

Why Do U.S. Schools Focus So Much on Self-Esteem?

When it comes to education, the U.S. system isn't the one countries look to as a model to emulate. At least they shouldn't, considering that the [U.S. places](#) 17th in reading, 21st in science, and 26th in math in international matchups.

But according to [The Atlantic](#), there is one country that is doing well in international education line-ups that most experts overlook. That country is Estonia. Surprisingly, Estonia even ranks higher than Finland, the nation that western countries have fawned over in regards to its education system in recent years.

So what sets Estonia apart as an international education leader?

The way *The Atlantic* frames it, Estonia's commitment to equity is the main reason. But a few hints dropped at the end of the article suggest that something else may be in play.

Washington education official Marc Tucker explains:

“‘What [we] saw in Estonia was not a new education system, it was an old one,’ Tucker said. ‘By every account they did not change the system after the [Berlin] wall came down.... It’s hardly surprising they continued to get great results.’”

Some of the signs of this old education system? Drilling lessons. Learning facts. Teacher-directed, rather than student-centered classrooms.

Ironically, these are all methods of instruction which the U.S. has scorned in recent years: We can't drill lessons because that will kill all interest in learning.

Learn facts? Why, that would diminish creative thinking!

And heaven forbid we have a sage on the stage filling children's minds with important information. They're better off finding their own way and collaborating with the wisdom of their peers.

In essence, it seems that the Estonian education system has chosen to focus on implementing knowledge in its students, while the American system has focused instead on fostering self-esteem, or as C.S. Lewis once [famously put it](#), the concept of "I'm as good as you." Lewis predicted that such an attitude would eventually lead to the abolishment of education.

Americans have long tried the creative, self-affirming approach to education.

Is it possible that America's best path to digging itself out of its educational hole would be to re-examine the knowledge-building educational methods of the past which countries like Estonia are still using with success?



Image Credit: Chapendra bit.ly/1eBd9Ks