



Teach Like Finland
33 Simple Strategies for Joyful Classrooms
By Timothy D. Walker

Well-being

Walker chronicles ways in which the Finish people slow down to enjoy living and value the quality of their life in and out of the classroom.

Key take away points that would translate to an American classroom

1. Schedule brain breaks
2. Learn on the move
3. Recharge after school
4. Simplify the space
5. Breathe fresh air
6. Get out into the wild
7. Keep the peace



In my classroom Brain breaks make a huge difference and students have 4 minutes to pass between classes. To build upon this break, I often gather my classes in an open circle at the beginning of each period to talk about something relevant, touch base about goals for the project in the week, and sometimes do a mindfulness breathing exercise. After reading the book, I believe that I should be doing more mindfulness activities at the beginning of class. over the summer I will test out a few apps with timed guided breath exercises and commit myself to doing these short activities with my classes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

Belonging

Walker explains ways in which teachers and students will be happier in the classroom and school environment if everyone feels a “sense of connectedness” (p.57)

Key elements include 1. Recruit a welfare team, 2. Know each child 3. Play with your students
4. Celebrate their learning, 5. Pursue a class dream
6. Banish the bullying, 7. Buddy up



In my classroom:

Building a sense of community in an art room is particularly important because high school students feel a heightened sense of vulnerability when they are making artwork and presenting it to their peers. One of the most successful practices I have for building community is using a formal critique process at the end of major assignments. This celebration is both fun and uplifting. Many students are complementary towards each other no matter what grade or social circle they are outside the classroom, their work is celebrated inside the classroom.

Autonomy

Culturally, Finland leaves more responsibility for the children to handle. Walker argues that in order for students to become responsible problem solvers on their own, teachers should help them practice these skills at an early age and they will rise to the occasion.

Key elements

1. Start with freedom
2. Leave margin
3. Offer choice
4. Plan with your students
5. Make it real
6. Demand responsibility



In my classroom Autonomy comes naturally in an arts classroom where everything is project-based. The students move about the room freely, work at their own pace, get the supplies that they need without asking, and have real choice in leading their own learning. I introduce skills and concepts but they are responsible for coming up with content and personal interests that are developed in their sculpture work. As students are working on independent projects I move about the room to have individual conferences, demonstrate another skill, or help someone that's having trouble problem solving on their own.

Mastery

Through Walker's strategies, he argues ways in which students can master material and understand concepts while still streamlining material and infusing joy

Key point:

1. Teach the essentials
2. Mine the textbook
3. Leverage the tech
4. Bring in the music
5. Coach more
6. Prove the learning
7. Discuss the grades



In my classroom

Students strive towards mastery creating artwork that focuses on sophisticated construction and craftsmanship. *Prove the learning* is perhaps the most important aspect of my classroom. Walker reinforces, as teachers, we want to get to know what are students understand and we want to see how they have come to those understandings,

making their thinking and learning visible. Which is why I have started asking students to verbally tell me what they are doing with the clay as well as show me.



Mind-set

Walker writes “to increase the joy in our classrooms, we teachers need to cultivate an abundance-oriented approach...in which we no longer seek to be better than others, and instead focusing on the best that we can be” (p. 170)

Key strategies

1. Seek flow
2. Have a thicker skin
3. Collaborate over coffee
4. Welcome the experts
5. Vacate on vacation
6. Don't forget joy

In my classroom

I would like to focus on collaborating with colleagues in order to increase joy in my teaching and classroom. Over the next couple of months, I plan on finding a couple of colleagues that would like to plan a new unit or visit my classroom as an expert. Furthermore, my goal for the next school year is to carve out time to chat with peers over coffee to create a collaborative learning space for myself.

References

Walker, T. D. (2017). Teach like Finland: 33 simple strategies for joyful classrooms. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Artwork credit

Hingham High School students
Raku Fire project

