

**School libraries,  
student research skills,  
student success:  
Observations from Finland**

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# What am I doing here?

- 4 months- January-May 2011
- Helsinki, Oulu, Tampere, Turku, Lieto, Espoo, Mikkeli, Järvenpää...

How do schools in Finland teach information literacy skills and develop library users without always having a school library?

# Why Finland?

- Finns visit the public library 3 times more often than citizens in the U.S.
- About 80% of Finns are regular library users. Average 11 visits per year.
- Average check outs: 19 books, discs or magazines.
- Library web sites register over 46 million visits a year.

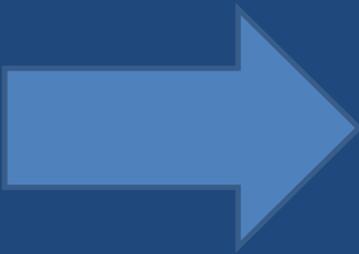
Source:

(<http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Kirjastot/?lang=en> 05 March 2011)

# Goals:

Start to:

- Understand how Finnish schools teach information literacy skills
- Understand the role of school libraries in Finland
- Understand how Finnish citizens become such active library users



Bring back ideas to use in my own work as a practicing teacher librarian and adjunct professor

# Research Approach

**Where?** Schools, school libraries, public libraries, university libraries and municipalities

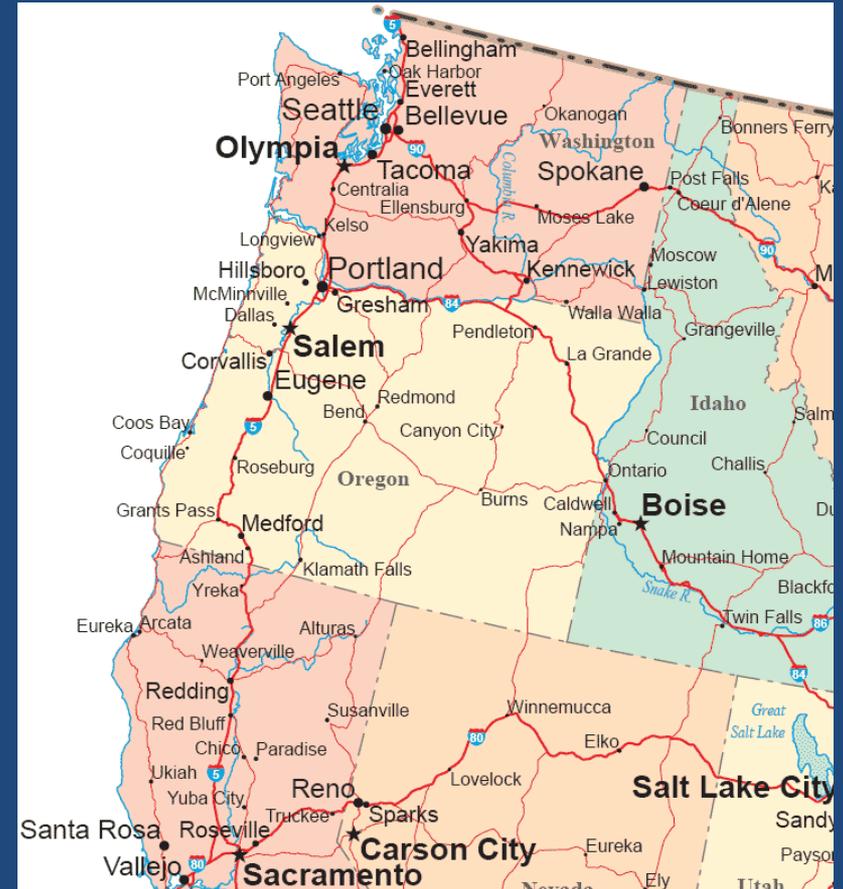
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**Who?** Interviewed school librarians, classroom teachers, principals, students, public librarians, professors, policy makers

A large, light blue downward-pointing arrow indicating the flow from the 'Who?' section to the 'How?' section.

