

# In search of the Pikebone Kantele: Finnish lessons in teacher education

Todd A. Price Dr.

National Louis University, [tprice@nl.edu](mailto:tprice@nl.edu)

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## Recommended Citation

Price, Todd A. Dr.. (). In search of the Pikebone Kantele: Finnish lessons in teacher education. *i.e.: inquiry in education*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 3.

Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie/vol10/iss1/3>

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i.e.: inquiry in education is published by the Center for Practitioner Research at the National College of Education, National-Louis University, Chicago, IL.

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**Cover Page Footnote**

Thanks goes to Arlene Borthwick, Jason Stegemoller, and Debbie Sternecky for organizing this amazing trip and all of my faculty colleagues for collaborating. A big thank you goes to our Finnish colleagues for hosting, Michael for lunch, and Pasi Sahlberg for inspiring this adventure.

# Something in the Water?

## Finnish Lessons in Educational Reform

Todd Price

*National Louis University, Chicago, USA*

At first glance, Finnish education appears so different, so refreshingly unique, that to the casual observer what happened there might appear to be something that could not possibly happen 'here'. Some of the faculty in our group found the lore of Finland itself mesmerizing. As scored by Elias Lönnrot in his long poem *The Kalevala* (1849), the legend of Finland is one painted with broad strokes; a people forever immersed in forest, fields, and heroic travel(s) by skiff over great expanses of water. Indeed, in this, the nation's most epic tale (as it is described by the translator, Keith Bosley), Finland is in fact a country forged through story.

*The Kalevala* tells of "steady old Väinämöinen" engaged in a noble pursuit. This main protagonist with flowing white beard presses on in an inspired quest, to acquire the jawbone of a fish, from which will exude music, we are to learn much later in this long, winding soliloquy. With his crew and through great struggle he catches the beast. From out of the "pikebone kantele" (Lönnrot, 1990, p. 538), the plucked chords sooth the ear and liberate the spirit, bringing harmony for all peoples. We learn—throughout this story of love lost and found, of storm and battle, of the drowning and the cacophony of voices, of hunting and fishing and the din of the feasts—that by *kantele*, a nation is born. *Kantele* is at its essence the sound, song, and undulating tone of Finland.

Like life imitating art, Finland's contemporary educational quest is both music, acquisition, and gift. Education is the *kantele*, it is shared between the Finnish people, and, analogous to Väinämöinen, strumming the fishbone, sets in motion culture and brings forth a kind of tune and tone. Amidst all of the statistics, charts, and explanations surrounding the Finnish education success story, there is something more; it is the general idea of sharing, of education as a collaboration. It is this idea that is apparently quite resplendent throughout Finland. Sahlberg (2007; 2015) equates turning a nation around through national education reform to be a few things; a dream answered, yes, and yet also a puzzling paradox. After all, who knew?

### Finland's Unlikely Success

One of the key features concerning Finland's miracle is that it was unexpected to the outside world; it was said to be surprising even to the Finnish people. Yet it might not have been, given Finland's long dance with literacy. As Sahlberg (2007) notes:

Finnish 10-year-olds had been found to be the best readers in the world by IEA's literacy studies in the 1970s and 1980s (Thorndike, 1973; Elley, 1992). Good reading and literacy skills among young Finns are often explained by an adult population of active readers. (p. 158)

Reading is indigenous to the culture. But beyond a cultural proclivity toward reading, these latest reform efforts and their success evidenced in the 2001 PISA scores are hardly the first such successful reform efforts. A few in particular are worth noting.

The first contemporary reform effort spanned the years of 1915-23. In this period, critical steps were made toward excellence in education. As described by Pekka Ruuskanen in *Towards New Learning, University of Jyväskylä, Teacher Training School: 150 Years of Developing School*, (Salo and Kontoniemi, 2017) the Finnish Coeducational School of Jyväskylä was launched through the stewardship of matriarch and religious educator, Anni Oksanen. Oksanen is a figure comparable to and no less significant to Finnish education than Catherine Beecher was to American education. She set up what would become the University of Jyväskylä Teacher Training School, a remarkable institution our faculty during the educational tour would have the good fortune to visit. Back then in the early part of the twentieth century, Oksanen made it her task to instruct the pupils in moral and ethical development, along with (and not as a poor second) history; to wit, she modeled the value of history for national identity and character while, and this is important, aimed to instruct the whole child, facilitated the development of the teacher, and advanced pedagogical progressivism. No small task there. This early, the normal school she helped launch is today an exceptional teacher training institution where veteran teachers of record engage their teacher candidates with an array of professional development activities.

