



# Manitoba Association of Multi-age Educators

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in affiliation with



## A Steller Professional Development Opportunity

By Charlene Sacher

MTS PD Conference Co-Chair

Have you ever gone to a PD only to walk out completely changed? Recently I was fortunately enough to attend the Living on the Edge Simulation that is offered by United Way. Walking out I had a new-found understanding of the complexity of many of our students and families in our community. After hearing from so many other participants that they had an amazing experience at this PD we decided to take the leap to book United Way for our large group session for the 2020 MAME MTS PD Day conference. This session will be offered in both the morning and the afternoon to give attendees the best opportunity to take part in this interactive simulation.

Living on the Edge: Taking a Look at Poverty is a unique experience designed to provide a glimpse into what it might be like to live on a low income while trying to survive from month to month. Participants are placed into households, each with a unique story. Participants will have to perform day-to-day tasks and learn about the struggles these households face each day. Living on the Edge is an eye-opening experience that allows those involved to gain insight into the complexity of poverty in our community.

United Way Winnipeg is working to create opportunities for a better life for everyone by engaging Winnipeggers from all walks of life, and inspiring action to help build a better community. United Way supports independent strategies, partnerships and programs in almost every corner of our city that are helping kids be all they can be, moving people from poverty to possibility, and encouraging healthy people and strong communities. United Way places emphasis on addressing the underlying causes of social problems and works to effect long-term changes that can be sustained over time.

Go to our Facebook or Twitter page to answer the question: What PD have you gone to that has changed your teaching?

## **LESSONS FROM FINLAND**

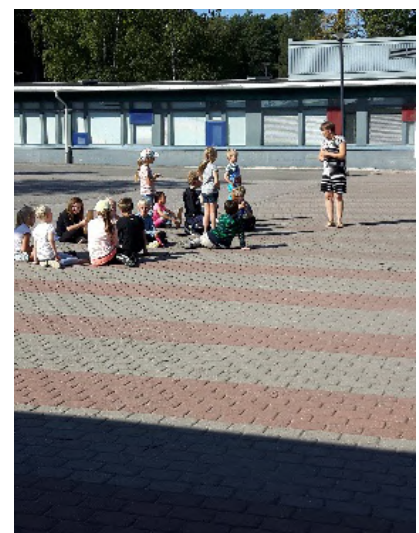
This past August MAME provided an opportunity for teachers to experience Finland's internationally acclaimed, top performing education system, first-hand as part of the Finland Education Inquiry. In this issue we continue to share the participants' observations and understandings from this unique experience.

### **We Couldn't Be More the Same, and Yet We Couldn't Be More Different: 2019 Inquiry Excursion to Finland**

by Anna Lerner

The MAME's inquiry excursion to Finland was an amazing learning experience that allowed me to make connections with what we, Canadian educators, practice and value in our schools. I had an opportunity to interview several Finnish teachers (classroom teachers and subject teachers) to hear about their classroom experiences and gain their professional insights. The importance of focusing on a child's aptitude, interests and curiosity was the key refrain in those conversations.

During our short stay in Finland, we visited Arabianhelmi day care centre in Helsinki, Mattlidens skola, a comprehensive school (grades 1 – 9), and Sepon koulu, a primary school (grades 1 – 6), in Espoo. Everywhere I went, I found a sense of calm and purpose. When I mentioned that to one of the Finnish teachers, she cited the Finnish curriculum framework: "...the learning is supported to be a peaceful and friendly working atmosphere." (Finnish National Board of Education, 2017) And then she added: "By offering a calm learning environment to your students, you have a huge impact on their learning and your own well-being."



As I look at the photographs I took in Finland, the memories immediately wash over me. The first thing that you notice, as you step into the school building, is that learning is happening everywhere, not just in the classroom but in school hallways, the cafeteria, playground, and even a coatroom at the day care centre. It seems as if every activity is choreographed and practiced, especially transitions between the activities such as entering the building after recess and putting the cutlery, dishes, and food trays away after lunch.