**How?** Holistic observations, interviews, context reading

# Where I am from...



# River Ridge High School

## Lacey, Washington



- Grades 9-12
- 1200 students
- 65 teachers
- Suburban high school
- 50% non-white students
- 30% of students attend college immediately after graduation



“to ensure that students and staff are effective users and producers of ideas and information”



### Three essential functions of a school library program

1. Information Technology Instruction
2. Reading Advocacy
3. Information and Resources Management

# School library program at River Ridge High School

## SPACE:

- Physical and cultural center of school
- Always open (hour before, hour after)
- 2 classes

## STAFFING AND FUNCTION

- 1 teacher (with additional school library training), 2 clerical assistants
- Collaboration, instruction, resources, management of ideas and information, mentorship, leadership

## IMPACT ON STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

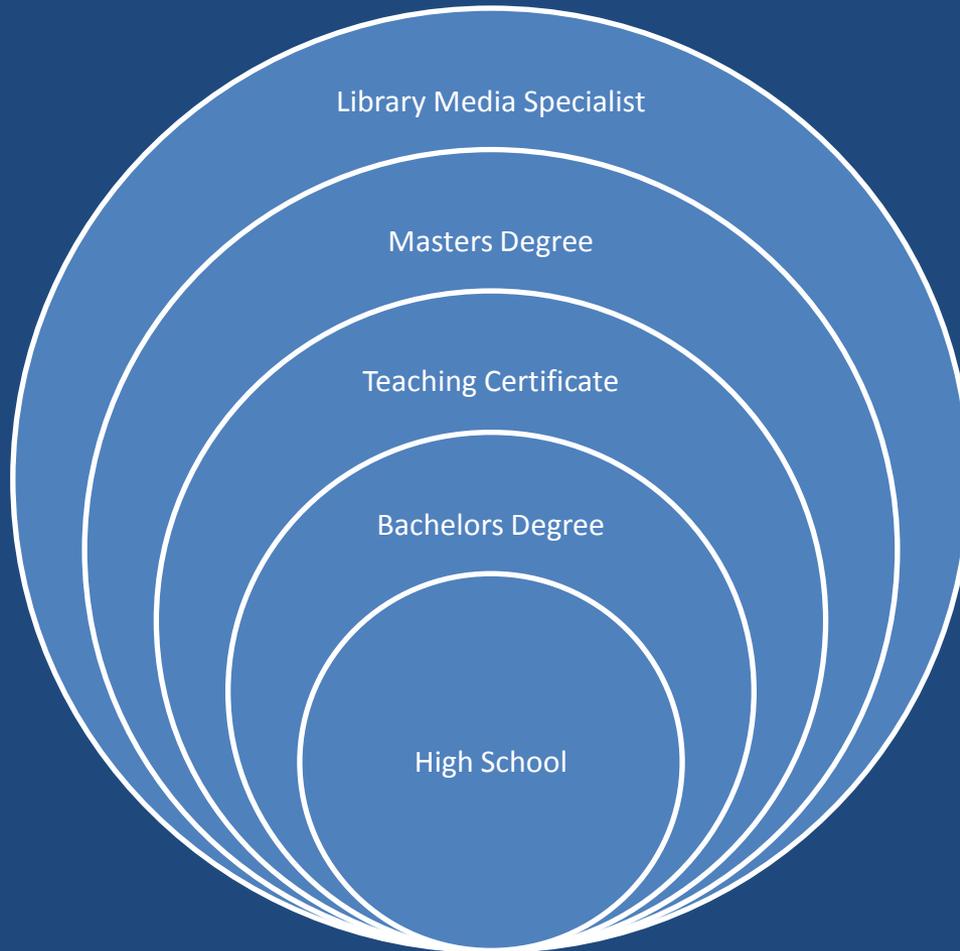
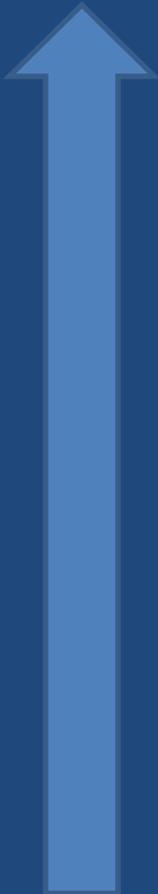
- Planning, designing, delivering lessons
- Student focused collection
- Teach most students each year
- Lighten instructional load for teachers, enrich learning experience for students

## PUBLIC LIBRARY COLLABORATION

- Little to none

# Teacher Librarian Training in Washington State

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# What is a teacher librarian, anyway?