A second and pivotal contemporary reform effort was the development of the basic comprehensive school. Sahlberg (2015) is best suited to explain its core feature(s):

The central idea of *peruskoulu*...was to merge existing grammar schools, civic schools, and primary schools into a comprehensive 9-year municipal school....All students, regardless of their domicile, socioeconomic background, or interests would enroll in the same 9-year basic schools governed by local education authorities. (p. 27)

Teachers teaching teachers in the university by way of authentic classrooms and on the backs of a major overhaul of the system toward an inclusive model, *peruskoulu*, paved the way for an ongoing, national commitment to excellence...and equity.

Picture steady, old Väinämöinen, white beard flowing, in a skiff with crew rowing, sailing toward the great fish; like that, a strong, determined effort was waged by the Finnish people. Educators like Sahlberg and his father, and such luminaries as Anni Oksanen, led the way, placing nation at the forefront in an effort to raise the aspirations (and subsequently, and less importantly, the PISA scores) of the Finnish people. That educational achievement would improve and the nation would prosper as a result seems hardly unlikely, largely plausible, and even to be expected, with such an all-encompassing effort.

Finland came out on top of the League of Nations, who are industrial titans from around the world. The major surprise seems less to be about Finland's improvement and more about the irony of how a standardized test, the PISA, would confirm that the improvement was real, that the Finnish system ranked best amongst nations. Finland apparently had placed little interest in preparing for standardized tests; how fitting to win the lottery! Sahlberg, however, points out that the lottery/race to the top is a cynical one, and while no doubt basking in the success of Finland, Sahlberg (2015) also characterizes it, frankly, to a charade:

“Naturally, those education systems that have established effective selection systems to identify talents and special abilities early on and then provide gifted students with optimal learning opportunities have succeeded well in these games.” (p. 56)

This is what he describes (and decries) as the great paradox: that Finland achieved so much while maintaining her commitment to equity and refusing to pull out exceptional students. Sahlberg (2015) again explains: “One of the unexpected aspects of the first PISA findings was that most of the education systems with high overall student learning were also the most equitable” (p. 62).

To warrant this claim, the Organisation for Co-operation and Development's (OECD) report, *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States*, notes:

While 8% of Finland's children are deemed as having special education needs, only half of them are placed in special schools; the other half are mainstreamed. Finnish educators believe that if schools focus on early diagnosis and intervention, most students can be helped to achieve success in regular classrooms. (2011, p. 122)

The Finnish education system, to that end, does seem like a gift benefitting all of the students.

### **Teaching: Highly Regarded, a Respected, Collaborative Profession**

The heart of the book that Sahlberg (2015) wrote with such pride is in the middle passages. One

Teachers and principals together are not only the critical contributors in curriculum development, but they are collaborative partners with the community, working within a local context.

could imagine that this section alone could inspire much discussion, should it be considered alongside current educational reform efforts in the United States, which accord to what some characterize as an audit culture or a form of new managerialism.

Essentially, Sahlberg lays out that teachers, rather than state managers, are the “key” to effective teaching, learning, and curriculum development. Summarized more specifically, Sahlberg proclaims

that teaching in Finland is highly regarded, a respected profession. Teachers and principals together are not only the critical contributors in curriculum development, but they are collaborative partners with the community, working within a local context. Indeed, it would appear that Finland, as Sahlberg describes, is more interested in inputs rather than outputs, and as a result, ends up doing exceedingly well on both. Disdaining the narrow focus as prescribed by outcomes-based education, the mantra for other OECD countries, Finland eschews the summative, “census-determined standardized test” and in its stead opts for diagnostic and formative teacher classroom assessment (2015, p. 123). Teaching, learning, and curriculum as such is aimed at improving students’ achievement and aptitude based on how they perform against each student’s own characteristics and abilities in that moment, rather than using a blunt fill-in-the-bubble instrument.

