

Speaker's notes

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References

Collaboration or cheating? What can be learned from global research, policy and practice which might enhance education for the health and well-being of the children and young people of Wales?

This presentation will explore the research policy and practice that can be seen from education systems in 2 particular countries.

The first country I'm going to talk about is Finland. Finland is often regarded as having the best education system in the world, although currently Finland is 16th in the PISA rankings, with the UK coming in at 18th, China is 1st (PISA, 2019).

Finnish children have the shortest school days, and shortest school year in the Western world. Krista Kiuru, a Finnish Government minister for Education, Family and Social Affairs has said herself that in Finland, their government policy is that children should be allowed to be children. Hometime is for important things like playing and spending time with their family. She said key to their success was the abolition of standardised testing, and the outlawing of private education. "The best school is the neighbourhood school", (Kiuru, 2015). It is illegal to charge tuition fees in Finland.

In his 2015 documentary titled "Where to invade next", Michael Moore goes to Finland to see what the education system looks like, and how it benefits the health and wellbeing of children and young people. In the documentary, he interviews several teachers and head teachers from various stages of the school system, from infants right up to high school. Many of the teachers in the documentary were speechless when Moore describes the school system in America, with many of them saying that standardised testing should be abolished, and that children should be baking, singing, climbing trees and doing art. Primary aged children spend no more than twenty hours per week in school, lunchtime is included in these hours.

One headteacher of a high school, named Pasi Majasaari, stated that homework is obsolete in Finland, and that children have plenty of other, more important things to do after school like being together with their families and playing. School is not more important than these things, these things are more important than school. This is where the true learning comes in. Another unnamed teacher stated that school should be about finding your happiness, and several others said that children tell them what they want to learn, and they own their own futures and we cannot overload children's brains with too much information, they need rest. Another said that they try to teach the children to be critical of their learning and to think for themselves.

“Schools in Finland have average autonomy over the use of curriculum and assessment compared to other OECD countries and a below-average level of autonomy over resource allocation. Teachers are trusted professionals required to have a master's degree that includes research and practice-based studies. In primary and secondary education, their salaries are slightly above the OECD average, and their teaching time is below average. A much higher proportion of teachers in Finland than the TALIS average consider that the teaching profession is valued in society and would choose to work as teachers if they could decide again. Finnish society and its education system place great importance on their schools and day-care facilities and trust the proficiency of their school leaders, teachers and educational staff, with no national standardised tests or high-stakes evaluations”, (OECD, 2015).

Main take away points...

- The Basic Education Act (1998), covers all children of compulsory school age. The local authority has a legal obligation to provide basic education to children of compulsory school age.
- School starts late for children in Finland, where they start attending school at 7 years old. There are only 9 compulsory years of education in Finland.

- Life-long learning, well-being, efficiency, and quality are the key elements of Finnish education policy.
- Since the year 2000, Finland has ranked near the top in PISA tests.
- The abolition of private schools means that children from richer households go to school with children from poorer households, which means there is a more democratic element to the education system.
- In Finland, education has been a top national priority for over thirty years.
- Finland has an approach to Education that is uniquely holistic and one of the basic principles of this system is that all people must have equal access to training and education which is high quality.
- Enshrined in Finnish constitution is the basic right to culture and education, which is why education is free at all levels; all the way from nursery to higher education.
- Finnish education policy is built on promoting the welfare society's effectiveness, and the principle of life-long learning.
- Recent reforms to the Finnish education system seeks to develop further the idea that schools are communities of learning, but that learning should be a joyful and collaborative experience which promotes learner autonomy.
- The Finish system is a trust based system that is holistic and produces well ranked results and children and young people with a good, solid sense of well-being.

South Korea

Now onto a completely different part of the world, and a completely different education system! South Korea is currently ranked at 7th in the latest PISA scores, but they have a completely different outlook to education than Finland. Arguably a very successful system, it is a stringent and strict model of education.

The pathway to becoming a teacher in South Korea is one of the most rigorous in the world, and is one of the most respected and revered careers in Korean society.

There is a far more formal relationship between students and teachers here, with even a necessary physical distance needing to be kept between students and teachers. Outside the school as well as inside, teachers are never addressed by their first or surnames, only as “Teacher”, this is also true for parents.

There is a strict behavioural code of conduct required by the learners in a South Korean school. No direct eye contact (this is considered rude and even defiant), no leg crossing in front of the teacher, students are expected to bow when the teacher enters and exits the classroom, no student should sign their names in red ink, this is considered bad luck, because traditionally, only the names of those who have passed away are written in red ink. Learning is predominantly exam assessed, and there is no differentiation at any level. Culturally, the learning environment is strict, with class discussions and collaborative learning not encouraged. It is considered rude to answer incorrectly out loud, and therefore students are encouraged to stay silent if they do not know the answer. Students usually stay in the same room, with various teachers on rotation coming in to teach them throughout the school day.

The school day is long for all school levels, but for comprehensive school aged children and young people, the school day lasts from around 8.30am until around 9pm, with children being responsible for the cleaning of their schools and also mandatory further academic study. Schools are often open until midnight for further study.

“Korea can continue to further improve equity in education attainment, by developing policies targeted at low income and multicultural households. Because of the strong national importance and emphasis placed on admission to top universities, there is a considerable demand for supplementary private education (including in private tutoring institutions called hagwon). This may affect education delivery in the formal education system and hinder student motivation and well-being. Korea can also sustain and advance its recent efforts to provide an educational environment where students have less stress and can develop their full potential beyond cognitive skills, according to individual needs and motivations. In addition, to make the best use of resources to improve quality and reduce dependence on household expenditure,

Korea can continue efforts to provide a coherent and well-aligned evaluation system and better coordinate overall education spending and budgeting plans”, (OECD, 2016).

Education starts early in Korea, with 89% of 2 year olds and 90% of 3 year olds enrolled in pre-primary education settings. The Nuri Curriculum’s policy in South Korea provides for the costs of pre-school education for all children between three and five years old, regardless of household income.

Due to the policy and practice of no differentiation, a study by the OECD into Korean education found that this challenges equity and fairness and could have very negative impacts on many children and young people. According to several studies, and one in particular by Hultberg et al. in 2017, the education system in South Korea is a reflection of the fact that as an economy, they have grown exponentially since the 1960s. From being one of the poorest nations, South Korea now has the 9th biggest economy in the world, so the pressure to have an excellent and highly qualified workforce could be the driving factor to such a strict educational system, that arguably, puts a lot of pressure on its children and young people. South Korea has one of the highest suicide rates, and its not surprise. The entrance exam to enter universities is 8 hours long, and happens during November time. The competition and stakes are high, and young Korean people often view this as the be all and end all of their lives. There are no special measures or allowances or extra time allotted to learners who might need them and it would appear from this fact that learning difficulties and disabilities are not acknowledged or supported.

I hope you have enjoyed my presentation today. There are many aspects of both these countries’ education systems that we could learn from here in Wales; how to do things better, and perhaps how not to do things, especially when we pressurise our children and young people. Many studies have shown that high stress levels in education has shown to negatively impact children and young people, not only emotionally and mentally, but biologically and neurologically as well, which was

shown in a recent study in 2018 by Frías-Lasserre et al.

Thank you for your time!