

Case Study: Peltosaari School, Riihimäki, Finland | 224 students | 5-12 years age range | Class size 26 | Mixed ability

Peltosaari School, Riihimäki, Finland

Finland is often regarded as having one of the leading education systems in the world: performing consistently high in international comparisons and consistently low in numbers of students leaving without qualifications; providing an all-inclusive but highly personalised approach to learning. But these results come about despite sharing many of the challenges facing teachers and learners in other countries. Looking at Peltosaari Primary school in Riihimäki provides an inspiring picture of one successful approach to utilising resources to create successful, engaging, personalised and collaborative learning. They call this “Progressive Inquiry”.

At Peltosaari School, Tanja Pylkkänen’s classroom is set up to encourage group work, with students working in pairs and small groups engrossed in personal inquiry projects. The first impression is of student autonomy and peer support, with students confidently explaining, asking questions and sharing on and offline resources.

Using ActivInspire™ software and other technologies, the learners share writing, photographs, sound files and their own pictures to collaboratively create project reports and stories. It quickly becomes evident though that the teacher’s direction and planning provides a clear structure for the learners’ activities as they confidently progress their Progressive Inquiry work.

Student collaboration

“Progressive Inquiry” is the term used at Peltosaari School to describe a structured approach to personalised learning: project work that provides a detailed and planned process for student-led inquiries. The primary-school students tackle challenging topics of number-bonds and story-telling by collaborating, communicating and sharing ideas – and the structured approach means that the teachers can provide pre-prepared frameworks for the learners, but also respond spontaneously to individual learner’s needs.

Through a question-led approach, learners develop content mastery and critical skills of collaboration, communication and inquiry. The personalised teaching ensures that all students in the class can achieve and quickly become confident in their work.

Teacher structure/role

Behind this confident classroom practice is thorough planning from a professional workforce. All teachers in Finland hold, or are working towards, Masters level qualifications and they are actively encouraged to undertake professional inquiry projects in their classrooms. In doing so, they critically evaluate the resources available to them to support their students, ensuring that all the resources used are focussed around the learning objectives and the needs of the learners. This isn't done alone however. Not only do teachers jointly plan lessons, they also work with Sirpa Arkko – a Promethean trained expert in technologies for learning, who supports them in choosing and using appropriate technologies in the classroom. This expertise means that teachers in the school like Anne Hulkko can receive immediate support as well as encouraging an 'invigorating atmosphere' of enquiry and support within the staffroom.

Anne Hulkko's work shows that when used appropriately, technology can support children to learn effectively, socially and quickly. But Anne Hulkko is keen to stress that technology is only one part of her toolkit. Being able to choose the appropriate resources by planning the 'pedagogical structure' of learning is important, and teachers critically evaluating which resources suit their teaching is an important step in developing powerful learning. One element that the technology has really added, according to Anne Hulkko, is the flexibility to quickly change the resources that she can use. Access to shared resources and multi-media to support her teaching means she can personalise the support she provides to the pupils.

At Peltosaari School, the leadership team started with an understanding of how ideas are shared within their school. Enthusiastic 'early adopters' were encouraged to

Students add voice recordings, pictures and animations to their written stories to provide richer ways of demonstrating their understanding.

experiment with the Interactive Whiteboards in their teaching and to share their ideas and successes with other members of staff. Principal Virve Jämsen said that this approach 'warmed up' other teachers who became interested in how these technologies could be used after seeing and hearing about their uses within similar classroom contexts. Not only has this helped other teachers adopt this technology, more teachers are eager for their chance to develop their own practices using technology.

But beyond developing a culture of enquiry amongst the teachers who want to see how these technologies can be used in their classrooms, there is an important role for providing a supporting framework for teachers to use these new technologies. At Peltosaari school teachers plan their lessons using a 'pedagogic infrastructure'. This approach critically evaluates the way in which technologies, people, teaching strategies and spaces can be best used to support learning. This ensures that teachers are supported to make choices that affect learning, choosing resources and pedagogies to match learning objectives.

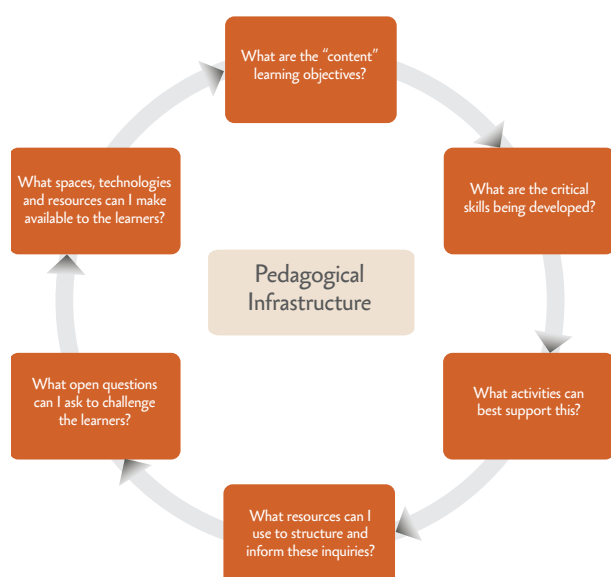
And the benefits? Beyond developing a culture of innovation within the school and a more supportive environment for teachers, Virve Jämsen reports this approach has had an important effect on learning, in terms of results, motivation and focus.