This is a moment for reflection, as one of the interesting paradoxes of what Sahlberg rightly derides in the “census-determined standardized test” is that in the US, standardized tests are seen by some as serving a social justice good, namely, insuring the creation of subgroups as in *No Child Left Behind*, whereby otherwise unexamined, marginalized groups would be tested. Hence, proponents of testing all with the same standardized instrument would, and have, claimed as much, that it would be unfair to test some and leave others behind. Sahlberg proudly notes that in Finland, assessment is authentic, and completed in the classroom. Classroom assessment is more valued than the type of broad-based, summative, national examinations which incentivize teaching to the test, and subsequently so, narrowing the curriculum.

It is important to point out that without report cards, Finland seems to have little interest in competing with other schools. But what about rigor? How do teachers do so well if they do not compete on these standardized terms? There are few answers here, only more interesting observations and claims. As Sahlberg notes, Finnish teachers teach a smaller number of hours than many of their OECD counterparts, significantly less than American teachers do:

In lower secondary schools, for example, Finnish teachers teach about 600 hours a year—800 lessons of 45 minutes each, or four lessons per day. By contrast, US middle school teachers teach about 1080 hours, or six daily lessons of 50 minutes. (OECD, 2011, p. 126)

It is reasonable to assume that Finnish teachers, at the least, have more time to engage in the community, meet with parents, and support “student welfare.”

Beyond fewer teaching hours, Sahlberg makes the claim that Finnish teachers receive better professional development. He chides the fragmented professional development he had seen as a consultant when observing classrooms and teaching conditions in other countries, and compared to them, the Finnish experience rated favorably. He sincerely expresses that professional development in Finland more consistently supports active development and experimentation by teachers with curriculum.

It is a puzzle for most administrators how, short of standardized forms of evaluation, one would be able to sort out the best from the worst teachers, yet Sahlberg seems to throw up his hands in one section, stating emphatically, “There are no formal teacher evaluation measures in Finland” (2015, p. 125). Teachers are allowed time during the work day to collaborate and work toward

school improvement with each other, he argues, almost with exasperation. This helps in building a sense of professional leadership and “shared accountability between teachers,” he opines (p. 126).

One could take away from this explanation that if teachers, administrators, and community are all responsible for education, and they are doing well, why waste precious time and resources measuring every individual teacher? A radical idea, but that is what he most emphatically indicates.

### **Observing Finnish Lessons in Finland**

Currently in professional teacher education organizations, an idea persists that learning takes place in a context, and this is a good idea, perhaps well overdue. Hence, we as teacher educators might need to be thinking about where we are sending our teacher candidates, and how place matters:

Teacher preparation curriculum necessarily reflects the developmental, conceptual, and experiential needs of the teacher candidates and is shaped by local conditions and opportunities inherent in the clinical education partnership sites. (AACTE, 2018, p. 31)

To put into context, teacher preparation is shaped by the local condition. It was helpful to finally be able to observe in real time and in living color the schools, students, and teachers, just to see how and if their own condition for teaching and learning reflected this idea.

Our Finnish educational tour—inspired by Sahlberg—was organized by our generous hosts with the express aim to cover broad areas of curriculum and instruction. It was arranged so that school visits would be possible in several different cities where we could convene freely with government and education officials, principals, teachers, students, and other faculty members. In one instance, an educator by the name of Vahtivuori-Hänninen provided the big picture, spoke on some of the niggling issues, and explained what the implications were for classroom teachers of socioeconomic shifts in a talk entitled Government’s Key Project in Knowledge and Education. In other instances, and most enjoyably, we observed classroom students engaged with their coursework. We appreciated the opportunity to observe student teachers coteaching with lead teachers in classes spanning across the educational spectrum.

Essentially, the breadth and depth of the tour involved deliberation over topics from international cooperation to unionism, and concerning the phenomenon-based curriculum and the details of the 2014 Comprehensive School Curriculum. The experiences—while planned—nonetheless felt spontaneous, authentic, and meaningful. Our hosts were concerned to represent the fidelity of their work and their educational system through a sampling of several educational activities: coding activities with second graders and cabinet making by high schoolers were examples. Included, and not exhaustive, were the following themes and stops along our tour:

- *Eco-sustainability in experiential education:* Helsinki sixth graders raising flora and fauna at a greenhouse in the Vesala Comprehensive Elementary School
- *Professionalism in support of practice:* Autonomy, creativity, and innovation fully on pedagogical display in the University of Jyväskylä teacher training school
- *Developmentalism in child-rearing:* Dance and a role play-acting performance by the children at a popular daycare center in Turku
- *Social justice as an orientation for citizenship:* Heartfelt testimonials by immigrants and political refugees who strive to move forward as adult students at a Finnish finishing school, Turun Ammanati Institiutti

The practices spoke volumes of what our Finnish faculty colleagues aspire to do. Essentially, they seek to create a rich and equitable environment for their students, and to treat their teachers, and perhaps more importantly, their teacher candidates, with the professional respect they deserve.

