# Transcript

## Thought Leadership Series: Pasi Sahlberg on Leadership Imperatives and Student Equity

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**KATE MORRIS:**

... on a regular basis. I also am really interested in the paper because it really shines a light on a really hotly discussed topic, in schools, beyond schools, in families, at the footy ground, down at the supermarket, at the local bar, around what is the best education for our young people. And towards the end of the paper it presents a proposition around "mission possible, fix inequalities".

And on that note, I'd like to hand over to Pasi to talk to us about his perspectives and to really test our thinking to that end. I'd also like to welcome everyone and the acknowledgment of country, pay our respects to elders, past, present and emerging and custodians of the land who are with us today. Thanks, Pasi. Over to you.

**PASI SAHLBERG:**

Okay. Thank you very much, Kate. Thank you so much. It's wonderful to have so many people from the education state Victoria and I'm very sad to hear and read about the situation that is happening right now there with the COVID pandemic. I understand that it's particularly difficult for teachers and parents as well in times like this and I wish that everything will be getting better quickly and that this whole country will stay healthy and safe within this very difficult times.

I was invited to talk to you about a thing that is a very important, an increasingly important issue and that issue that has actually become more and more clear during this COVID-19 pandemic and it's the equity of education and that's one reason why I almost two years ago decided to move from Helsinki and come down here to live in Sydney and work at the UNSW, where a big part of my work is really focusing on this question of equity in Australian education or globally, and of course many of these things that I'm going to tell you within the next 40 minutes or so is very much influenced on my experience, past experience, in Finland, where I worked as a mathematics and science teacher for many years and I trained teachers at the university there and then spent a good part of my career in the Department of Education, or Ministry of Education as we call it in Helsinki. So I'm looking at many of these things through this experience and also as a researcher and a former teacher and policy maker as well.

You know, one thing I want to tell you, maybe a couple of things before we move on. One is that my colleagues and friends overseas, many of them in Finland but also in the United States and Canada and all around Europe, they often ask me after this time I spend now here in Australia what do I think about the school education system here in Australia. It took a while for me to really kind of establish an opinion that would be based on a better, deeper understanding what's happening here, but now I have started to reply to these questions in something like this, that here in Australia we have the best - one of the best education systems in the world, but it's not for all the children, and I'm saying this because many of the schools I've seen in Victoria and here, in Tasmania, and I've been in all the territories and states in this wonderful country and I've seen beautiful schools, absolutely fantastic places for children to learn, world-class education, amazing principals and very committed teachers all around, but the big difference that we have here in Australia compared to some other countries like Finland, for example, is that these places are not spread evenly across the country.

So it depends still where you live here whether you get a good education. It depends a lot what your parents do, what type of education or situation they have economically, and that will determine still much more than, for example, back home in Finland what type of education you will get. So that's why we call this a mission possible because this situation we have here is created by the human beings and because it is, we can also, the human beings, we can do it away if we want to do it. That's why we call it a mission possible and I have a very strong view that we can change the education here for better in Australia if we want to. And it's not going to be even very complicated. It's just a matter of changing the kind of mindset how we see things and then start to do those things.

That's why this little policy brief that Kate mentioned in the beginning that I invite all of you to read and share offers different things for different people to do because this equity - if we want to fix the equity or inequalities here in Australia in education, it takes the whole village, it takes all of us to do our share, including children and young people, and that's why it's possible. So then the second quick notion is that none of us should think that we can fix these inequities or inequalities here in Australia through schools only. So I want to make it very clear that this is not something that you as a principal or leader can do alone. You can do your share and you can do actually a lot if you want to, but you cannot do it all. It's very important to understand what is within school principals' or teachers' possibilities in this mission to fix the equities and there's a lot that the governments and politicians need to do, there's a lot that the other public sectors like health and other social sectors need to do. So don't feel that you have to - you can fix this thing because it's not going to happen.

So I'm going to speak to you now from these PowerPoints. I hope that you can see these things over there. If you have - the first question is probably can we have the copies of the slides. Yes, you do, the organisers will make these available, or I'm going to post this right after this presentation on my own website and probably share this in social media as well. So feel free to take a look. My Twitter address is there, just like Bastow's, so you can follow us and see what's coming here.