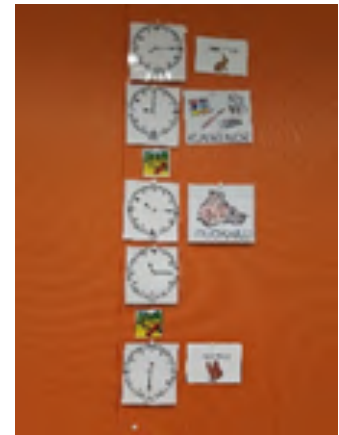
The second thing that one sees is a beehive atmosphere. The children are in their element and know exactly what to do. The teacher circulates around the classroom, often stopping to have a quick chat with her students. Learning occurs in different ways and at a different pace: students might work independently, or beside each other, or collaboratively in small groups.

The third thing that is apparent is the fact that there are very few decorations on the walls in the classroom. Finnish teachers believe that a highly decorated classroom might sidetrack young students from focusing on their learning.



Finland's teachers do many interesting things that impact children's learning and cultivate a sense of curiosity in their students; outdoor education, movement breaks in a classroom, and multidisciplinary units are just some of them. I couldn't help but notice that many of the school practices, I saw or heard about, could be also found throughout Canada. For example, "Finnish Schools on the Move", a national programme supporting structured and unstructured physical activities in Finnish schools, in many ways resembles "So Active So Healthy" initiative which Margaret Park School started several years ago.

Before the trip, I had read about 15-minute breaks that Finnish students and teachers take after every 45 minutes of instruction.



It was interesting to learn that Finnish schools started to follow a new system which increases time-on task in the classroom setting and reduces the number of breaks throughout the school day. In similar fashion, several years ago, Margaret Park School adopted a Balanced School Day schedule which provides two nutrition breaks and three learning blocks, ensuring less interruptions throughout the day.

Every school in Finland has a Student Welfare Team. It includes the school's principal, nurse, social worker, psychologist, and special education teacher and seems to perform the same function as the In-School Learning Support Team in Seven Oaks School Division. At the beginning of a school year, Finnish educators usually do a class profile where they identify academic and social-emotional needs of their students which could be compared to the Faye Brownlie assessment that I complete each fall.



During our short visit, we had many opportunities to study Finland's teaching practices up close, observing Finnish teachers and students in the classroom, on the playground, and in the cafeteria. It is my impression that Finland strategically invests resources in key areas of education focusing on students' well-being. "Well-being and academic achievement seem not to be antagonistic..." writes Adler (2015) "On the contrary, increased well-being raised academic achievement." I believe that Finland has come to the same conclusion years ago. One of the examples is school lunches. In Finland, all students are provided with free, hot nutritious meals at lunch time. Another is a variety of afterschool structured activities. Grade 1 and 2 students enjoy a shortened school day that ends at noon. These students usually stay at school till 4:00 p.m. for afternoon activities and clubs provided by different organizations. Finland has developed a unique network of clubs, sports and arts groups, youth and community organizations which provide after-school activities for students of all ages

(Walker, 2017). When I asked a group of eighth graders at Mattlidens skola what percent of students might be engaged in those activities, the answer was: "Almost everyone." The way I see it, the benefit of these after school activities is that they ultimately teach children to help themselves and become more independent in their learning.

In Finland, from a very young age, children are given a lot of freedom and trust in and outside of school. Students, as young as Grade 1, use knives and hand saws in woodworking class on a regular basis. I was surprised to learn that in Finland there are no school buses as the students are expected to walk to school as early as first grade provided that the school is within a walking distance (2 kilometres).

Unlike in Canada, it is more likely to see a Research Teacher rather than an Educational Assistance in a Finnish classroom. At Sepon koulu, we had the chance to interact with the school administration, classroom teachers, and some of the students from varying ages. We learned that in addition to general support provided by a Research Teacher in the classroom, intensified or special support provided by a Special Education Teacher is another common-place practice in Finnish schools.

