

Testing 3, 2, 1: What Australian Education Can Learn from Finland, A Teacher's Perspective

Lawrence, M. (2020). *Testing 3, 2, 1: What Australian Education Can Learn from Finland, A Teacher's Perspective*. Melbourne: Melbourne Book

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WHAT
AUSTRALIAN
EDUCATION
CAN LEARN
FROM FINLAND

A teacher's perspective
MICHAEL LAWRENCE

This book details the author's educational experiences, including teaching in Finland. It analyses the current system of teacher training, curriculum design and the impact of mandated testing regimes.

Michael's education in Melbourne's West was "unforgiving" (Lawrence, 2020, p. 12). As a left hander forced to change hands, he reflects that his classes were streamed setting "a student's future in slow drying cement" (Lawrence, 2020, p. 14).

He moves on to his early days of teaching in Victoria: Werribee Geelong and Ocean Grove,. The level of freedom within his early career classrooms allowed him to weave his passion for Music into his lessons. He lauds several progressive Principals for their positive impact on staff.

The "standardisation push" is outlined in the ensuing chapters and NAPLAN tests and the ATAR system blamed for the decline in teacher autonomy in Australian schools (Lawrence, 2020, p. 36). Frequently citing Pasi Sahlberg, Lawrence also recounts conversations he had in Finland, where he was questioned as to why "Australian teachers allow this system to exist" (Lawrence, 2020, p. 39). Other educational academics, including Gonski, are also cited.

The Finnish system is lauded and reference to the high regard in which teachers are held in that country is compared to Australian teachers who he sees as focusing on good grades (p.68) and being stifled if they are creative (p. 74). University entrance methods are also considered in this light.

Concluding chapters cover the experiences of several teachers, suggestions for individual adoption in Australian classrooms, and guidelines for graduate teachers in their quest for employment. I was led to wonder what it might be like to be valued in the manner he ascribes to Finland's education system. This book was interesting in terms of reminiscing about my own history in education. It will appeal to those questioning NAPLAN, or who are interested in learning more about what practices are successful in Finland.

From the Reviews Editor: The review of this new title again raises the issue of the Finnish educational system and its perceived merits. Readers may wish to revisit some related articles:

1. Elizabeth Greef's (2019) article in *Synergy*, *What Does the Library Have to Do With It? The Success of Finnish Education in PISA Tests and the Role of School and Public Libraries*.
2. *Facts and Myths About Finnish Schools* by Pasi Sahlberg, the Finnish educator now working in Australia. The article, published in 2019, may be found on his web page, www.pasisahlberg.com in the 'news' section. Sahlberg's web page contains many other useful and very current resources, including his presentations.

At a Glance

Brief listings, with both a local and global focus.

The **National Literacy Trust in England**, is an independent charity whose focus is on disadvantaged learners. The wide range of resources available on their web site may be of interest to many practitioners.

The Trust undertakes an Annual Literacy Survey and the findings from this are used to inform a number of research reports around a range of critical literacies and reading. Of particular relevance in our current challenging times is [Children and Young People's Reading in 2020 Before and During COVID-19 Lockdown](#).

The area of social media is covered in a number of resources on the Trust web page. The report entitled [Video Game Playing and Literacy: A Survey of Young People Aged 11-16](#) provides some interesting insights into the connections between video game playing and literacy, creativity and wellbeing.

The **OECD** has produced a wide array of materials with a global perspective on the impacts of COVID-19 on education and skills. The [OECD Education and Skills Today](#) archive provides papers on topics such as the job market, higher education exams and early childhood education, to name a few.

The **World Economic Forum** has produced a range of resources on education and skills which may be of interest to readers. One of its most [recent reports](#) looks at the future of media and the value of content. Another examines the [impact of COVID-19 on global literacy](#).

Merga, Margaret (2020). [**How Can School Libraries Support Student Wellbeing? Evidence and Implications for Further Research**](#), *Journal of Library Administration*, 60 (6), Jul 2020. This article raises the very relevant issue of libraries as safe places capable of enhancing student wellbeing, something of ongoing interest to those in school libraries.

ASCD recently published titles:

[**Solving Academic and Behavioral Problems: A Strength-based Guide for Teachers and Teams**](#).

Intended to assist with student growth through structured conversations

[**Social and Emotional Learning and the Brain**](#)

Applying the principles of brain science to social and emotional learning.

[**Decoding autism and Leading the Way to Successful Inclusion**](#)

Provides insights into autism and practical suggestions for meeting students' needs

[**From Behaving to Belonging: The Inclusive Art of Supporting Students who Challenge Us**](#)

The authors detail the move from behaviour management to an approach that “supports all students—even the most challenging ones—with kindness, creativity, acceptance, and love”.

The [**ASCD Express**](#) has an excellent archive of articles published in the last fifteen years. Subscription to the Express Newsletter is free and articles will arrive in your inbox twice a month.

Contributions to this section are warmly welcomed, so please let us know if you discover a wonderful new resource you wish to share with your colleagues. Your review only needs to be a couple of lines.

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