

THE FINNISH EDUCATION MODEL:

Lessons for leaders and change agents

Porto de Galinhas
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Meet Finland



A small, ageing, increasingly diverse society.



Highly educated

One of the world's most educated populations.



Ageing population

More people are living longer — and staying active.



Increasingly diverse

More languages, backgrounds and perspectives.

FINLAND AND NEIGHBOURS



FINLAND AT A GLANCE



	Population	about 5.6 million
	Capital	Helsinki
	Area	about 338,000 km ²
	Currency	Euro (€)
	National languages	Finnish and Swedish
	Sámi languages	recognized in the far north / Lapland
	Population density	about 19 people per km ²
	Urban population	about 86%
	Median age	about 43 years
	Share aged 65+	23.8%

WHAT DRIVES THE ECONOMY?

Innovation, knowledge and sustainable strengths.



Services

Strong modern service sector and expertise.



Technology & digital innovation

Leading in tech, start-ups and digital solutions.



Machinery, metals & chemicals

Advanced manufacturing and industrial know-how.



Forest industry & bioeconomy

Renewable resources, wood products and circular solutions.



Clean energy & design

Clean power, smart solutions and world-renowned design.

NATURE AND CULTURE

Big nature. Simple pleasures.
Deep traditions.



Over 75% of land covered by forests



About 188,000 lakes



Around 3 million saunas



Small country, big nature, and a very strong relationship with sauna.

FINNISH VALUES & SPIRIT

Guided by values. Driven by *sisu*.



Trust



Equality



Education



Sustainability



Design



Sisu
(quiet determination)



Peaceful, practical and forward-looking — Finland is a place where people, nature and ideas grow together.





Evaluation Strategy for Education 1990s

Assessment supported
improvement rather
than competition



Basic School Reform 1970s

A common comprehensive
school for all students



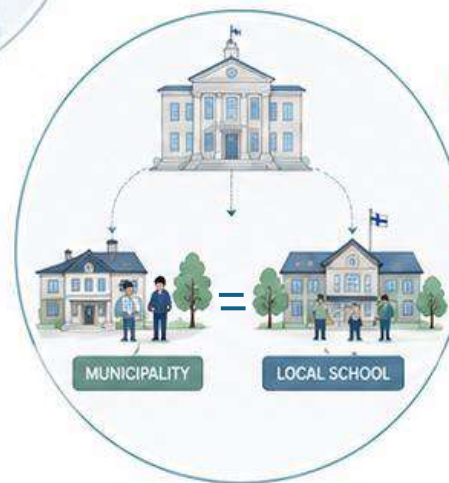
Initial Teacher Education Reform 1980s

University-based preparation
strengthened teacher
professionalism

Foundations of the Finnish Education Model

National Curriculum Reform 1990s

Curriculum guidance promoted
coherence, flexibility, and trust



New Public Administration 1990s

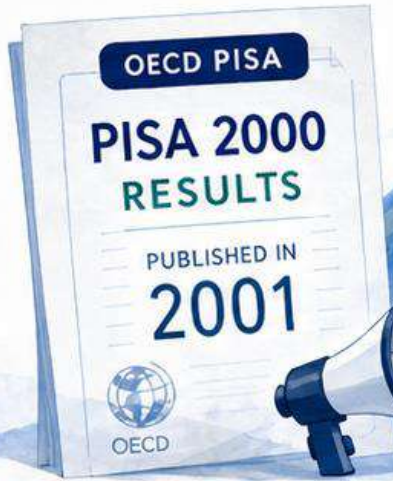
Decision-making shifted
closer to schools and
municipalities



2000

2001: The PISA Surprise

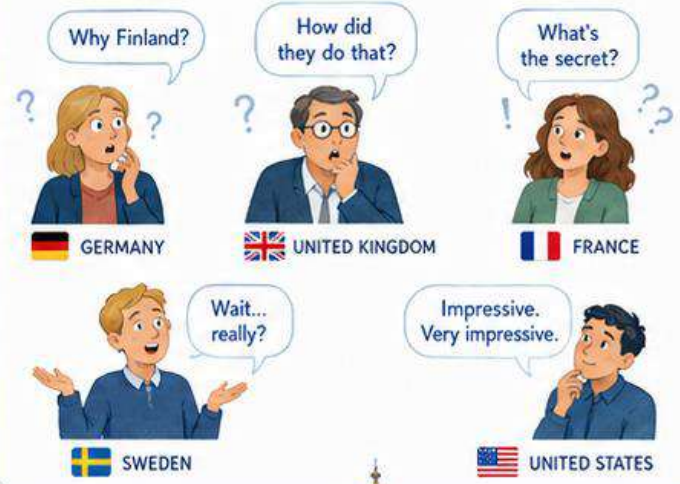
A surprise to the world — and to Finland.
PISA changed Finland's global image overnight.