The Finnish education system has many similarities to the Canadian system. Both countries, Canada and Finland, place student's well-being at the heart of the curriculum and work toward building high quality and equity in education. At the same time, the Finnish education system has many differences compared to the Seven Oaks School Division in general and Margaret Park School in particular. Some of them would be hardly applicable to our multicultural community (I have found that Finland has a very homogeneous society), others are definitely worth trying. I have taken a lot away from this inquiry excursion and have already started implementing some of their ideas and practices in my classroom with much success.

#### References

Adler, A. (2015). Gross national happiness and positive education in Bhutan. *IPEN Blog*. Retrieved October 25, 2018, from <https://worldhappiness.com/2018/01/02/gross-national-happiness-and-positive-education-in-bhutan/>

Walker, T. (2017). *Teach Like Finland*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company

## Teacher Mindset

by Verna Bridges

Recently there has been a focus in education on an idea that the mindset of a student can help or hinder their learning. As educators many of us have taken a step toward helping children understand that they can learn, that they will figure out how to do something, and that every time they make a mistake, they are another step closer to success. We want children to be joyful, have a sense of belonging, have autonomy and move toward mastery. Having a growth mindset helps students move toward these goals. Understanding that they can be in charge of their learning makes them happy. But what about the teacher's mindset? Do teachers feel joy in their work? Do they understand that even as a professional, there is room to grow?

In Timothy Walker's book, *Teach Like Finland*, he talks about the importance of having an "abundance-oriented" approach in our classrooms. That is, having a positive approach to our teaching and seeking to be the best we can be. According to Walker, there are six strategies to help teachers develop this mindset.

The first strategy is to seek flow. Flow is the state where your mind is occupied with the task you are doing, you are working efficiently and filled with positive emotions, you feel that you are doing your best. Having a non-competitive culture between teachers, and also students, can help to achieve flow. We want to cultivate a mindset that everyone can do their best work, free of comparisons.

The second strategy is to have a thicker skin. This idea comes from the fact that teachers often feel that they need to please so many people, parents, students, and colleagues, that they agree to things to appease people. Teachers need to, be more confident in their expertise as a teacher, develop resiliency, and not take things personally.

The third strategy is to collaborate over coffee. I have been very lucky in my teaching career to have had colleagues that are always seeking ways to support students and often this happens in front of the microwave in the staff lunchroom. According to Walker, collaboration is not a luxury, but a necessity to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Having a mindset that collaboration makes you a better teacher brings more joy to you and your classroom.

The fourth strategy is to welcome experts into our classrooms to provide great learning opportunities. The experts may be lurking within our own school building. Perhaps another teacher who is an astronomy fanatic or an educational assistant who loves to paint can bring joy to the students and the classroom because of their passion for the topic. Don't overlook the expertise of students. Often, they have skills that other students need and giving students some ownership in teaching brings joy to the classroom.

The fifth strategy is to vacate on vacation. While talking to teachers in Finland it became very apparent that their work hours were monitored carefully and that they could not spend too much time teaching and preparing lessons. They guarded their personal time well and being refreshed and recharged, perhaps, brought more joy to their classrooms. A teacher's wellbeing has an effect on the students and classroom, so it is important to take the opportunity to vacate on your vacation.

The sixth strategy is to bring more joy to the classroom. According to Walker, the 2016 curriculum for comprehensive schools "prioritized joy as a learning concept". Being part of a classroom where children and teachers are happy and have a sense of belonging and joy, helps to raise academic achievement.



As a teacher we want students to leave our classrooms knowing that they are important, they are successful, and they can make a difference in this world. The mindset of a teacher establishes the culture in the classroom. It is important to work toward a culture of joyfulness and being the best we can be.

## BBC Dance Mat

By: Julie Ford

In this age of laptops and computing devices, there is less dependency on writing with pen and paper. While learning to write is still a necessary skill for students to have, I believe we should also be taking the opportunity to teach students how to correctly touch type on a computer. According to the folks at Read and Spell (<https://www.readandspell.com/touch-typing-benefits>), experts believe touch typing can be learned by children as young as 6 or 7 years of age depending on whether their hands fit on the keyboard comfortably.



