

School of Thought

The world we live in is changing fast but do you think our schools are adapting fast enough to keep up with these changes?

In this lesson you will share your own views about school in the discussion and read about one of the world's most progressive education systems in Finland.

Pre-reading Discussion

What do you think about your school? What things make learning enjoyable and what do you find difficult?

From the list below, what or who motivates you most as a student?

- The teacher
- Your parents
- Your friends
- The course books/materials
- Competitiveness
- Curiosity
- Tests and exams
- Ambition
- Something else...?

Do you think school is preparing you well for adult life? How much responsibility should schools take for the following?

- Skills and qualities required for working life (collaboration, time management, negotiation, leadership etc.)
- Relationships (family, friends, colleagues, partners etc.)
- Practical and organisational life skills (personal finance, running a household, cooking etc.)
- Your physical and emotional well-being (keeping healthy, avoiding stress, having a good quality of life)

FINLAND:

One of the best education systems in the world

Finland's education system is consistently ranked one of the best in the world. Here are some of the reasons why it is so successful:

Educational Policy

Since the 1980s, Finnish educators have focused on making these basics a priority:

- Education should be an instrument to balance out social inequality.
- All students receive free school meals.
- Ease of access to health care.
- Psychological counselling
- **Individualized guidance**

All compulsory education is free, there are no private schools in Finland.

The Teacher

Being a school teacher is one of the most prestigious professions in Finland. A three-year undergraduate degree plus a two-year Master's degree are required to become a teacher. Only 10% of applicants get admitted to the teaching programs.

A great deal of **social awareness** is also required. Students in Finland often have the same teacher for up to six years of their education. During this time, the teacher can take on the role of a mentor and a mutual trust and bonding are built so that both parties know and respect each other.

Different needs and learning styles vary on an individual basis. Finnish teachers can account for this because they've figured out the student's own idiosyncratic needs. They can accurately chart and care for their progress and help them reach their goals.

The teacher/student relationship

Children start receiving education at the age of seven, when they reach intellectual maturity. Their relationship with the teacher is very close, since each class is limited to 20 students and until the sixth grade, children usually have the same teacher for most subjects.

Teachers work in groups, seeking the participation and feedback from their students.

The numerical grading system is not used until the fifth grade to discourage competition or comparisons.

Teachers are evaluated and given feedback by their more experienced colleagues.

There are no lists of top performing schools or teachers. It's not an environment of competition – instead, **cooperation** is the norm.

The curriculum

Each school is free to design its own curriculum. Educational planning is agreed among teachers and students. Work is integrated in all levels of the education system (primary, secondary and higher education levels). Priority is given to exploring, creativity and experimentation, rather than to **learning by heart**. The aim is not to transmit information but to teach **critical thinking**.

The School Day

Students in Finland usually start school anywhere from 9:00 – 9:45 AM. Research has shown that early start times are detrimental to students' well-being, health, and maturation.

From the outset pupils are expected to learn two languages in addition to the language of the school (usually Finnish or Swedish), and students in grades one through nine spend from four to eleven periods each week taking classes in art, music, cooking, carpentry, metalwork, and textiles.

Finnish students' schedules are always different and changing, however, they typically have three to four 75 minute classes a day with several breaks in between. The student gets 75 mins of recess per day. The overall system isn't there to ram and cram information into their students, but to create an environment of **holistic learning**.

A more relaxed atmosphere

Regular classes are mixed with outdoor time, physical or recreational activities as well as time to generally just relax.

This type of environment is also needed by the teachers. Teacher rooms are set up all over Finnish schools, where they can relax, prepare for the day or just simply socialize. Teachers only spend 4 hours a day in the classroom and take 2 hours a week for professional development.

Less homework and outside work required

According to the OECD, students in Finland have the least amount of outside work and homework than any other student in the world. They spend only half an hour a night working on stuff from school.

Finnish students are getting everything they need to get done in school without the added pressures that come with excelling at a subject. Without having to worry about grades and busy-work they are able to focus on the true task at hand – learning and growing as a human being.

This text is created from a combination of two online articles:

10 reasons why Finland's education system is the best by Mike Colagrossi 09 September, 2018
<https://bigthink.com/mike-colagrossi/no-standardized-tests-no-private-schools-no-stress-10-reasons-why-finlands-education-system-in-the-best-in-the-world>

25 Amazing lessons about Finland's Education System by Lluís Torrent 17 December, 2012
<http://unitedexplanations.org/english/2012/12/17/25-amazing-lessons-about-finlands-education-system/>

Zero & First Conditionals

Match the two parts of these sentences to make them correct according to the text:

If you want to be a teacher in Finland,	they will understand their needs better.
When children in Finland reach the age of seven,	students are better able to learn
When you create a relaxed learning environment,	teachers will be able to get to know their students
If teachers have the same students for several years,	they can start school.
If you make the students start the school day too early,	you must have a two years master's degree
If the classes are smaller,	it can be bad for their health according to research.

Which sentences are Zero Conditional and which are First Conditional?

Phrasal verbs (verb + preposition)

Add the correct prepositions to the verbs below.

	on x2	to	about	out x2	for x2	up	for
Balance _____							
Take _____							
Account _____							
Figure _____							
Care _____							

Now check they are correct by finding the underlined and in italics phrasal verbs in the text.

Using context from the text to help you, match the phrasal verbs to the following definitions/synonyms:

- _____ = to spend time improving something
- _____ = to accept a job or a responsibility, especially a difficult one
- _____ = become equal in amount, value, or effect
- _____ = to look after
- _____ = to arrange for something to happen
- _____ = to make yourself ready for something
- _____ = take responsibility for an action or situation
- _____ = to be anxious due to some problem or difficulty
- _____ = to not exceed a maximum of

Post-reading Discussion

What are the main differences between your school and schools in Finland?

What do you think is meant by the following words and expressions (mentioned in the text in red)

- Social awareness
- Cooperation
- Learning by heart
- Critical thinking
- Holistic learning
- Individualised guidance

Small Group Discussion

1. In pairs/small groups discuss these points then share your ideas with the rest of the class

Group A – Discussion Critical thinking vs. Learning by heart	Group B – Discussion Co-operation vs. competition
Group C – Discussion Holistic learning	Group D – Discussion Individualised guidance

2. What changes would you like to see in your school? Do you think that the Finnish system could work where you live? Discuss these points in pairs/small groups then share your ideas with the rest of the class.

Group A – Discussion The curriculum	Group B – Discussion Teacher/Student relationship
Group C – Discussion Assessment and homework	Group D – Discussion School facilities

3. Group Presentation - Create your own school

Imagine you have the funding to create your own school. You want to make it an inspiring and happy place for the students and teachers alike. Think about:

- The location
- The buildings & facilities
- The age group of the students
- The teachers
- The curriculum – subjects & assessment
- The timetable
- Homework

Present your ideas to the rest of the class. Remember as it's not reality (at least, not yet!) try to use the **Second Conditional**, for example:

If we founded a new school it would be a primary school for children aged 7-10