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Book Review: Teach Like Finland

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Book Review

Walker, T. D. (2017). *Teach like Finland: 33 simple strategies for joyful classrooms*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company. 210 Pages.

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“It’s been said many times before, on the Internet and elsewhere, that there’s no homework in Finland. Sorry to disappoint you, but that’s a popular myth” (Walker, 2017, p.31). This enjoyable book arrived at my house some weeks after I returned home from participating in a book club and visiting three cities in Finland and a variety of schools with colleagues from various educational institutions. I have always likened joy with teaching, yet so much of what we hear about schooling in America is far from joyous. This book was written by an American teacher who relocated to Finland to teach after a few short years of teaching in America. It was timely and effectively written. In my very own visit to Finland, I saw exactly what this author was sharing when he wrote about how he began to schedule brain breaks and hourly outdoor breaks, which he says are to maximize learning.

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Throughout the book, there are strategies for change. Overall, the book demonstrates through a variety of experiences and stories of Finland’s and America’s classrooms just how important it is to be collaborative and purposeful. For example, he walks us through how to create the Anchor Chart on classroom rules. He contends that once the teacher and students work through questions answering what a peaceful classroom looks like, you can return to it throughout the year. Further, he adds that it will be important to do collaborative work so that students can strike a balance on the noise level as everyone throughout the room discusses their ideas.

In classrooms where the level of engagement is high, celebration is real. Walker expresses that whether it is textiles or woodworking (yes, you got it, textiles and woodworking), students and teachers need to honor the work of one another. He notes that hardworking students develop into competent cooks and artists because they are intrinsically motivated. He suggests that blogs and Twitter chats are also good ways to spread the word about excellence. Much of what happens next is social bonding, and he says that that promotes connectedness in the classroom.

The author of *Teach Like Finland* uses ample examples and shares how he feels often. He talks about his own journey to become a teacher in Finland, where he had resistance himself and wondered how it could be. Yet, he and his wife relocated to her homeland to discover what he was missing as an American teacher, stressed with lack of time and joy and suffering plenty of struggles. The ways of teaching in Finland, where students take 15 minutes of every hour to get fresh air and relax, were appealing but did not seem real to him. Then he learned that he too would take those breaks from the grind of the classroom and discover how productive both he and his students were afterward.

In conclusion, I encourage everyone who loves teaching and knows how challenged American schools are today to be joyful places, to read this book, *Teach Like Finland*. When you do, take time to consider how much you enjoy teaching when the environment feels happy, and I suspect that is exactly when the students will enjoy learning. I believe, like the author of *Teach Like Finland*, each teacher will realize that what Walker is saying is realistic. Though we may be thinking that such change would have to be school-wide, he clearly points out that perhaps the most important strategy is joy. He shares a worldwide movement about happiness in school and how it can be achieved. The author demonstrates that when teachers get reminders to focus on happiness, they do make decisions to build up ways to find positive emotions like happiness and they notice how this translates to happiness in their lives. This book shows us how every teacher can start somewhere to change the level of joy in the school where they are with the children they teach. This book has the potential to change your classroom.

Seema Imam is co-chair of the National College of Education, National Louis University, where she has served 22 years in teacher preparation. She has served on the board of directors for the Islamic Schools League of America, which she was recently the chair. Seema served 16 years in Chicago schools and five years as principal at Universal School in Bridgeview, IL. Seema holds teaching, principal, and superintendent certificates. Seema's research focuses on diversity and technology. Seema authored Chapter 10, "With New Standards in Mind: Selecting & Integrating Educational Technologies for Student Success," in Addressing the Needs of All Learners in the Era of Changing Standards, published by Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. She is author of Chapter 3, "Separation of What and State: The Life Experiences of Muslims in Public Schools in the Midwest," in Muslim Voices in School Narratives of Identity & Pluralism, Sense Publications, 2009. She co-authored a children's book, I Am Listening, Lucent Publications.

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