As most students do not get formal teaching for touch typing, they turn into hunt-and-peck typers. This is a slower process for developing their thoughts through the medium of technology. With touch typing there is muscle memory involved as the students gain proficiency. As more proficiency with touch typing is gained there is less thinking required for the actual typing, which frees students up to think through their wording and the flow of what they are writing.

A free website which I enjoy for teaching the students to touch type is Dance Mat Typing, hosted by the BBC. The website link is <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zf2f9j6/articles/z3c6tfr>.



The website has four levels to play, with each level divided into three stages. Each stage within the levels builds upon the previous stage. At the end of each stage there are animated characters that give positive feedback. Throughout the stages and levels the various animated characters explain to the students what they need to do. Thus, if a student is not strong in reading they can still learn to type. This is further enhanced with colours on the letters as displayed on the screen. The further you progress, the more the student sees how the colours match to the specific finger that should be used to press the key.



The game is designed to be pressure free. There is no need for students to rush through the lessons. The primary goal is to be able to do the practice rounds with the muscle memory the student develops. The game encourages students to not look at the keyboard which builds the necessary muscle memory. The first lesson teaches the home keys which are the foundation for building correct touch typing. The game does not get into teaching students the numbers on the keyboards but as the goal is to train them to be good touch typers for writing, this is not much of a drawback in my opinion. You will need headphones or speakers to enjoy the song and dance in each game. At the end of each level you can test your typing speed and accuracy. I find even older students and adults enjoy the website. I have tried this with my own family and they enjoy it thoroughly and so I encourage you to try it out.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Your MAME group has professional development funds available for our members to use. Simply go to our website and apply under PD Funding. You are eligible for up to \$300.00 to attend professional development opportunities.

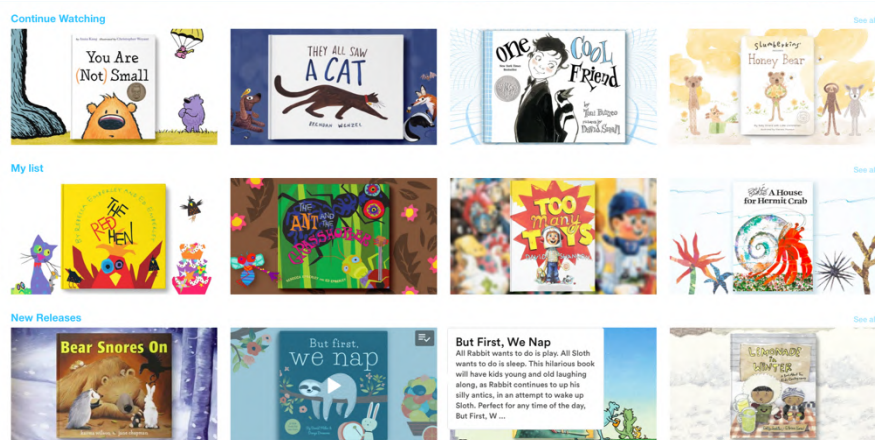
Visit [www.multiagemanitoba.org](http://www.multiagemanitoba.org) to complete your application.

## Vooks

By: Lisa McAvoy

There is no question that Read alouds are an essential part of any early years classroom. I love reading great books with my Kindergarten students. Another way I like to bring books into the classroom is through video stories. My students enjoy the animated pictures and hearing different voices telling the story and who hasn't needed a few minutes while their students are engaged to complete a task or two. Many teachers are familiar with the website *Tumblebooks* which offers a huge library of stories in video format, narrated with text on screen and animated pictures. Thanks to a recommendation from a colleague I discovered Vooks. Vooks describes itself as the first streaming service for animated storybooks aimed at children 2-8 years old. Vooks can be accessed on the web, or as an app downloadable to iPhones, iPads, Apple TV, Android devices and Smart TVs.