### **Eco-sustainability in Experiential Education: Vesala Comprehensive Elementary School**

In the middle of the school was the greenhouse. One of the first impressions was the change in the climate, with mist and fans circulating; it felt like stepping into a rainforest. As guests, we were informed to watch where we walked, as creatures therein were allowed to roam. On cue, an unusual breed of long feathered chickens, with what appeared to be boots for feet, wobbled ahead of us. Around the bend, a blond-haired, high school-aged boy wearing dishwasher gloves removed a full-length iguana. Somewhat reluctantly, the iguana left its cage, but as the student adroitly stroked its neck, the lizard settled into a calm repose.

Plants and flowers were moist from the mist; above, a fan was circulating, ensuring that this space truly served as a thriving greenhouse. In another portion of the naturally lit, glass-ceilinged room, a sixth-grade boy gently placed a käärme (snake) around his neck, and then proceeded to share some of the creature into my own waiting arms! It was actually quite a beautiful animal, room-temperature warm, docile and smooth. When asked whether he took science courses as well, he said, “Yes, I like it a lot.” His friend nearby agreed, at which point we observed the well-preserved exoskeleton of this käärme; the snake had most recently come out of its own skin.

During this exhilarating session with the kids, the Vesala vice principal ticked off the six principles of the school, including what amounted to student voice. He conveyed that “giving the kids an awareness of how they can participate in anything,” is important, and that “they have an opinion” and they can essentially do something about it. “This is a problem,” he said, “because due to immigration and socioeconomics, many of those students do not understand how much they can actually change on their own.”

The last principle was “a safe and sound” school. A head teacher who presented at length of all things comprehensive about this wonderful school mentioned that “in other words,” the school should be safe but also “a place where students would like to be a part of.”

### **Professionalism in Support of Practice: The University of Jyväskylä Teacher Training School**

“Here on the wall you can see the blueprint of the school. We have six grades; all of the classes of the same grade are placed together.” Thus, we began our tour of the University of Jyväskylä teacher training school with a cheerful head teacher leading us onward. “The administration,” she pointed out, “is concentrated on the third floor; we just passed the nurse’s and school psychologist’s rooms.” Moving next through a fourth-grade hallway, she gestured, “Kids leave their shoes off for the cleaning purposes; in winter, there is a lot of slush and snow and you can only imagine...” Almost as a confession, she explained, “We are really lucky with the resources. Since we are a university teacher training school, we get our funding from the government. All the classrooms are equipped with the technology, smartboard, interactive whiteboard...”

We came upon a fifth-grade teacher. The head teacher conducting the tour suggested we talk with her. The fifth-grade teacher explained that her kids were presently in the English literature class, and that it was the 150th anniversary of the birth of the local theatre, and hence the students would be going on a field trip in the afternoon after lunch. “We have in Finland free lunch, for everybody, every day,” she said. The students would be returning from the theater for history and sports thereafter.

“Do the children have sports every day?” asked one of the faculty.

“No,” she said, and the head teacher chimed in:

I wanted to talk with you more about the timetables. The school timetables we follow, they’re not the same every day as the United States, but we have a weekly timetable. Monday is different from Tuesday, which is different from Wednesday.

The teachers, however, she noted, had flexibility to decide how they used the hours of the day. If they had, for example, a project going on, they could opt to devote more hours to it.

A question from one of our faculty colleagues to the classroom teacher was, “I’m wondering how important it is to have reading strategies. Do you teach reading strategies at the fifth grade? Can you tell me a little about that?”

The fifth-grade teacher replied:

Well, at first and second grade it is really important they read every day. At home I [ask] them to read 10 minutes every day aloud with their parents. But at fifth grade they are 10 or 11 years [of age] and they should read quickly enough already, and then they just use that. They read different types of texts, and they need to understand what they read...

“So, do you do instruction and comprehension strategies?” the colleague responded.

“Hmm, something like that,” she remarked.

Meanwhile in the hallway, high school students played “kitzca,” a game where they skid a variety of objects across the floor toward a marked-up surface at the other end, attempting to see what effect each object had as a result of surface and friction, sort of like shuffleboard or curling.