"The results indicate that appropriate teacher support for students' collaborative inquiry efforts appears to include interplay between spontaneity and structure."

It's increased the teaching and multi-channel opportunities to learn in different ways. Motivation for learning has increased as well as students' and teacher's monitoring progress. The investment has definitely been worth it.

Five Key Steps to Starting your own Progressive Inquiry

1. Build your pedagogical infrastructure from the outset, see diagram below.
2. Provide structure to the students' inquiry: tools such as those found on www.Prometheanplanet.com.
3. During planning think about how all resources at your disposal can support the overall learning objectives, including the use of space, digital and non-digital resources, teacher and student support.
4. Ensure students can understand the process of inquiry so that they are structured in their individual and collaborative activities.
5. Provide specific opportunities for students to share, question and evaluate each others' work.



"I love to get immediate feedback and love the feeling that I am in response during the lessons. I can answer and I get the feeling that teacher values my opinion."

Student, Class 2A

"The great benefit is that we can use children's creativity and imagination in learning; when they can make their own projects and let other children see the work they've done. They get immediate feedback and progress with the feedback and ideas they get from each other."

Anne Hulkko

Technology used:

ActivInspire™, ActiView, ActiVote and ActivBoard+2 Interactive Whiteboard

The characteristics of mass education systems, often give the same educational diet to the many and are constructed so that collaborative learning was too time dependent to find a place in the school day. One of the major reasons for this was not just the physical nature of the school and its use of time and resources but the very nature of resources that mitigated against a personalised and collaborative environment.

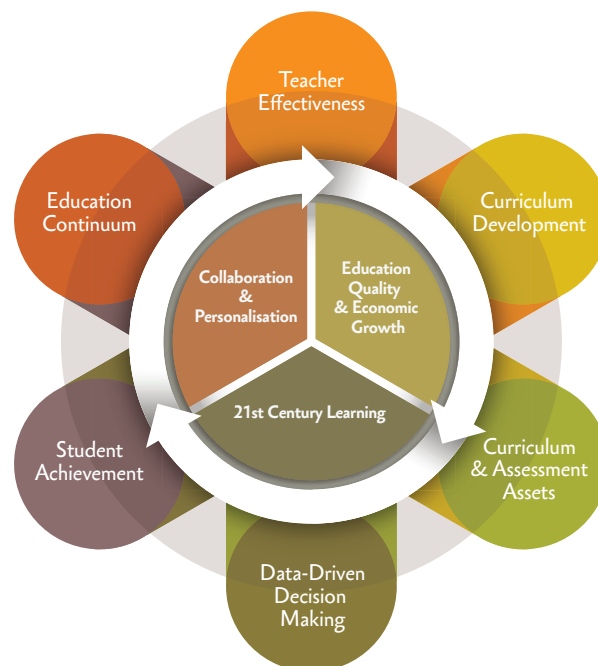
Our technologies changes all of this and enables educators to construct any learning scenario they wish, as you can see in the wonderful case study the limit is now, quite frankly, only limited by one's imagination.

Jim Wynn, Chief Education Officer Promethean

Promethean believes that education is the fuel that drives economic growth and social progress. Effective teaching is the key to successful, collaborative and personalized learning—which in turn creates better prepared students, more prosperous nations, more secure societies, and more engaged global citizens. Promethean’s Education Strategy Group explores and facilitates technology’s role in realizing the promise of more effective educational systems locally and around the world.

Through combining leading-edge research, pedagogical expertise, and policy and practical insights, our approach demonstrates the impact of the long- and short-term return on investment in education technology—a theme central to the realities of Twenty First Century Learning.

The group focuses its efforts around six Educational Themes that are key to achieving global education success:



Teacher Effectiveness, which examines how technology can help teachers in every aspect of their work;

Curriculum Development, which surveys the way the face of learning is changing, especially in critical areas such as science, technology and math;

Curriculum Architectures, which considers how technology can enable shifting curricula to be linked with learning assessment;

Data Driven Decision Making, which pursues insights into how educators can use data to improve individual and system-wide performance;

Student Achievement, which studies how technology best facilitates personalization and collaboration in teacher/student and student/student interactions; and

Education Continuum, which explores how technology supports learning system success throughout schooling and into the workplace.