

## ICP Conference in Helsinki

Thank you for the opportunity take part in the ICP conference in Helsinki. The chance to talk with other principals from various parts of the world and to be involved with educators facilitating on a global basis was incredible. The Finnish education system has aspects that are very close to our NZ way of working and other aspects that sets it well apart. Educators are highly valued in Finland and it was inspiring to hear the Finnish Minister of Education, Krista Kiuru, speaking with such admiration for the high level capability of the teaching profession.

Finland's education system has no [tuition fees](#) and the children receive free meals every day. The education system consists of daycare programmes (for babies and toddlers), a one year of pre-school for children at the age of six (not compulsory) and a nine-year compulsory basic [comprehensive school](#) (starting at age seven). The Finnish strategy for achieving equality and excellence in education is based on constructing a publicly funded [comprehensive school](#) system without assessing, tracking, or streaming students during basic education. Part of the strategy is also to ensure that students have a school near their homes whenever possible or to provide free transport to more widely dispersed schools. There is inclusive special education within classrooms (as we have here generally) and instructional efforts to support slower achievement. After their nine-year basic education, students at the age of 16 may choose to continue their secondary education in either an academic or vocational track, both of which usually take three years and give a qualification to continue to tertiary education.

I was hugely impressed with the attention and focus on the arts, culture and opportunities for creative play. I attended one session which showed a whole school working towards a self-written and created musical production. The whole school was involved and over the course of the year, music was composed, lyrics written, instruments learned and practised, singing learned, sets designed and painted, dances choreographed and acting mastered with authentic learning opportunities taken throughout the year. Videos were made as the production developed and shared with families as they school built up to the final event. The school renamed its teaching spaces to link with the characters in the production and the actual theme of the production was continued and further developed over the course of three years with new, enriched performances each year. It would be my perception that children would love attending school in an environment such as this!

One presenter jokingly told us that ADHD in Finland is called childhood! I was impressed with the relaxed way in which children were able to play - swings and games that OSH would have concerns about here in NZ. There were no school uniforms. The lady I visited in Tampere told me, "You'd never get a Fin in a uniform!" The school day was broken up into smaller parts. A typical 4<sup>th</sup> grade school day in Finland looks like this:

|                        |                 |             |                |                  |                |                |                |                  |  |          |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|--|----------|
| Mother tongue<br>45min | Break<br>15 min | PE<br>45min | Lunch<br>30min | Science<br>45min | Break<br>15min | Music<br>45min | Break<br>15min | English<br>45min |  | Homework |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|--|----------|

The Minister of Education stated, as she was discussing the high PISA outcomes that Finland is awarded year after year, "with advances in technology how are we going to inspire and challenge students and keep their interest up?" Many of the speakers referred to keeping children curious about learning and continually looking for ways to increase creativity. There is much that we can be thinking about as a result of this new learning.

We were provided with many speakers who spoke about global trends in education, cultural responsivity and the impact of these on raising achievement. There was great emphasis on maintaining engagement and thinking differently and creatively about ways to engage and sustain engagement in 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. This is a challenge for us all.

There was much to think about and reflect on in terms of my own practice here at our school. There is no need for an in-depth written report but I have had many in-depth and reflective discussions with our staff and Board and we are using the opportunity to revise our Charter and strategic plan in line with the new learning I have come away with.

### Some of our thoughts for the future are:

Regularity of break times

Increased and more creative play facilities

Robotics and additional extension opportunities

"It takes a village to raise a child"...how can the collective staff support at risk children

Increased specialist support for Active Inquiry

Developmental Programme for New Entrants

Additional language learning

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