## River Ridge High School Teacher Librarian Work Percentages



# Typical Lessons at RRHS

- How to create quality research questions
- How to create a bibliography and cite your sources
- Strategies for finding and recording information from online and print resources
- Great books just for you!
- How to pick the best resource for your research

# School Library Information and Technology Programs for 21st Century Learning

## LIT program...the new school library

### 1. Information and technology instruction

- Students learn information literacy skills including evaluation and analysis of the **credibility, relevance and currency of information**
- Students learn to be **critical consumers and producers of information**
- Students learn to use **emerging learning technologies** for school and lifelong learning
- Students learn to be **safe, ethical and responsible** digital citizens

# LIT continued

## 2. Reading advocacy

- Students experience a powerful, fashionable and ubiquitous **culture of reading** at school
- Students learn to read for **enjoyment and understanding**
- Students have **access and guidance** to a relevant collection of fiction and non-fiction in a variety of formats

# LIT continued

## 3. Information and resources management

- Students have **open and equitable access** to resources, technology and information
- Students enjoy coming to an **inviting and effective physical and digital** library environment
- Students have **access to resources** in a variety of formats that support their learning needs and interests
- Teachers have **access to resources** in a variety of formats that support their teaching needs and interests

# So what?

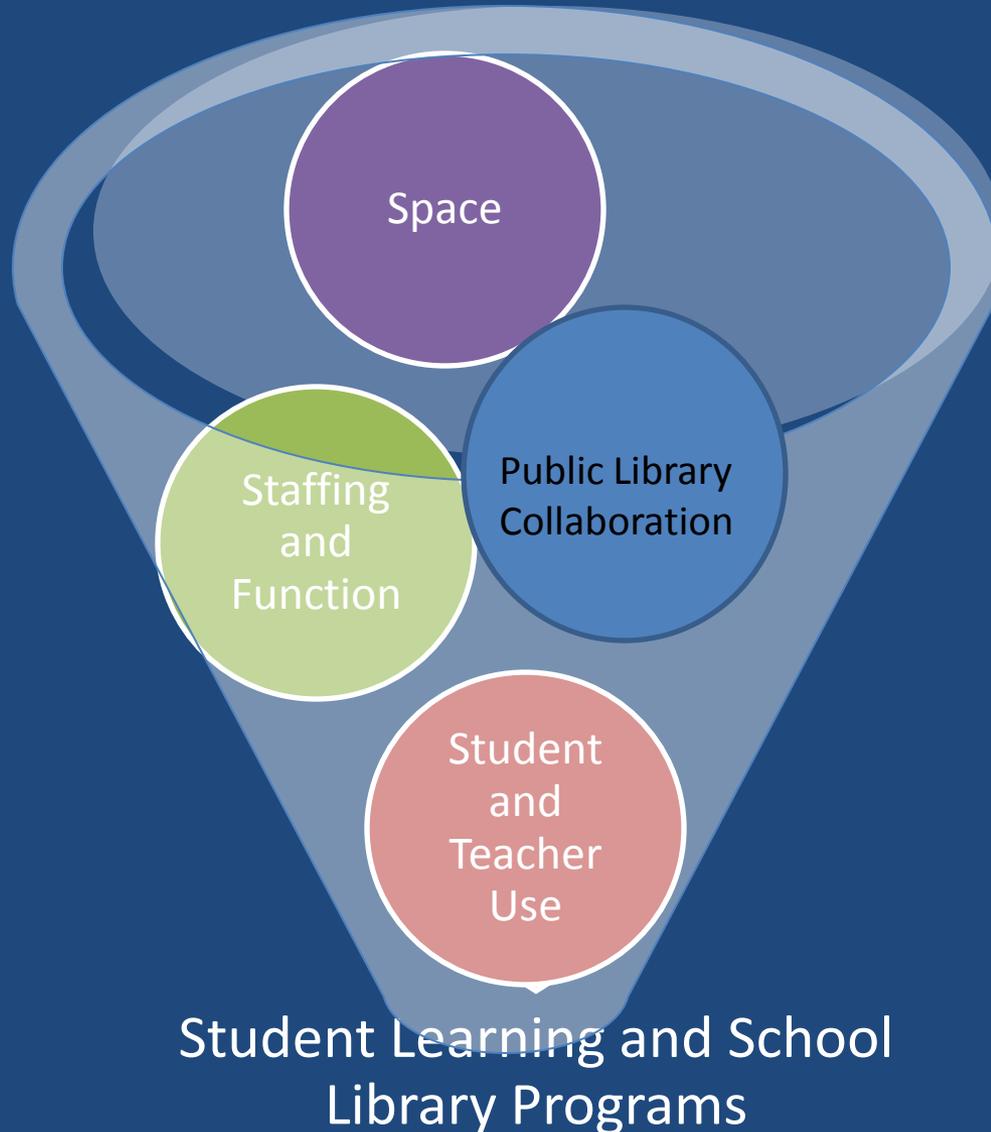


US research shows that teacher librarians make a positive impact on student achievement.