“ From a quiet Nordic nation
to global education celebrity.



2 THE WORLD WAS PUZZLED



1 FINLAND NEVER AIMED TO BE THE BEST

We just wanted good schools
for every child.

Us?
Number one?



3 FINLAND DIDN'T HAVE ONE SIMPLE EXPLANATION



PISA 2000
The test is conducted
around the world.



2001
First results
published.



Finland becomes the
unexpected #1.
Global attention overnight.



A new story about
education begins.
And it's just the beginning.



Five common myths

MYTH

Finland is better at doing what others do.



Reality: Finnish success came from doing many things differently: equity, trust, play, and a broad idea of learning.

MYTH

Finnish schools have a sharper focus on foundational literacies.



Reality: Literacy and numeracy matter, but Finnish schools also protect arts, crafts, sciences, physical activity, and wellbeing.

MYTH

Finland only chooses the best and the brightest to become teachers.



Reality: Teacher education is selective, but admissions also value motivation, communication, and suitability—not just top grades.

MYTH

Students have no homework in Finland.



Reality: Homework does exist in Finland, usually less in primary school and more purposeful than excessive.

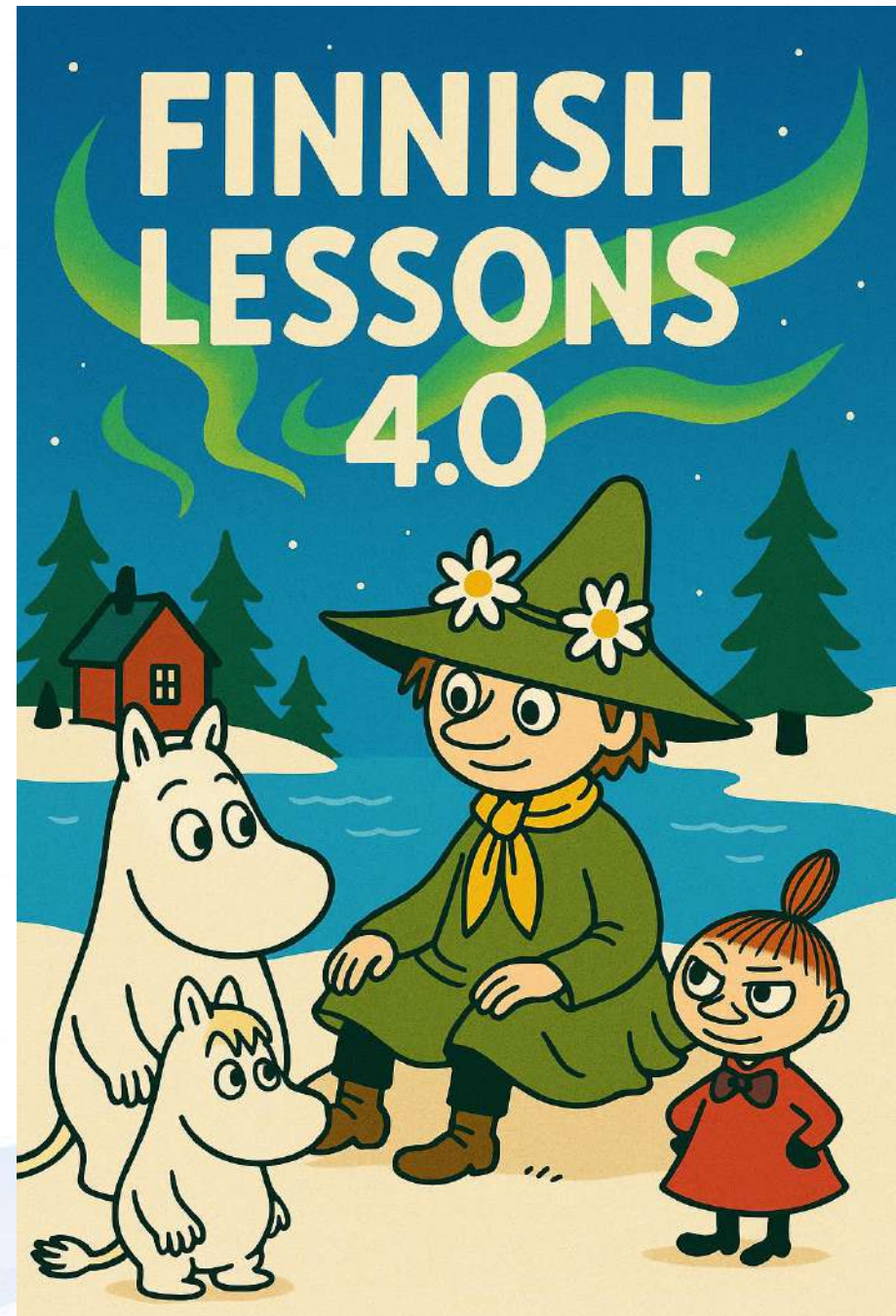
MYTH

Traditional subjects were scrapped in Finnish curricula.



Reality: Traditional subjects remain; multidisciplinary projects were added to connect learning to real-world themes.

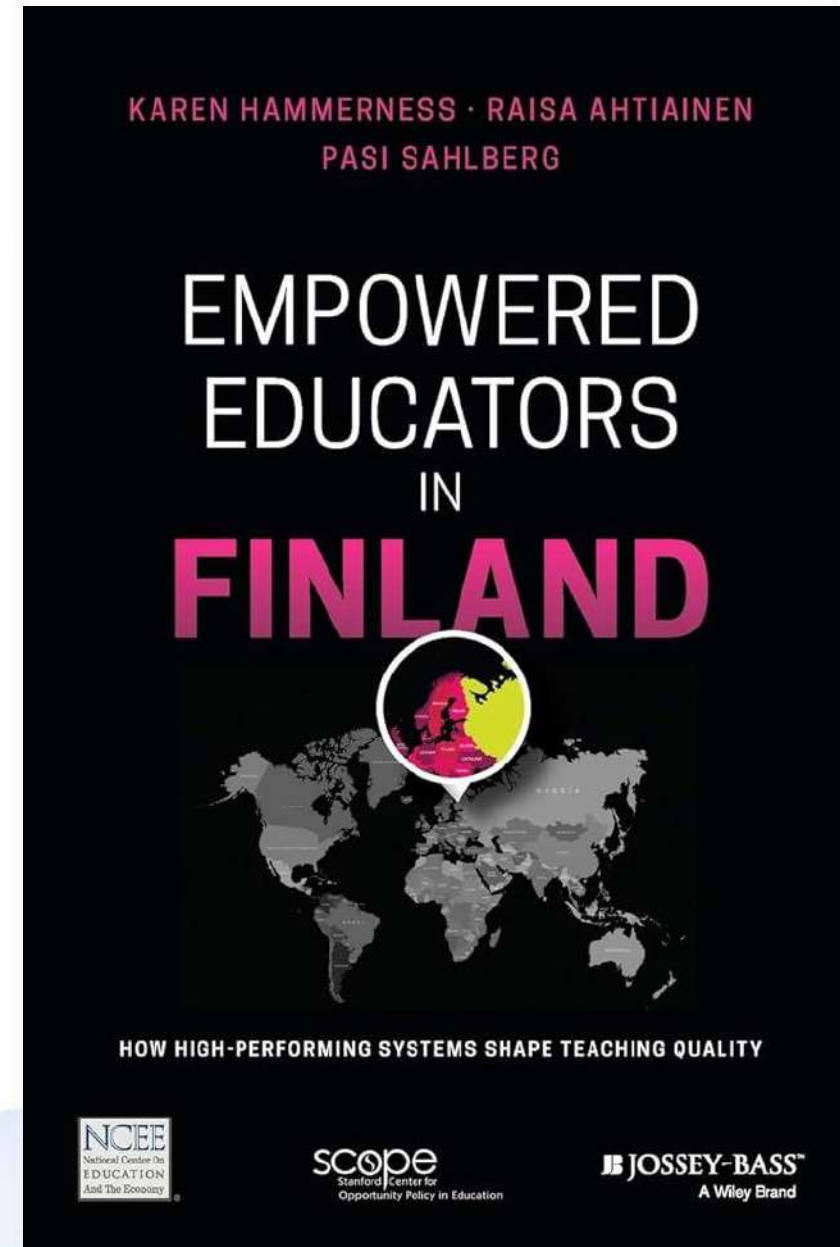
Essential elements of the Finnish education



COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONALISM

“The Finnish Way makes plain that collaboration with teachers, not confrontation, is the path to better results. The evidence is clear—and the road ahead should be, too.”

