

**LEAP Action Learning Report 2014**

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| Topic area(What) | 1. Observe the types of professional learning typical in Finnish primary schools, for the purpose of increasing teacher capacity and improving student outcomes, and 2. Investigate methods of student engagement in teaching practice. |
| Context(Where and When) | Koskenmaki School, Nokia Finland (20 – 30 September 2014)(The principal that was my partner principal in the 2014 LEAP program, Anna-Maija Hakuni-Luoma, lived in Tampere and her school of 420 students was in Nokia.) |
| Research methods(How) | Mainly observation and discussion |
| Findings(So what) | During my visit, I had the opportunity to visit a range of schools. I visited a pre school, two high schools and two primary schools. I also met with other school principals who visited Anna-Maija's school in Nokia, where I delivered a presentation regarding my school and the NSW education system. I also had a meeting with the Superintendent of the Centre of Education, Nokia as well as educators at Jyvaskyla University.**My observations** regarding Finland and Finnish education, including possible reasons for their outstanding academic results include:1. Students begin school at the age of 7. The Finns value the personal development of independence and social skills through free and directed play that happens in pre schools up until the age of 7. Students beginning school at 7 seem "ready to learn" compared to many of our much younger students in NSW who sometimes start school before their 5th birthday. 2. As soon as students begin school early intervention is given when needed. If a teacher thought students in the class weren't grasping a concept, they were given a series of sessions of intervention, withdrawn from the class in small groups with individual programs. The aim was that all students in the class be at similar stages of learning, progressing together in the stages of their learning. Close collaboration with classroom teachers and specialist teachers was emphasised.3. All students had daily access to a healthy, free lunch at school. Teachers and students shared this meal together. Government funded.4. The culture of Finland supported the education process. Finnish people are a conservative, law abiding people, who value learning. Children are expected to learn when they attend school. This is a cultural expectation (parents, school, society).5. All teachers in Finland must have a Masters degree. Teachers are highly regarded in society- on an equivalent social status as doctors. However The pay scales are similar to ours. The demand for teacher training positions is very high. 10% only of students wanting to become teachers are able to secure training. 6. A multilingual approach to learning. Students are taught other languages from an early age. Finnish students learn English from the age of 9. They also learn Swedish.7. Interestingly, professional learning appeared to be no more widespread or extensive than we find available in NSW schools. The students we observed were engaged in their learning, however teaching practice seemed very similar to that in our schools, and in many cases quite formal and traditional.8. Education in Finland is generally not affected by changes in politics or political parties. Legislation protects against this. Implementation of the strategic educational direction has been **consistent** for the past 40 years or so. Schools don’t have regular imposed change from the Department of Education.**Other interesting observations.**1. Students are timetabled to attend lessons. Starting and finishing times can vary from day to day, depending on the lessons, for students from kindergarten on.2. Technology didn't appear to be any more advanced or readily available than in NSW schools.3. One of the goals for the new Finnish syllabus (to be introduced by 2016) is that learning environments need to places of peacefulness, calmness and unhurried pace.4. Schools were often not big on competition. Nokia school had no student leaders. There were very few whole school assemblies during the year and no awards of any kind were given to students.5. Enjoyment of school is not high, generally speaking. Engaging and motivating students was an area that the Superintendent of Centre of Education, Nokia, believed needed to be addressed in Finnish schools.6. Textbooks were used widely for a variety of subjects in primary schools. Texts were also differentiated for different ability levels7. Communication levels between parents, students and staff appeared to work well, particularly using email. |
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