Students report that having a teacher librarian improves their school experience and work.

Teacher librarians fill a wide variety of roles, based on the needs of their staff and students

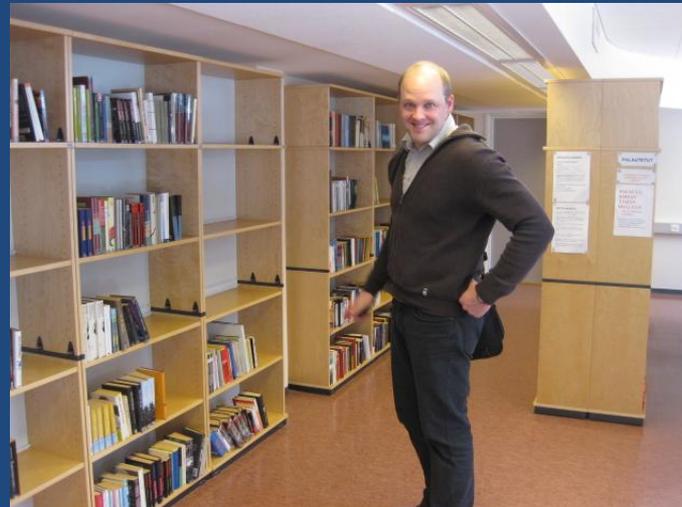
# What's happening in Finland?



# Space- wide range



From small, squeezed in spaces, old materials, empty shelves



With pen and paper technology

# Space- wide range



To brand new, student friendly spaces with lots of technology, resources and space to study, read, work, collaborate, learn



# Space: use



# Space: user friendly



# Why does “Space” matter?

- Book museum vs. library program
- Open or closed
- Specific, appealing or squeezed in a corner
- Student friendly and accessible or not
- Technology and chairs and books or...
- Equity in student use and access

# Staffing and Functions

## Staffing:

Few full-time school librarians in Finland (+/- 10)

Class Teacher: 1-2 hours a week outside of school day.

## Functions:

Duties: help patrons one on one and manage the collection (ie: shelve, process books)

Some librarians have an opportunity to collaborate and teach information seeking skills (outreach)

“Library Secretary” vs. “School Librarian”

# School library staffing models

Teacher works in the library 1-2 hours per week  
Training: Teacher Training-  
extra training varies

Public Librarian  
Training: Masters in  
Library

Full time School Librarian  
Training: Masters in  
Library or 2 year degree in  
Library Studies

Part Time School Librarian  
Training: Masters in  
Library

No supervision or “open  
model” with teacher  
shelving books during  
extra hours

# Delivery models in Finland

## Oulu

- Library Director at Municipality
- Organizes and systematizes libraries; trains staff
- Collaboration with public library: "Library Route" grades 1-2, 3, 5, 7

## Lieto

- Public Library within the school serves 7-9 and Lukio
- Collaborative projects with public branches for primary grades
- Grade 2 and 4 visit (curriculum development)

## Tampere

- Public Librarians organize and run Lukio and grades 7-9
- Public Librarian teaches information literacy with teachers and on own

## Espoo

- Classroom teachers run libraries
- Integrated into everything schools do
- Adopted, systematic plan for teaching IL skills

## Helsinki

- Survey of 13 schools
- Library staff and Department of Education staff working on strengthening collection, space, delivery of skills



# Staffing and Function



Function challenge: Meeting the technological needs of students within the perception of traditional view of school libraries.



