



Main factors behind the good PISA reading results in Finland

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Finland in International Comparisons; Reading Literacy (IEA/PISA)

- ◆ 1991 IEA Reading Literacy Study Finland # 1
- ◆ 1998 OECD Adult Literacy Survey Finland # 1
- ◆ 2001 PISA : Finland # 1
- ◆ 2003 Pisa: Finland # 1
- ◆ 2006 PISA: Finland # 2 after Korea
- ◆ 2009 PISA: Finland # 3 after Shanghai and Korea



Finnish society supports reading – schools and teachers not alone

- One of the best library systems in the world – Library is the most beloved cultural institution.
- Number of books borrowed annually from public libraries and number of new books for children and young people is high.
- Especially women are keen readers and they understand the importance of reading.



Continues: Finnish society supports reading – schools and teachers not alone

- Most homes subscribe at least one newspaper.
- Foreign TV programmes not dubbed but have subtitles – improves children's reading routine.
- Bed-time stories important in families.
- We have valued reading high and love our language - literature keeps it alive and readers keep literature live in return.



Is the Finnish school somehow special?

- Equal opportunities for all to education irrespective of domicile, gender, socio-economic status or native language
- Education free of charge (including school lunches)
- “Nearest school is the best school for a child” principle: every school has its own geographical catchment area, no elite schools, no private schools
- Comprehensive, non-selective basic education, no streaming
- No national tests during the whole comprehensive school (sample surveys about the learning results) – in the national core curriculum the description of good performance – no inspection system
- Teaching is a dream profession for young people, particularly girls who perform better in school than boys; nevertheless the status of teacher is high
- University level education for all teachers from kindergarten to upper secondary school (ME, MA)



Finland is a country of

- ◆ readers
 - ◆ excellent public libraries, highly-educated librarians
 - ◆ devoted teachers, good school buildings
- but also a country epitomized by poor school libraries
- ◆ where a teacher, not a qualified librarian tries to cater for the (outdated) collection
 - ◆ kept open only a couple of hours a week
 - ◆ with a very minimal annual budget (if any)



Long childhood – an easy and playful but brisk start

- ◆ School starts at the age of 7 (voluntary pre-school for 6-year-old children)
- ◆ Pre-school lays the foundation for learning to read and write (emerging literacy)
- ◆ Pre-school a learning environment where to develop the phonological awareness, vocabulary and literacy and where to get experiences of different text types and genres
- ◆ Half of the pre-school pupils learn to read as if by chance (earlier one third of seven-year-olds knew how to read when entering school).



Literature is a powerful ‘teacher’ of language and literacy

- ◆ The name of the school subject is Mother Tongue and Literature since 2003.
- ◆ Speaking and listening are the bases of literacy. The importance of each child telling his/her own stories and listening to stories (teacher and parents reading to a child); when listening a child is learning the language, vocabulary, structures, style and text conventions.
- ◆ The aim of the mother tongue syllabus is “to encourage the pupil to read literature. The pupils can find factual and fictional literature and other texts that interest them and are able to justify their choices.”



Changing reading environment - enlarged concept of *text* in schools and in libraries

- The rapidly changing media environment of children, the *Digital natives*
- Multi tasking – children use different media simultaneously
- The most important media for 6-8-year-olds in Finland in order of importance were in 2010: TV, video, DVD, CD, book, cartoon, Internet, radio...
- All types of texts daily: literature, information, media texts, audiovisuals, graphics, spoken, written . . .
- **Schools and libraries have media literacy programs and projects.**





Strong support for slow learners – we want and need everybody aboard!

- Our slow learners are better in basic skills than slow learners in other OECD countries.
- The underlying ethos is a strong sense of equality.
- Every pupil has a right to special needs education: part-time or full-time + remedial (additional) teaching.
- 37 % of first-graders get additional support.
- Early intervention is emphasized: diagnosis and rehabilitation as early as possible.
- Intensive cooperation between parents, teachers and other experts.
- All class teachers and special needs teachers have knowledge and expertise on learning difficulties.
- ◆ Wisely chosen interesting books for struggling readers.



Teachers' wide autonomy

Teachers are free to

- develop the curriculum for the school;
- choose the text book and/or prepare their own materials;
- choose the reading materials with their students depending on their interest and reading ability (the only obligatory reading is Kalevala);
- design their own tests for their classes
- decide how and when they are working with libraries or with other **cooperative partners.**