Vooks really is best described as *Netflix* for children's books. The browsing interface is virtually identical to streaming services like *Netflix* and is easy to navigate. Books are displayed in categories such as New Releases, Popular Titles, Seasonal, and by themes like Friendship, and Be Brave. You can even add books to the "My List" category just as you would with movies on *Netflix*. There is also a continue watching feature to pick up a book where you left off.

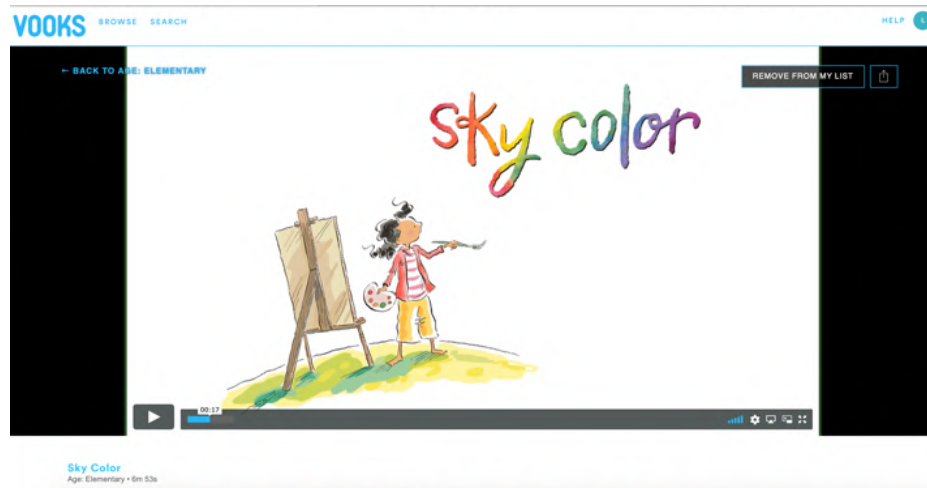


The video interface also looks just like a streaming video. It is easy to pause, play and navigate through a book using the progress bar. While browsing titles on the web you can read a quick summary of each book by hovering your mouse over the cover picture and I love that the video's runtime is displayed in the corner when browsing. This is perfect when you want to make sure you can finish the book in the extra few minutes you may have before recess or Phys. Ed.

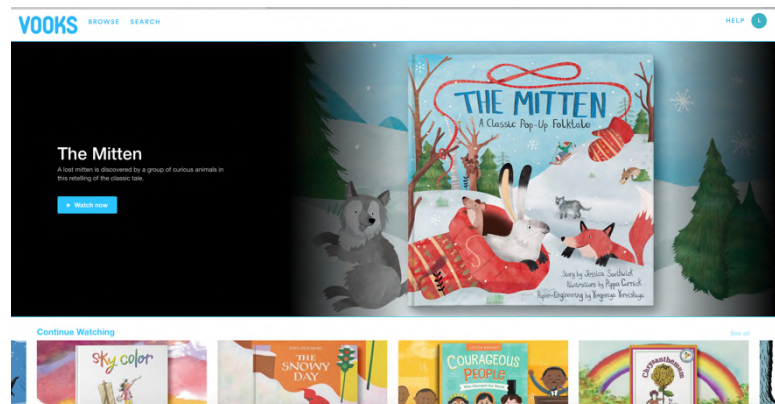
The stories have quality narration, including famous voices such as those of actors John Lithgow and Meryl Streep, as well as different voice actors for the story's characters. The stories are fully animated and the animations are dynamic and engaging. The text is displayed on screen with the words highlighted as they are read.



While very similar to *Tumblebooks* I find the sound quality, narration and animation to be superior to that of *Tumblebook* videos. My students are very engaged when watching a Vooks video and they remember their favourite books and request them over and over.