In a music room, a colleague asked the music teacher, “When do you start to teach them reading notes?”

“I would say in the second grade.”

The head teacher who was leading our group suggested we ask the student teacher(s), “What is your goal and purpose?” So we did.

“To help the students form a positive relationship with the music.”

### **Developmentalism in Child-Rearing: A Turku Early Childhood Center**

The headmaster of a Turku early childhood center started us off with a humorous anecdote:

If persons from a Mediterranean country, Italy, Spain or so, know 20 or 30 words, they tell, “Yes, we can speak English.” We in Finland may study six years and read English books and we still have the feeling we cannot speak English.

In general, the headmaster was perhaps making a stereotypical comment about the Finnish penchant for seeking excellence, and assumed failure to reach it. But that was what he claimed to be the reason why he was the only one to step up and take us on the tour.

The facility was clean, bright, and nestled up the hill on the outskirts of town. The little ones were not infrequently bundled in coats and led to play outside even in cold weather, he explained, as the philosophy of the school found value in the kids not only getting outdoor time, but in practicing putting on their coats, winter boots, hats, and mittens. “This kindergarten,” the headmaster explained, “is 30 years old, and the name of it means ‘bear square.’ Many, many years ago, this was a place where bears tended to [roam]. Perhaps some wolves can be found within 50 kilometers, but no bears.”

“We are known as the facility that takes families with bigger problems,” the headmaster said. “Forty percent of the children speak mother language...something else than Finnish.” “Our policy,” he continued, “is that when they are three years [of age], I will take them [in] if it is possible, whether parents are home or not.” It is unclear exactly what our host implied when he spoke about “bigger problems,” and how his center served the students of families who were recently arrived to Finland, speaking primarily their native language at home.

However, a group of Finnish educators in a recent study responded to the increase in immigration with this curricular call: “Mother tongue and literature education should be related to the textual worlds and themes that pupils are familiar with” (Roos, Hannula, Torma, & Lerkkanen, 2016, p. 228). If other educators believe similarly in such a practice, it indicates an appreciation in Finland for native language as a resource, not a deficit. Furthermore, “the special task of mother tongue and literature education” is to ensure students draw from “diverse” languages and texts to make meaning (Roos et al., p. 228). This progressive viewpoint seems to imply that *all students* benefit from learning through foreign languages. The authors go on to advocate for specific pedagogies, including collaborative writing and different types of “talk”—strategic talk, evaluative talk, constructive talk, disputational talk, cumulative talk, and exploratory talk. In conclusion, these authors make the case that including students’ home languages not only honors diversity, but serves to integrate the curriculum in Finnish schools.

After the headmaster spoke, a walk through the facility followed. Evident were stuffed animals, dolls, and a hobby horse or two. Next was a tent, boom box, some drums and tambourines. I followed a parade of kids and teachers outside to a fenced-in playground yard. Two of the children rolled large snowballs, another one in tow with a toy shovel. The air was crisp, not terribly cold, and while the kids were digging up sand in another part of the yard, I merely tried to get down to their level while their teacher encouraged them to converse with the American. “My name is Chony,” the young digger finally expressed.

Once back inside, the kids gathered in a large room, the same one with the tent and boom box, and played a game to music which involved taking on the roles of little animals. Therein, parents/guardians looked on with amusement. Later, one of our colleagues, a professional cartoonist, entertained all with depictions of popular Hollywood animated characters. The kids laughed and called the names out when they recognized familiar features.

### **A Finnish Finishing School: Turun Ammanati Institiutti**

As an example of Finland’s egalitarian basis for social policy, and how this approach contributes to a successful education system, our educational tour took us to Turun Ammanati Institiutti, a Finnish vocational school where we began with the wonderful opportunity to dine in a student-run cafeteria. At this “opetusravintola taito” (teaching skills restaurant), culinary arts students prepared fine cuisine, where featured were two dishes: a plate of fish “kempele” and something akin to a Finnish version of Swedish meatballs, accompanied by an “alkuruoka salaattibuffet” (appetizer salad buffet)—sweet potatoes, pasta, and assorted greens. Our guide, a head teacher at this school, pointed out that these were not the only options for the student body, that there were other cafeterias as well. She said, “We can choose where we want to eat!”