Information literacy skills, Reading Diploma, student friendly space



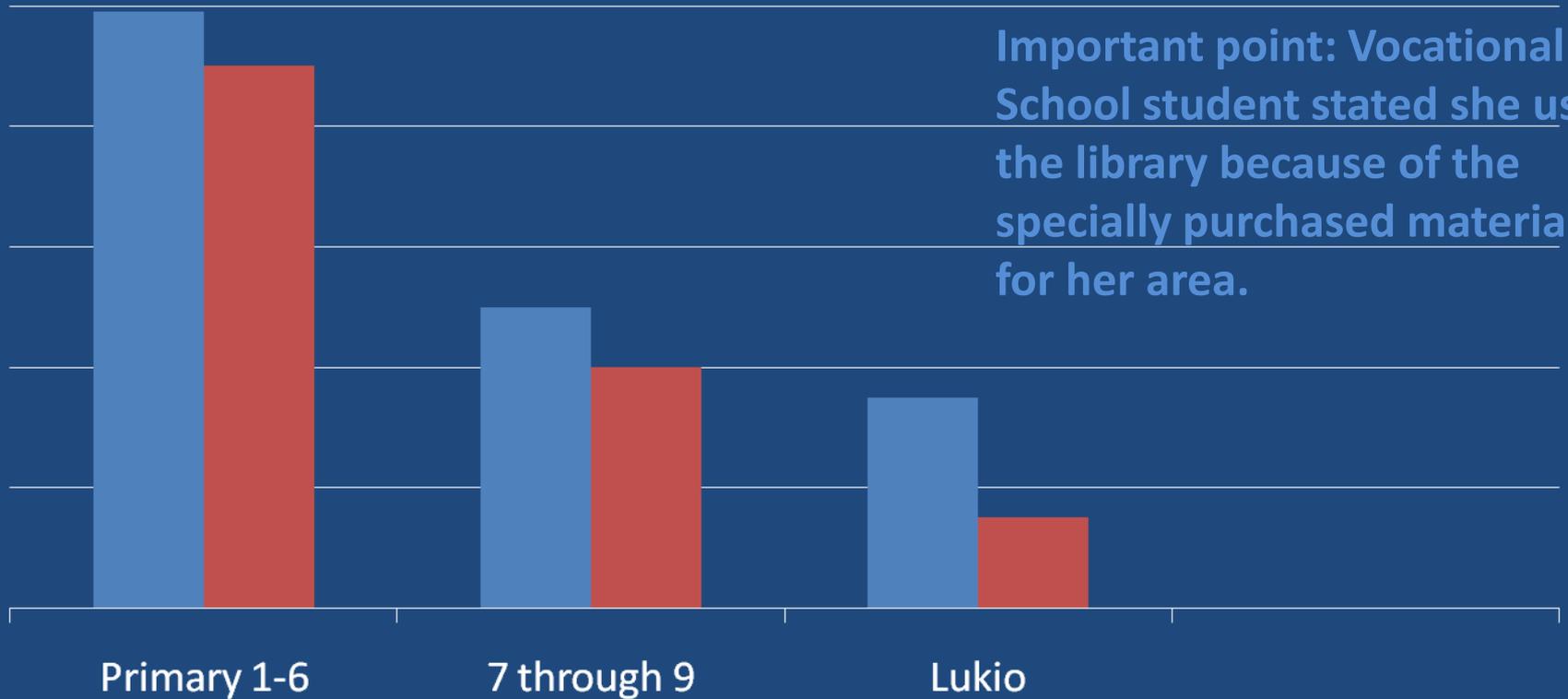
# Why does “Staffing and Function” matter?

- Quickly increasing rate of information: specialist to manage and teach management of information
- Secretary vs. information specialist/teacher
- Open vs. closed: issues of equity
- Technology vs/and books
- Person makes the difference (warehouse vs. library)
- Teachers and school librarians in parallel lives
- Special schools vs. “regular schools”
- Research and national curriculum: Question of “everyone is responsible” vs. one person’s responsibility

# Impact on students and teachers

Blue: schools with school librarian

Red: schools without



Important point: Vocational School student stated she used the library because of the specially purchased materials for her area.

