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Education in America

According to *Ranking America* out of forty countries the United States ranks fourteenth, and Finland is ranked fifth in education. Throughout this paper I am going to be hitting three major differences between the American educational system and Finland's educational system. In the documentary "Where to Invade Next" Michael Moore visited Finland and talked to the Minister of education, teachers, and some students. Through talking to them Moore found that compared to American schools Finland's school years and days are shorter, there is a drastic difference in the amount of homework assigned, and a standardized testing is only given one time in Finland. Finland's teachers and students were very vocal on the things they thought should be changed in American schools. Teachers seemed to be worried about the amount of homework American students are given and the time or lack of they have to socialize. The Finnish students were concerned with the way American students are tested. America's educational system should follow Finland's educational system because Finland's students have moved up, and have steadily been ranked near the top of the education statistics

In Finland the school years are shorter as well as the school days. According to the article *11 Ways Finland's Education System Shows us that "Less is More"* Kelly Day explains the average time Finnish students are in school. Day says the typical school day starts anywhere

from 9:00 to 9:45. She mentions some research that has proven time and time again that it is important for adolescents to get quality sleep, especially in the morning(Day). Day also mentioned how the school day usually ends around 2:00 to 2:45 and how the start and end times are constantly changing. Just like Jones, Day mentions the amount of breaks that Finnish students get throughout the day. Day says on average the Finnish students are given three or four seventy-five minute breaks. After talking about the time spent actually in school Day goes on to talk about the time left for preparing. Day said “Teachers have shorter days as well. According to the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) an average a Finnish teacher teaches 600 hours annually or about 4 or less lessons daily.” In her article Day compared those 600 hours spent teaching in Finland to America’s 1,080 hours. In Finland teachers and students are not expected to be in school until their classes start and can leave once their last class is over(Day). It seems as though their school is modeled more like an American college. Giving the students and teachers this extra free time allows them the opportunity to work on their lessons and classes more. There are many benefits to having a school year and schedule set up like this. The children are able to learn to be flexible and everything is not always the same so they are not getting bored. The kids also have more time to balance out their social, work, and school schedules.

In America students are often expected to complete hours of homework, all while having a balanced social life. In Finland homework is almost non-existent, it is extremely important that students get the appropriate amount of time to socialize. In fact, Finnish law mandates that for every forty-five minutes of instruction, students must get fifteen minutes of play time. According to an article written by Abby Jackson a 2014 study showed that on average a Finnish fifteen-year old spends 2.8 hours on homework a week compared to the average fifteen-year old American

student who spends 6.1 hours on homework. Homework assignments in America commonly start in kindergarten and continue through twelfth grade while in Finland homework is not usually introduced until middle school and high school (Jones). Having less homework just like shorter school days and years helps the kids in Finland have a better social life. This leads to less stress and more happiness. I am not saying because we as American students have a lot of homework we are all unhappy. Some people deal with stress different than others. But I have been through and have friends that have been through it. Having almost two hours of homework a night along with working, and trying to keep a social life can be very stressful.

Peter Gray a psychologist and research professor at Boston College connects the increase in homework given and the decrease in “play time” to children to an increase in childhood mental disorders. He refers to this as “the play deficit”. Gray talks about how over the last couple decades the amount of time children are allowed to play has slowly been declining. As the time for play has decreased the mental health issue in American children has increased. Gray says “It’s not just that we’re seeing disorders that we overlooked before.” Since the 1950’s clinical questionnaires have been given to assess anxiety and depression in school children. This questionnaires form has not changed and has shown a linear increase in anxiety and depression.

Standardized testing is an important factor in America’s teaching style. The scores on these test determine the amount of funding a school receives. I myself have experienced this first hand in high school. In my junior and senior year of high school the English and math class my classmates and I were assigned to was determined by our scores on previous standardized test. I personally did not do well on the math portion of these test so I was put in a class that only focused on what would be on the test. I do not believe this class was helpful to me. It was supposed to prepare me for the test but I do not think it did. It also did not help prepare me for

the math classes and skills I would need in college and later on in life. Throughout my research America's teaching style was often referred to as a test-based teaching. Jones comments on the No Child Left Behind and Common Core mandates we have in America. The No Child Left Behind Act was established in 2001. A main focus of this act is to close the student achievement gaps. Jones then goes on to say how these mandates can create "a teaching to the test environment in schools." In America standardized testing begins in third grade and continues on through high school(Jones). Unlike America, Finnish students take a test called the National Matriculation Examination. This is test is what we could consider a standardized test and it is taken at the end of high school(Jones). Jones also mentions how the test is than graded by teachers themselves and not by computers. In the academic journal *Learning by Experience in a Standardized Testing Culture: Investigation of a Middle School Experiential Learning Program* Scogin said "Standardized testing has been perhaps the biggest hurdle preventing wide-range adoption of experiential-type learning pedagogies. In a 2012 review of literature on the topic, Anderson presented 35 empirical studies linking accountability policies associated with testing to their resultant science education practices. Ninety-seven percent of the studies in the review reported negative impacts of test-based accountability" This shows that standardized testing should not be relied on to determine not only the level of academics at a school, but also the performance of the students. Teaching to the test does not benefit students. Yes, it helps gets more funding for the school is students do well but it still hinders a child education. It does not prepare them for future classes or even future life events.

Throughout all my research there seemed to be one reoccurring theme. It seems as though in Finland there is a much more personal relationship between not only students and teachers, but

also teachers and administrators. They are all more concerned that students actually learn what is necessary for later life, and for the students well-being. It has also become apparent that these changes cannot happen overnight and that we cannot do exactly what Finland is doing. It would almost be impossible to do so but if we could take some of their ideas and model them to help our country it could help immensely.

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