Should American Educational System Follow Finland’s Educational System?

“Education is not learning of the facts, but the training of the mind to think”, said Albert Einstein. America is one of the top countries in the field like technology and army, but not in the education. In the documentary “Where to Invade Next”, Michael Moore, visited the Western countries to take the things the Americans need from them, bring them to United States of America and convince fellow Americans. Among the facts he mentioned, the kids from Finland are ahead the rest of the world including United States of America due to their longer recess time and better standardized tests (Moore). America is one of the top countries in the field like technology and army, but not in the education. Therefore, American education system should follow Finland’s education system because the longer the recess time and the shorter school hour can improve a child’s self-growth and no mandated testing system can develop the children’s passion in learning.

During the recess time, children can communicate each other and play to relax their brains. American Academy of Pediatrics’ Council on School mentioned in a 2013 statement that recess serves as a necessary break from the rigors of concentrated, academic challenges in the classroom. But another equal important fact is that safe and well-supervised recess offers cognitive, social, emotional, and physical benefits that may not be fully appreciated when a decision is made to diminish it. The American Academy of Pediatrics also believes that recess is
a crucial and necessary part of a child’s development and it should not be suppressing for punitive or academic reasons. However, according to a 2007 survey by the Center on Education Policy, when No Child Left Behind (NCLB)law started using in 2001, 44 percent of school districts added time for English/ language arts and math and reduced time from other subjects and recess. While 20 percent of districts had cut recess time and 9 percent of physical education, social studies and science was reduced time in 36 percent and 28 percent of districts respectively. Due to shortened recess time, the average daily loss was 8 minutes per day. Despite this cut, the average NCLB recess time still falls within the national average 24-30 minutes per day for all elementary school. (Recess Reduced, Outsourced ). Thus, the children may not get enough time to go outside, play and make friends due to the short amount of time. The result is that they will grow old with the lack of fitness and communication skill.

Meanwhile in Finland, the recess time is an hour a day and the total school hour including recess is only 4 and half hour (The Liink Project). This means that kids from Finland get more hours to play during recess and after school. By playing, children can learn social skills that testing can’t give. For example, if a child stacks the measuring cups by putting small cups into the larger one, it will help him learn to identify small, medium and large sizes. He will be excising his brain power that having fun at the same time. "One of the great hidden secrets of play is that it turns on genes in the brain. It fosters the maturation of the various centers of the brain that allow us to exert control over attention and to regulate our emotions and to control our behavior.", said Hara Estroff Marano, an editor at large of Psychology Today (Chmelynski). Hence, if we give the children time to play, they will improve not only Physical Quotient (PQ) but also Emotional Quotient (EQ).
If there are a lot of tests throughout the school year, when will the children find their own interest, passion and enthusiasm for their entire lives? Since there are a lot of tests, they have to spend their precious time studying for the standardized tests. According to NCLB, there are mandated annual testing in reading and math and science in grades 3 to 8 and 10 (Bourque). NCLB also required that 100% of proficient students on reading and math tests by 2014, which is impossible for many testing opponents (Hess). “Due to the 100% proficiency test, low-performing students are encouraged to stay home on test days or counseled to quit or be suspended before tests are administered. State education boards are lowering the bar, manipulating exam content or scoring so that tests are easier for students to pass.”, said Amrein Beardsley Audrey, a journalist at International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership (Amrein). Then, the children may think that their goals are to get “A” on the standardized tests. Whenever they get “B” or “C”, they will think themselves stupid and cannot be successful. This may affect the curiosity and interest of the children.

Moreover, the children will get stressed when they worry about their grade on the test, which interfere the process of brain development and learning skill. For young children, the effect of stress will get worse as cortisol (a stress hormone that is released to help our bodies deal with threats) is produced during stress response (the heightened state of arousal that our body goes through when it perceives a threat). It can damage the developing brain and negatively affect the immune system (Better Brains for Babies). On the other hand, in Finland, there are no national tests for students. The first national examination is the matriculation examination after general upper education (Finnish National Agency for Education). The purpose of the assessment in Finland is to improve learning; it is “encouraging and supportive by nature” (Encouraging Assessment and Evaluation). Even though Finish children do not have much experience in tests,
the survey that compares 15-year-olds in different countries in reading, math and science, PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) showed that Finnish student has ranked at or near the top since 2000. Throughout the same period, the PISA performance of the United States has been middling, at best (National Center for Education Statistics). Since Finnish children don’t have to take many tests, they can focus on learning to think while American children are preparing for the tests.

However, Finnish children cannot much keep in touch to technology like American children do. This is because there is roughly one computer per five Finnish students in schools while American students get one for each (National Center for Education Statistics). As one of the application of the technology, children can access the information easily and effectively. Besides, they can also apply the knowledge of the technology to develop the advanced series of modernized technology. Therefore, Finnish children are left behind than American children when compared to technology since the schools don’t provide much.

To sum up, shorten recess time and standardized tests of America keep dragging the children down from their self-growth and development. Thus, it is never too late to rethink about “No Child Left Behind” policy and change what is missing. I believe the reason why American students left behind from Finnish is not because of the children but because of some major flaws of American education system, which restricts the children dreams freely.
Bibliography


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