the school has its students behaving well and learning properly (Hancock). The order in the school is mostly due to the fact that "[t]he school receives 47, 000 euros a year in positive discrimination money to hire aides and special education teachers... There is one teacher (or assistant) for every seven students" (Hancock). The funding the school receives helps ensure that the students there receive education on par with schools in more fortunate areas. In fact, when LynNell Hancock, a reporter for Smithsonian Magazine ventured to the school, she discovered students outside of the school enthusiastically participating in an outdoor math activity. The activity

involved students being instructed to carry out various math tasks with “math cards” that the teacher, Aleksi Gustafsson had made (Hancock).

According to Gustafsson, she had been inspired to create this activity after attending a free-teacher’s workshop (Hancock). The equality in Finland’s schools leads to the children receiving the same-high quality and unique education taught in Finland, maximizing the demography of well-educated students. The neighborhood of Siilitie is a good embodiment of how Finnish schools have thus far been explained. The school receives equal funding and a large quantity of well-trained teachers to account for the amount of students with learning impediments. One contributing factor to the Finns’ success that hasn’t been specified yet is how important meaningful lessons are for the Finns. Teachers in Finland spend much less time in class than teachers in the United States and more time planning their lessons (Jackson).

In addition, Finnish teachers do not follow specific regulations, but rather a set of national guidelines (Hancock) and are encouraged to adapt and use new methods of teaching based on their students’ needs (Doyle). Lastly, most teachers in Finland stick with the same group of students for several years to get to know them properly (Hancock). Since the teachers in Finland spend multiple years getting to know their students, they attain deep understandings of their students’ needs. Combined with the fact that teachers are encouraged to use creative thinking to adapt their lessons based on their students, it creates a situation as seen in Siilitie, where a teacher who knew her students learned best from interactive activities formatted a math lesson that involved the children enthusiastically running around outdoors, completing math-related tasks. It’s not only the creative <https://assignbuster.com/the-finnish-appreciation-of-education/>

liberty teachers receive that separates Finnish teaching from the rest of the world, but the unique format of their instruction as well. Just recently, Finnish schools reformed their education to “phenomenon based” learning, where they integrate different subjects into one broad topic such as the UN.

The benefit of this, according to Larry Cuban, a professor from Stanford University, is that by combining different subjects like math, reading, and science, into one large topic, it teaches students that there isn't a “divorce between these contents”, like the subjects are commonly taught (Khoo). To explain this concept, Cuban gave the analogy: “When you're cultivating a garden, you've got to know a lot about botany, insects, fertilizer, math, and a whole bunch of other things” (Khoo). Their new, innovative phenomenon based method of teaching better prepares students for their experience after school. After analysing the format of the Finnish school system, it is easy to determine that the Finns' success in education comes from their high regards towards schooling. Whether it's the public status of their teachers, the equality in their education, or their innovative methods of teaching, there is no denying that their national education is one of a kind.

Despite them diverging from the traditional views of a successful school system, they have found immense success from their unique methods of teaching. Perhaps other countries can learn from the success of the Finns, and adopt the Finnish practices into their schools. The students would certainly welcome such a change. .