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Education Crossing Boundaries
Adjunct professor Inkeri Ruokonen & Professor Heikki Ruismäki
Department of Teacher Education
Faculty of Behavioural Sciences
University of Helsinki, Finland

Abstract

Philosophical and educational issues that underpin the Finnish system of education

The presentation discusses issues of educational and philosophical importance that affect the Finnish Educational system. Finland has been in the top three of every overall ranking since the first PISA study in 2000, achieving the first place in reading (2000), mathematics (2003) and science (2008). Finnish pupils have been the only country outside the region of East Asia to score high performances in mathematics literacy. Differences in performances between Finnish schools are very small and the performance gap in Finnish students is below that of other OECD countries.

The objective of this study is to reflect on and discuss the educational philosophy and the thinking behind Finnish Education. Qualitative data has been gathered from the articles and writings of Finnish teacher educators and educational researchers which have been published in peer-reviewed educational journals or books during recent years (Pasi Sahlberg, Hannele Niemi and Pertti Kansanen). Through qualitative content analyses and reflections to educational theories and philosophy the data is classified in some main principles behind Finnish School education which are discussed in this presentation.

Teaching and learning has a long history in Finland and has been a key issue in the development of this small nation to success from the beginning of 19th –century and there has been a wide political consensus that free education for all citizens was essential in welfare of our state to develop.

The analysed writings show that the equality has been the main principle of the Finnish modern comprehensive education to develop. All children go to the same schools and every child has right for equal education in Finnish schools, which helps them to find out their potential and takes into account their different qualities and learning skills and can lead them later to free vocational education or free university education.

Results shows that Finnish universities have a research based teacher education which encourages teachers' pedagogical thinking. Finnish teachers are active in raising serious questions about what they teach and how they teach and what is their educational philosophy behind their goals. Finnish teachers are experts in their subject areas but also educators who have freedom to develop their teaching according to the frames of the National Core Curriculum. The social and ethical dimensions of Finnish education and the importance of free, supportive, creative and positive learning environment are very important as well as ability to teach supporting the right ability level of every individual pupil.