- Finnish Lessons 3.0



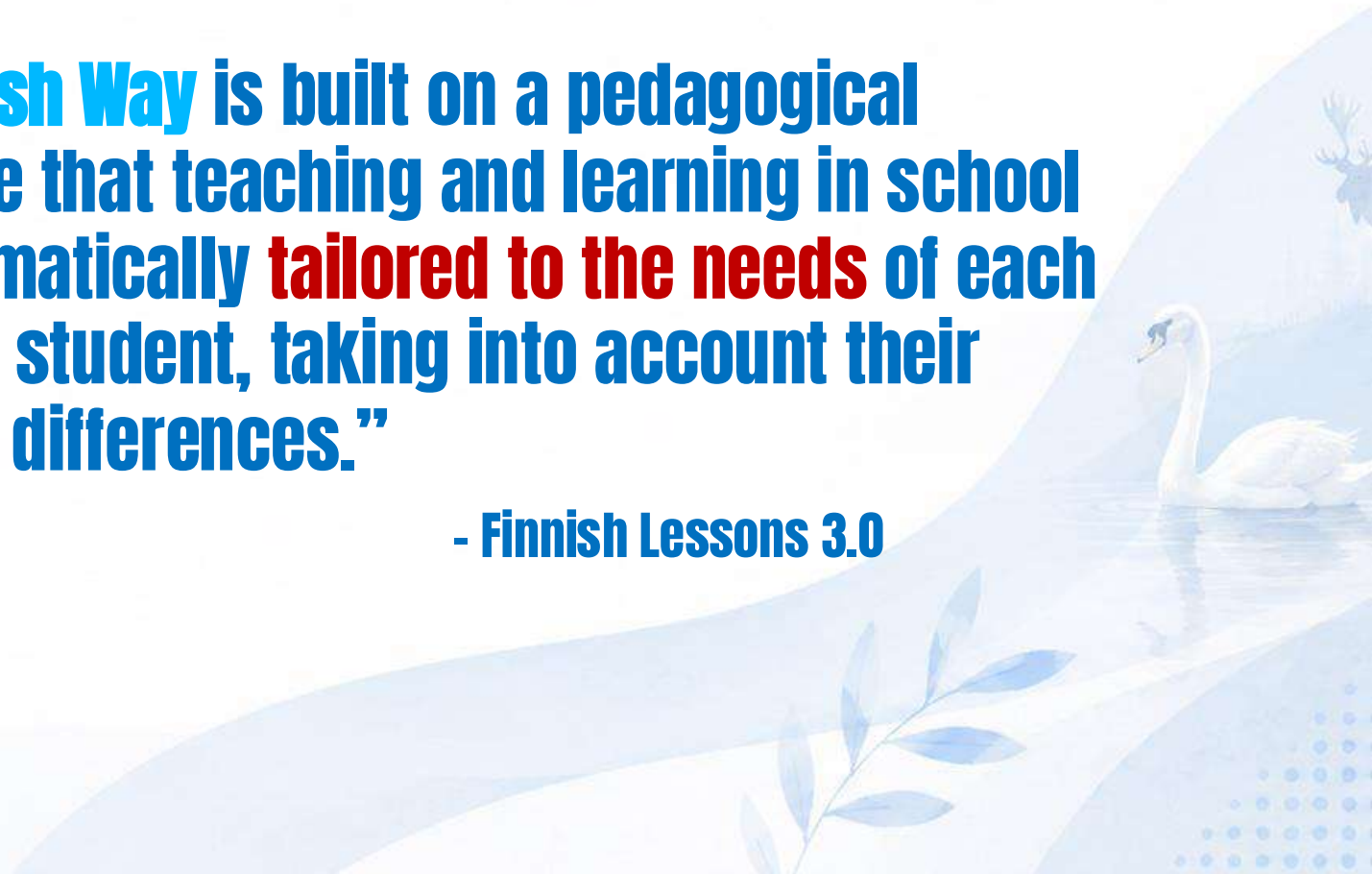


THING

EQUITY AS A POLICY PRIORITY

“The Finnish Way is built on a pedagogical imperative that teaching and learning in school are systematically tailored to the needs of each and every student, taking into account their individual differences.”

