

## “Why are Finland’s Schools Successful?”

The Hancock article was both interesting and thought provoking. Both Finland and the United States have made education a priority. Some years ago, Finland made it their national priority. The differences between the U.S. and the Fins lies in how each nation has gone about directing their energies toward education.

First, there are many successful schools in the United States. However, the U.S. is a vast and diverse nation and not all schools stand up to the same standard. In the U.S., public education is primarily a local responsibility. Generally, the most successful schools are located in the higher income areas, generally found in the suburbs. Many of these suburban schools practice, at least, some of the attributes found in the Hancock article.

So, in contrasting the two nations and how they handle education, one of the biggest differences involves the local control in the U.S. compared to “peruskoulu” in Finland. The Fins created “one system of comprehensive schools.” Finland eliminated the bureaucracy and thus is able to make decisions that impact all students within the nation.

“If you only measure the statistics, you miss the human measure.” This could be the most important quote of this special report. The United States relies in standardized testing to measure the success of students, teachers, and school districts. This practice is largely utilized because it is easy to measure. Analyzing numbers and creating charts and graphs is a common practice in American education. The Fins chose not to take the easy way out. In Finland, teachers discuss their professional practice as it applies to the students; teachers modify their instruction based on these professional interactions. While many U.S. teachers practice these skills, the school day is not set up for this to take place on a continual basis.

While the resources in the U.S. have focused on raising test scores, measuring teacher effectiveness against student achievement, and getting rid of in effective teachers, the Fins have placed their energy and resources into attracting the best and the brightest to the teaching profession. So, while Finland is doing its best to attract individuals to the teaching profession, the U.S. is inadvertently deterring young people from entering into teaching.

Lastly, while Finland is committed to addressing critical thinking among students, the United States continues to be fixated on testing. “We prepare children to learn how to learn, not how to take a test.” As Pasi Sahlberg indicated, testing is not what Finland is about. Many teachers in the U.S. are committed to addressing critical thinking skills in spite of our emphasis on testing; this current state is due largely to the fact that the U.S. has placed the future of education into the hands of professional politicians while Finland has given this task to professional educators.

While Finland and the U.S. differ in many respects (population, geographic size, history, culture, etc.) the process of educating youth could serve as a common thread. I believe we both could learn from one another.

