

Rethinking Early Education and Health – the Finnish Perspective

Abstract

This research considers some of the possible reasons why Finnish children have been out performing English children in the OECD PISA 2006 and considers in particular the Early Years in Finland.

An article in the NUT (the teacher March 2008) raised my interest in this area as this article inferred that Finland has a more successful education system than Britain and that all the teachers in Finland have a Masters degree. The information for this article in the Teacher came from the results of OECD PISA 2006 and Education at a glance 2007, www.oecd.org/edu.

This was further supported by an article by Dr David Leat (2008) (Newcastle University),

“In September I was at the European Conference on Educational Research in Belgium. I heard a presentation from Dutch researchers from Twenty Universities on ‘Balancing Prescription and Professionalism in Curriculum Policy and Practices’. It was fascinating. They had conducted case studies in nine countries: England, Belgium, Finland, Germany (two states), Hungary, Poland, Sweden, the USA (California) and the Netherlands. They had assessed their recent history and emerging policies in terms of centralisation or decentralisation of curriculum, testing and teaching.”

Dr David Leat’s article (2008) suggested a shift towards decentralised educational policies particularly in Finland. Thus the aim was to consider and compare the curriculum and delivery approaches in Finland and England with particular reference to the Early Years and literacy development. My research included a literature review of Finland’s government documents and a visit to some of Finland’s early year’s day care settings in order to undertake a semi-structured interview with English speaking colleagues.

The children in Finland do not start school until they are seven, master several languages, Finnish, English or Swedish and a high proportion of them 70% <http://www.eurydice.org> 23.7.08 (page 143) stay on for higher education or training, clearly demonstrating continued willing engagement in education.

In Finland the teachers aim to give the children “pre-skills” as opposed to teaching them, this engages the children, without pressurising them. I believe this to be an exciting and developing area of education particularly as our UK children are not considered to be global enough in their outlook (Education Guardian 18.11.2008). A paper such as this will potentially impact upon practice, policy and theory as it questions our current practices and demonstrates alternatives.

The results reflect some of the standards of practice we should be aiming for, such as ‘the child at the centre’ or ‘hearing the voice of the child’ and clearly indicates a need for a greater focus on the development of the whole child as opposed to achieving differentiated targets based on a generic curriculum of one size fits all.