- Finnish Lessons 3.0



EDUCATION FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

“The Finnish Way is guided by a clear purpose to educate the whole child, to learn what to do with what you know, and to grow into humanity.”

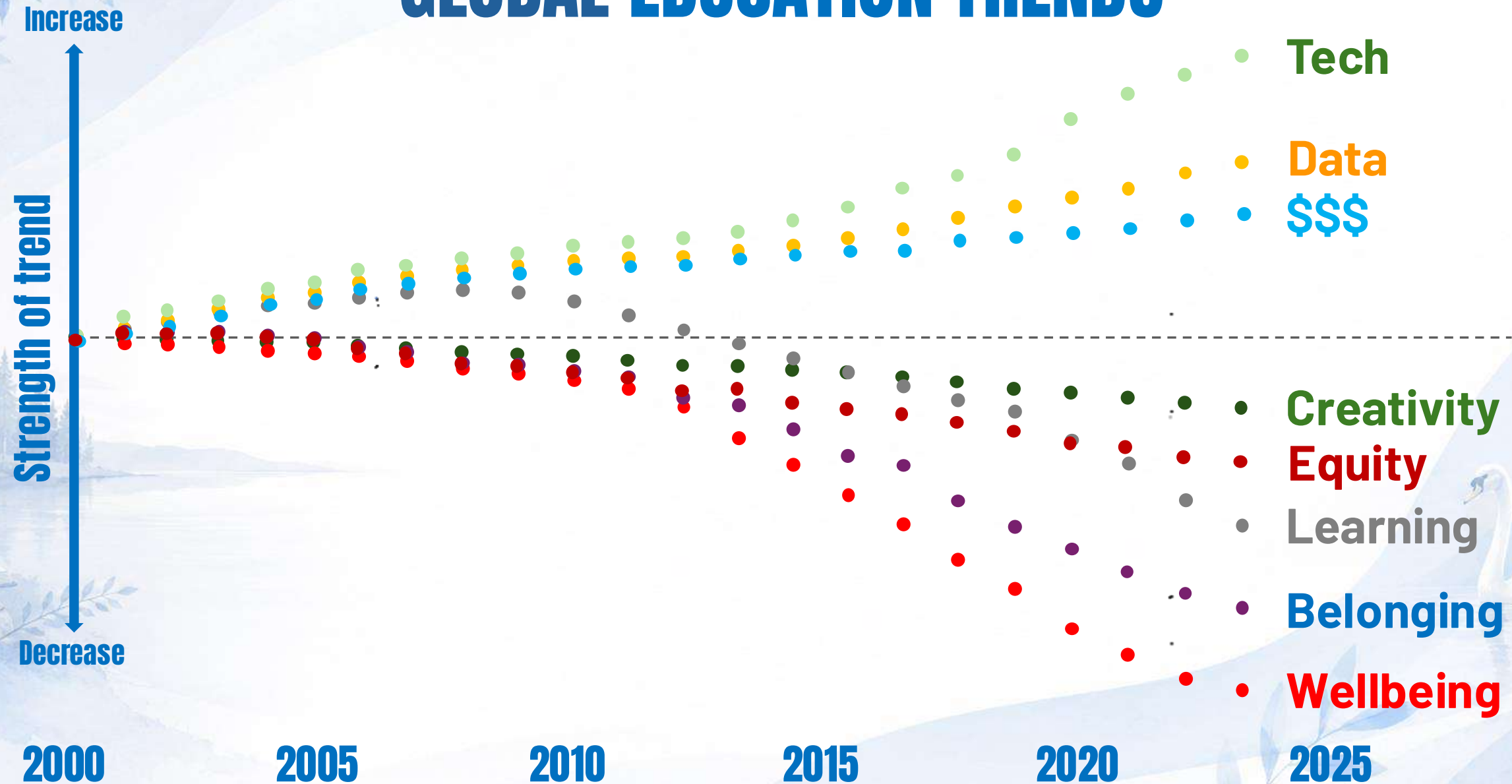
- Finnish Lessons 3.0





**Better future through
a bigger picture**

GLOBAL EDUCATION TRENDS



Sources: OECD Education database; UNESCO GEM database; UNESCO Institute for Statistics; World Bank database.