On completion of the fish, we followed her as she commenced to take us on a tour of the building premises and classrooms. We were first introduced to a practice kitchen. “We have four similar ones,” she said. One we visited was not ready for tour, as it was being washed down at that moment, so we went onward. “They come here in the morning and they have a teacher there who tells them what to do,” our head teacher guide explained, “and they clean up afterwards!” There were other vocational classrooms we did visit. The head teacher informed us that many of the students were not new to the world of work: “Most of the time this is their second career.”

Our main interest was granted to speak with the vocational students, which we enjoyed as we reached the third floor.

A young man was introduced and started to explain how the Finnish language and Finnish language courses advance one's becoming more thoroughly integrated into Finnish culture. "I think the most important thing about language learning is you just try to use it all the time," said the student who met us in a joint room off of the next floor. An émigré from the United Kingdom, this student went on to explain, "For example, I have my laptop in Finnish, my phone in Finnish, I try to speak Finnish every part of the day." He noted that this was important because "pretty much everyone [else] here speaks English in Finland." To confirm what the head teacher had previously pointed out, "One of the interesting things is that several of the students were already professional chefs in their own country, but don't meet the same criteria for Finland."

This British student noted that his peers like him came from a variety of different countries, and under different circumstances. Two of his peers who joined the conversation spoke about how they have husbands also working in Finland. These women were pursuing Finnish education to complement coursework completed in their native country. One female student from Nepal said, "I'm married and I'm working...so I didn't have time to study before in my 2-4 years [prior to taking the course at Turun Ammanati Institiutti]...I would like to learn Finnish, so I came here....It was good!" Another female student came from Pakistan. Having already completed a master's in electrical engineering, she said, "Maybe after this Finnish language course I can go to do some work in a Finnish company." She continued, "The nationality group we have here...there's two from Kenya, one Ghanaian, one Somali, one Indian, one from Cuba, and one from Poland. Everyone in the whole group is already living here."

The head teacher was accompanied by another language teacher who taught the foundational Finnish language courses. The language teacher chimed in:

There are many different reasons why people move to Finland. When you go outside of the university, you need the Finnish language. We have different kinds of courses for immigrants; they have the basic level of Finnish language course, then one year of Finnish language, [and also] Finnish culture or immigration training.

The language teacher noted that the vocational school did not offer the immigration training course; rather, the school received students after they had taken this course elsewhere, and had already chosen their profession.

To this end, the British student described the coursework in becoming a Finnish chef:

The one we are on now is "basic education," the foundations of the restaurant industry, so learning just the simple things you have to do at work. After that, things will be a little bit more in-depth; the next year of education, it will be perhaps portion planning and getting to know the specialist groups. Working on different courses...we prepare food, at the moment it is pretty basic; what we started with [is] soups and salads and dinners, this basic sort of thing.

He went on to explain the curriculum...and where he hoped to land a job:

The class is split up into different parts. You have a chunk of learning classes and things like that, sometimes in the classroom, sometimes in the kitchen. We will do a short internship of about six weeks, where [we] have to go and find the internship ourselves. During the internship, we have to meet certain criteria. One part of our course was to learn how to prepare lunch food. I went to a restaurant quite nearby. There was a school there; I made lunch food for everybody there. Now I have chosen to do an alcohol and serving course, which is my choice. Now next month I will do an eight-week internship at a bar where I learn how to prepare and serve different kinds of alcoholic drinks.

In conclusion, students from Britain, Nepal, Pakistan, and elsewhere testified to the value of learning the Finnish language. Several of them spoke fondly of their first course, *Strengthening Your Basic Skills*, as well as their overall experience at the institute:

I lived here in Finland almost three years. I'm from Kurdistan. First it was really hard to learn Finnish! Now I can speak Finnish, but I mostly use English because I'm afraid to [make mistakes]. [This is the] first year I started school here....I'll graduate in 2020. It's by Finnish language, not English, because I live here in Finland and I would like to finish my study in Finnish! Turun Ammanati is a great place to learn because...they teach us how we want, how we understand. They [provide rules] like "subject follows verb;" I had [a problem] finding this in a book, but they help us.

### **What Lessons Have We Learned?**

The intent of the education tour—its well-orchestrated schedule of events, dedicated teachers, engaged students, and friendly classrooms—was to provide us as foreigners the opportunity to observe, discuss, and reflect upon the Finnish educational system. All of this supplemented, in a most gratifying way, Sahlberg's (2015) book, *Finnish lessons 2.0*. As teachers, educators, and researchers on tour, we came away with a desire to follow up—we imagined next steps. Writing this essay is fulfilling one of them.