While the Vooks library is not nearly as large as *Tumblebooks* they are adding new titles each month and they send updates by email when new books are added to the library. You can currently find classic titles like *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, *Chrysanthemum*, and *Where the Wild Things Are*, as well as newer selections like *Sacredly Squirrel* and *They All Saw A Cat*.

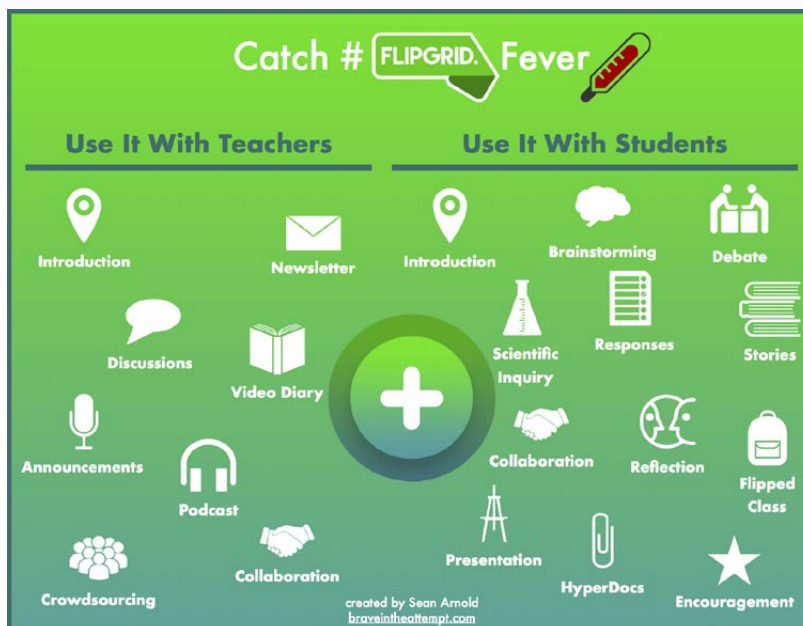


Vooks also offers teacher resources for many of their titles in the form of downloadable PDFs that include extension activities, vocabulary cards, discussion questions, writing or drawing prompts as well as talking points that can be sent home to encourage discussions at home.

The one downside is this is a paid service. Vooks offers a subscription fee of \$6.49 a month or a yearly subscription for \$64.99. However, here is the best part, Vooks is currently offering **1 year free to teachers!** Be sure to sign up soon before this offer ends.

Have you tried **FLIPGRID** yet? It's an easy way for students to record their thoughts, answer questions, or even show you what they know. You can even give them feed back!

Add New Grid		3 Grids		Search Grids	
	Name	Flip Code	Activity	Last Updated	
	Welcome to Team A... School Email	<a href="#">young6257</a>	5 Topics 89 Videos	Oct 17, 2019	  
	Easter Egg Hunt School Email	<a href="#">t8g3wf7</a>	10 Topics 65 Videos	Apr 17, 2019	  
	Lit Circles School Email	<a href="#">tmfplo3</a>	3 Topics 21 Videos	Apr 11, 2019	  



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### Submit an Article to Our Newsletter

This newsletter is created by our membership for our membership and we would love to hear from more of our members. Is there something exciting happening in your classroom or school? Do you have a teaching experience or thoughts on multi-age education that you would like to share? Please do! You can email your submissions including images any time to [lisa.mcavoy@lrsd.net](mailto:lisa.mcavoy@lrsd.net)

### Special Project Grants

Is there a special project that your school would like to undertake or participate in?

MAME members can apply for funding of up to \$1000 for Special Projects.

Visit [www.multiagemanitoba.org](http://www.multiagemanitoba.org) to complete your application.

### The MAME Library

MAME has been accumulating resources that are relevant to multi-age educators. These materials are available for loan to our members. To view a list of titles, go to our website, [www.multiagemanitoba.org](http://www.multiagemanitoba.org) and click on the Lending Library tab. To borrow MAME resources, please contact Charlene Sacher at: [charlene.sacher@gmail.com](mailto:charlene.sacher@gmail.com)