# Impact on students

Students say:

“I use the school library because I can go to the library and get help from Olli.” (lukio student)

“The public library has more books.” (4<sup>th</sup> grade)

“I go to the public library- it is so close to my house.” (8<sup>th</sup> grade student)

“I don't get assigned much research.” (lukio student)

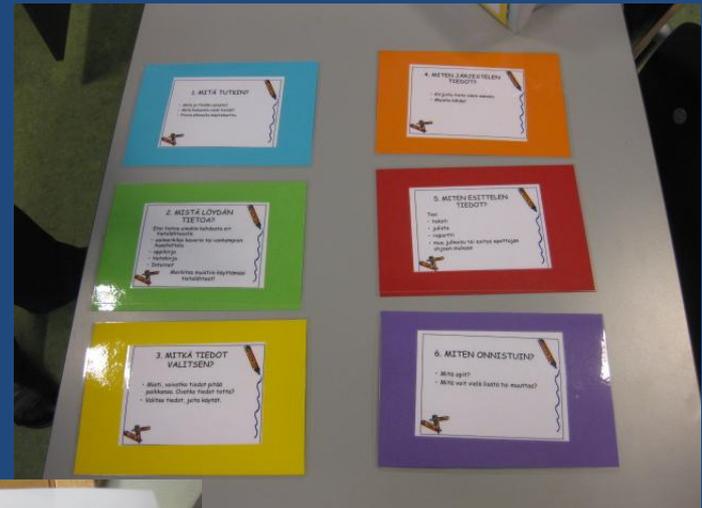
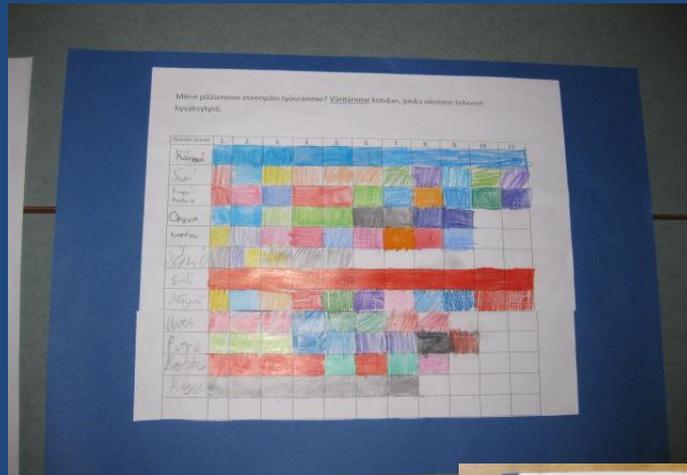
## Students also say...

- “I think school libraries should concentrate on computer stuff, and things that don't exist in the public library.” (lukio student)
- “I usually just start with Wikipedia. I know I need to compare with other sites.” (9<sup>th</sup> grade)
- “The school library is useless. No one uses it.” (9<sup>th</sup> grade)
- “I usually don't have to cite my sources. Just put them in my own words.” (8<sup>th</sup> grade)

# Impact on teachers

- “If I needed books, I would go to her.”
- “I know my students have the skills they need because of her. I don’t have to worry about teaching information seeking skills and that has made my job easier.”
- “Students are not very critical of information on the internet. We don’t have time to teach them how to be critical.”
- “The library is the thing I miss most from my former school.”

# Information Literacy Plans in Action



# How do school libraries impact students and teachers?

- Preparation for active citizenship
- Preparation for future studies and personal needs
- Strengthen lessons
- Additional teacher in classroom and in planning stages
- Responsibility for research skills

# Public Library Collaboration

- Amazing and creative collaborative projects are possible
  - Lieto, Tampere, Helsinki, Oulu
- Kids are great customers..
  - But is there training to prep them for an information saturated future?
- Systematic plan makes a difference
  - Oulu, Lieto, Tampere
- Helps to have a leader who is passionate

# Beyond school

- Public library checkouts incredibly high
  - But...
- University professors and librarians say...
  - Unpredictable skills
  - Generally unprepared
  - Reteaching is necessary

# Finnish “take away”

Collaboration and innovation is important  
(especially in lean budget times.)

Collaboration between school and public libraries is  
strong and systematic in some systems.

Students become public library users early in life

Schools can implement information literacy skill  
plans without a school librarian if there is passion  
from a teacher, leadership from a principal, or a  
desire to be involved from the public library.

# Lingering Questions

Can strong school libraries co-exist with strong public libraries?

Do students learn enough information literacy skills to be successful in research in school, for life?

Is a small public library better for students than a school library center with specially selected materials?

Students and teachers seem to think school libraries, and school librarians are about books. What is the role of technology in school libraries in Finland?

Finnish schools are fundamentally constructivist. Would strong school libraries help support this belief and approach to education?

# Final Thoughts

- “School libraries might be the secret weapon in renewing the pedagogy in Finnish schools.”
  - Finnish PhD candidate in Library and Information studies

# Thanks to...

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