In particular, several of us, upon return, also read *Teach like Finland: 33 Simple Strategies for Joyful Classrooms* (Walker, 2017); others studied chapters from both *Towards New Learning: University of Jyväskylä Teacher Training School: 150 Years of Developing School* (Salo & Kontoniemi, 2016) and *Reforming Teaching and Teacher Education: Bright Prospects for Active Schools* (Kimonen & Nevalainen, 2017). I further reviewed the work of curricularist Michael Uljens (2015), who provides an historical and theoretical context to the Finnish experiment in education reform, as well as, importantly so, advocating for nondetermined ends for educational lessons, programs, and initiatives. Uljens and I continue to correspond, as he shares an interest in curriculum study and his unique approach to educational leadership, "non-affirmative theory." Still remaining is to follow up on the specific theories and issues related to educational change as explicated and expounded upon in the 2014 Comprehensive School Curriculum, and

phenomenon-based curriculum implementation. Given the complicated conversations around curriculum in the U.S. related to, for example, *Next Generation Science Standards* and *Common Core State Standards*, experienced teacher educators might look forward to the day when, like Finland, U.S. education reform efforts would not only consider but enact principles of learning context and safe and sound schools. *We* could do worse than promote the idea that teachers and communities come together as partners, and that community assets be used in crafting a curriculum that benefits fully *our* students and schools. Institutions in the U.S. would be very interested, one could imagine, to find out about how teacher preparation in Finland unfolds—admissions requirements and processes, teacher training schools and clinical experiences, new curricular development for teacher preparation coursework—and what we might learn from such Finnish lessons in educational reform.

It would be a shame if we misunderstand that in Sahlberg's tone, amidst his pride and his witticisms, is a real revelation. Sahlberg calls into question the values of a ceaseless race, the seemingly mindless and joyless competition for high test scores. It should be noted that much of his text was written while consulting and employed to do research at the behest of the World Bank—no stranger to the world of competition and high finance. That he should arrive at the conclusion he did is really quite compelling for a particular reason, and that reason remains timely. The reason why *Finnish Lessons 2.0* is such a compelling read is that Finland could not have expected to win, yet they did. Sahlberg's journal article(s), written prior to his book, seems prophetic; it imagines the wane of No Child Left Behind and the dawn of a literal Race to the Top campaign. These political agendas were waged, respectively, by the Bush and Obama administrations, seemingly against and at the expense of professional educators, with a similar econometric goal: ratcheting up the stakes and the scores in high-stakes testing. It really is a testament to Sahlberg and Finland that amidst a mushrooming internationalization effort to standardize, the country that was the literal winner of these high-stakes sweepstakes, and her most prominent educational ambassador, have cast dispersion(s) on the whole process.

Amidst a mushrooming internationalization effort to standardize, the country that was the literal winner of these high-stakes sweepstakes...[has] cast dispersion(s) on the whole process.

Sahlberg cites American researchers Amrein and Berliner (2002) to put a stake in his claim that standardized testing is contagion to a healthy educational ecosystem. I italicize here the key consequences that, perhaps well known to critics, remain apparently elusive to obstinate advocates of the ever-more-intrusive-and-over-the-top drills in assessment, evaluation, and sanction:

On the basis of their analysis across 18 states in the USA, that since clear evidence was not found for the positive impact of high-stakes testing policies upon increased student learning, and because there are numerous reports of unintended consequences associated with these policies, such as *increased student drop-out rates, teacher and school cheating on exams, and teacher defection from*

*the profession*, there is need for transforming existing high-stakes testing policies. (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 151)

In sum, how joy in learning, trust in teachers, and authentic play by children are infused at every step and stop throughout the structure of this remarkable educational example, and through Sahlberg's rendering of it, our group's dalliance into the heart of teacher education and Finnish schools became meaningful.

Perhaps enough information is provided here to direct a path forward, charting new waters in our own skiff, enough to seek and forge our own *Kantele*.

*Todd Alan Price is Director of Policy Studies in the National College of Education, National Louis University. He has authored several articles, chapters, and books concerning curriculum study, teacher education policy, service learning and civic engagement pedagogy, and educational communications technology.*

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