

## Finland Reflections

Paulla Bennett-York Region District School Board

Reflection Summary- While visiting Finland in May of 2010, I had the unique opportunity to observe and engage in their learning environments through the lens of an Information Technology professional. I will admit I was curious to explore their systematic approaches to ICT Education and Digital Literacy.

## Finland Reflections

By Paulla Bennett- York Region District School Board

While visiting Finland in May of 2010, I had the unique opportunity to observe and engage in their learning environments through the lens of an Information Technology professional. I will admit I was curious to explore their systematic approaches to ICT Education and Digital Literacy.

Their strategy to provisioning learning environments where technology was integrated into instruction was and remains quite similar to what we had and have adopted in York Region. Their guiding principles for ICT mirrored our own in that they truly envisioned technology as an enabler for learning and had implemented it into their classrooms in such a manner so as not be a distracter or an add on.

They began their ICT journey in 1998 with an investment in infrastructure and a focus on equipping classrooms with document cameras, SMART boards, ceiling mounted projection devices. They were developing pedagogy and teacher training using collaborative Portals that were really all inclusive digital communities where students, teachers and parents could engage online and learn together.

They were working with the National Education Department and the University of Helsinki to better understand the effective use of technology for teaching and learning and a number of research based projects were underway to better understand the learning impact in school municipalities across Finland.

They were promoting the use of ICT in a multi-dimensional way, a strategy aligned with YRDSB's blended learning thinking. They had employed a digital literacy methodology to ensure students can cope in a hyper complex world and encouraged student voice in how technology could and should be used for their learning.

Some particular elements of Finland's ICT philosophy that particularly resonated with me were their use of technology to support English Language Learning. I had the pleasure of observing a few classrooms where teachers and students were using smart tables and a simple application where Finnish word bubbles would appear on the smart table to learn English. The teacher would say an English word and the students would tap on the associated Finnish word. Student engagement in this learning exercise was substantial and the joy of learning using a game based approach was evident.



Through ongoing collaboration with my Finland friends I know they continue steady on their ICT and Digital Literacy journey and that our learning partnerships continue to prove beneficial in helping to remove some of the technology complexities and establish some simple yet meaningful best practices.

As an IT Professional I place significant value in our opportunities to work and learn together in this digital age.