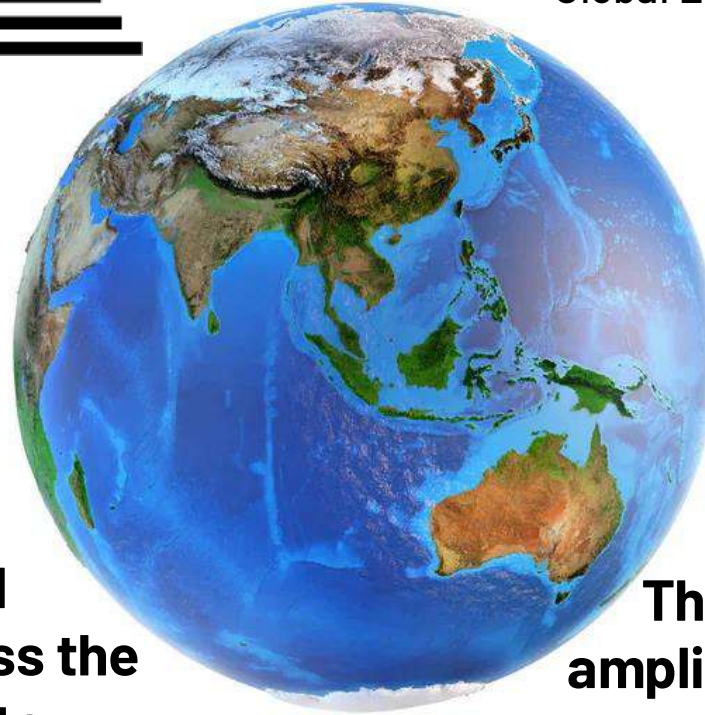
Around the world, about 273 million children and youth were **out of school** in 2024.

– Global Education Monitoring Report 2026



Achievement gaps between students in the most socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged quarters across the OECD countries is equivalent to nearly 5 years of learning.

– PISA 2022



THE WORLD BANK

There is a **global learning crisis** that amplifies educational inequalities that severely hobbles the disadvantaged youth who most need the boost that a good education can offer.

– Human Development Report 2018

The background is a soft, painterly illustration of a landscape. On the left, a calm lake reflects the sky, with a line of evergreen trees on the far shore. In the foreground on the left, there are some leaves and a small branch. On the right, a white swan swims in the water, and a deer is partially visible on the shore behind it. The sky is a pale, hazy blue with some faint clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Thoughts?

AGE OF ACHIEVEMENT

— CONTROL. PERFORMANCE. COMPLIANCE. —



Learning
as duty

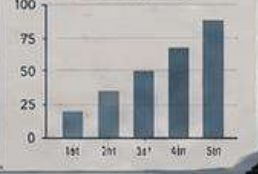
SILENCE
FOCUS
FOLLOW
SUCCEED



REPORT CARD

MATH	B
READING	B-
SCIENCE	C+
WRITING	B

TEST SCORES



CONTROL
AND
PERFORMANCE

The present



Test-driven
success



Academic
model of
intelligence



Compliance
and standards



Dominance of
foundational
literacies

TEST

B-



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TEST SCORES



CONTROL
AND
PERFORMANCE

The present

AGE OF AGENCY

— TRUST. PURPOSE. POSSIBILITY. —



Learning as
a right



Curiosity-driven
success



Holistic model
of intelligence



Adaptability
and creativity



Belonging,
wellbeing and
flourishing

YOUR VOICE
MATTERS

TRUST
AND
AGENCY

WE DESIGN
OUR LEARNING
OUR FUTURE

Lessons for leaders and change agents



SHARED PURPOSE



**Lead with clear
shared purpose and vision**

FROM THE GROUND UP



**Lead with clear
shared purpose and vision**



**Strengthen the base
to intrigue the top**

DEEPER COLLABORATION



**Lead with clear
shared purpose and vision**



**Strengthen the base
to intrigue the top**



**Invest in deeper collaboration
for 'systemness'**

“Sometimes the most powerful thing we can do is trust ourselves enough to **do things differently.”**



Muito obrigado!