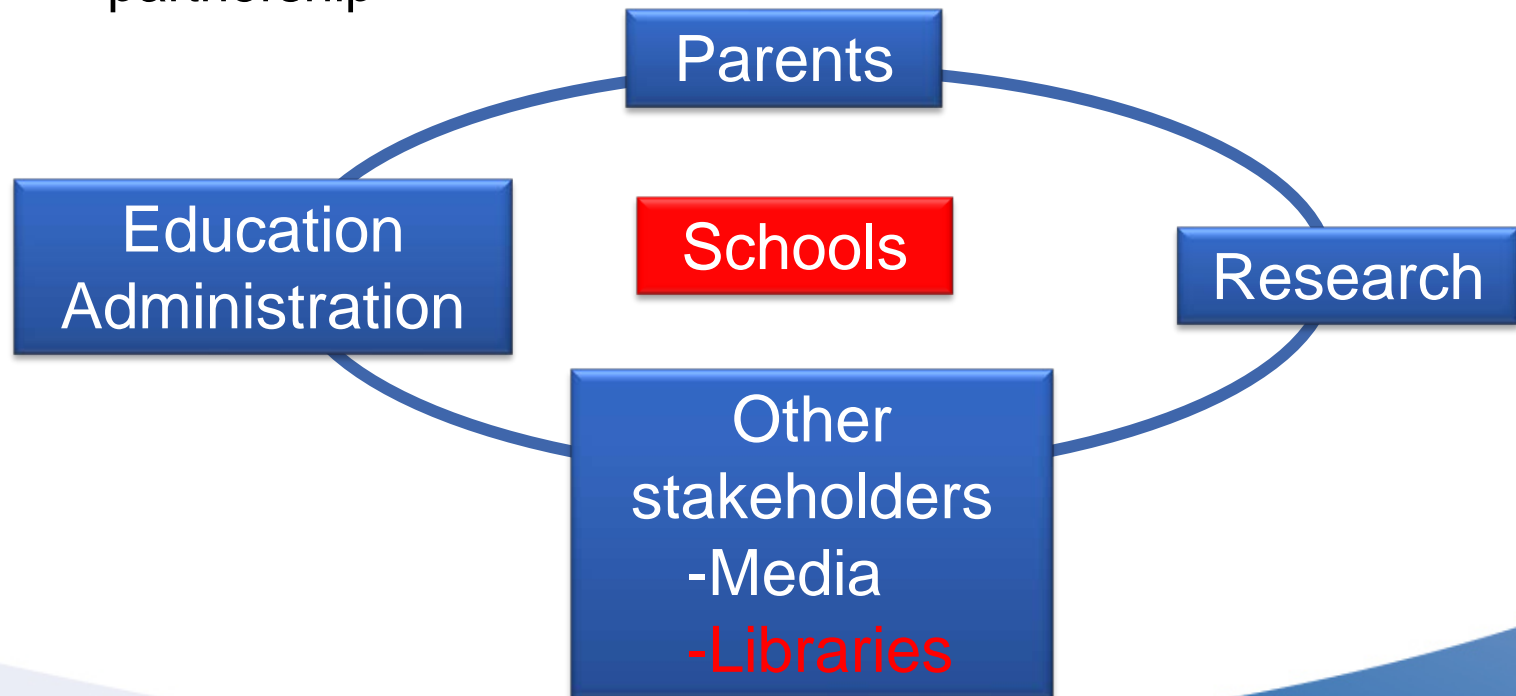
Ongoing literacy work – national campaigns

- ◆ Reading Finland project enhancing reading in basic and general upper secondary education was 2002 – 2005.
- ◆ Now starts READING SPIRIT, a MEGA reading project is to be launched this year by the Ministry of Culture and Education.
- ◆ Schools and public libraries and school libraries together, conducted by Oulu City and University



Effective co-operation

- Good results in literacy call for a strong co-operation between homes, schools and in the whole society.
- Interactive, co-operative way of working at all levels in partnership





The main challenges we are facing are how to

- ◆ motivate and strengthen the habit to reading among all youngsters, but boys and weak readers in particular?
- ◆ raise the level of reading comprehension?
- ◆ turn the attitudes especially among the weak readers and boys more positive for reading fiction and other lengthy print texts?
- ◆ support better our more talented readers? (Their level of reading literacy is also reducing)



How to get boys read?

- Lessons from the Reading Finland Project

- ◆ special methods for boys, more action related activities, exploiting emulative spirit: who reads the most
- ◆ cooperation – group work is powerful
- ◆ to exploit the attractiveness of social media, ICT, video camera and clips
- ◆ masculine (non-feminine) reading materials for boys (non-fiction, newspapers, science fiction, fantasy, hobby magazines, comics, on-line texts)
- ◆ More male reading role models at home, at school and in media
- ◆ Cooperation with the Finnish Football Association
- ◆ A room for reading boys at the Book Fair



Improving school libraries

Establishing school libraries with the aim of

- ◆ raising the attractiveness of reading:
 - throw away outdated books
 - modernization: database, Internet access
 - author visits, exhibitions, campaigns
- ◆ supporting learning of information retrieval and knowledge management skills (information/digital literacy)
- ◆ employing dedicated school librarians
- ◆ having a place where to read in peace magazines, books, newspapers, comics . . . a peaceful place for reading at all times
- ◆ co-operating effectively with public libraries and using the expertise of their librarians



Finnish teachers (T) and librarians (L) in comparison

- ◆ T knows how to develop the reading skill and knows the interests area of an individual pupil
- ◆ L knows the newest and most attractive books for a certain age group
- ◆ T knows how to motivate reading and how to approach each book and how to teach reading skills and different reading strategies
- ◆ L knows non-fiction and how to search information from the Internet
- ◆ T knows how to utilise text books but is not always strong in information literacy



Teacher and Librarian have a same aim in Finland

- ◆ Both cooperate for motivating reading activity and teaching information retrieval