So I retitled this presentation as "Good schools for all" because this is the thing that we are talking about here. This is what's going to happen within the next about half an hour or so. I'm going to speak to you about four things. One is the question that people often ask, particularly in situations like this when there's somebody from overseas speaking to you, where are these world-class education systems, who are doing well, or sometimes people even ask what is the best education system in the world. I think that's a question that is impossible - doesn't really have an answer because there are education systems that are performing well but they are performing well in different areas and that's why it's very difficult to say who is the best, but I'll speak a little bit about where are the systems that are doing well according to set criteria.

Then the other one, probably the most important question this afternoon, is what is this thing called equity in education? What are we thinking about? What does it look like? Too often I've been in conversations where people speak lengthy about equity in education without really making sure that we are talking about the same types of things, so that's why it's extremely important to make sure that we have a common understanding what equity means. Then I have some three sets of ideas for you to take away from this session in terms of what could you do and these are all kind of ideas that I brought with me from Finland from my experience there working as a teacher in a school and working many years with the teachers in schools there, and then I have three like really personal ideas for the kind of state, the system level thing to think about. I hope that this is something that you find interesting. So let's start with the first one and look at the world-class school systems.

For the last 20 years really since the OECD has been running the program for international student assessment, or it's also known as PISA study, we have been kind of systematically ranking countries' education systems in the world based on their performance. Now, what you often see - probably if you have a small screen you cannot see all these things, but every three years in early December the media will be sharing these PISA survey results and this is kind of a thing that we often see in the newspapers and news. We see the top countries, those who are receiving really high scores, like in this case this is 2018 science, and then when you go from the top towards down the countries' performance in terms of the PISA scores in science decrease.

Often the media and also those people who don't pay too much attention to these things make a kind of a conclusion so this is kind of a metric that will determine every three years where the best education systems are. Now, unfortunately the situation is not that simple and none of us here should think that we can just take one measurement and then, based on that, we decide and judge the success or failure of an education system because educational performance is much more complicated than this.

So this data that you see here is just one measure of science, so much more education going on in every country than that. So now what we can do with the data is to create kind of multidimensional pictures of the education performance, education system's performance, in different countries. So I will focus primarily on OECD countries because that's where the data comes from and this is kind of an interesting thing that the OECD data that is collected every three years from Australia and Finland and other 37 member countries will allow us to do so we can look at the educational performance in terms of the students' learning outcomes, the knowledge and skills that they learn, that is the vertical axis there, and then we can compare those national results with the equity that is on the horizontal line. So let me explain very quickly what this is.

So of course when the countries are moving from the bottom to the top, it means that the national average performance in these academic tests - I have combined here reading, mathematics and science as one academic kind of a proxy that improves. And then when you move from left to right in your screen, so if the countries are moving from left to right, it means that the equity of these outcomes gets better, stronger, and equity here of course means how the students' background, family background, is affecting their learning. So if you're in the education system that is doing particularly well, then you should be there in this grey area there that says "high performing systems".

Now, you see these dots there, there should be 37 dots or something like this over there. One of them is Australia, so one of these dots is us. And now I'm going to give you half a minute to try to figure out where are we, where is Australia. That combines all the states and territories, the whole kind of system as a whole. That doesn't of course make the full right to each and every state and territory, but that's how it is. So look at this map a little bit and you can point your finger to that particular point that you think is Australia. And I'm going to give you the right answer in 15 seconds, so think about this a little bit.

Okay, now the interesting thing here of course is that this OECD average is they kind of divide this whole map into four areas and if you look at these dots, these countries, they're all over the place - not really all over the place, but there are those who have really low students' learning results or learning outcomes, level of learning and skills, and the equity seems to be a problem. So I'm going to show you now where the countries are. You see there that Australia is actually - according to these latest results from the OECD, it's not that bad. It's not great either. Australia is not in this grey area, that's where we used to be, but we have a lot of work to do to become one of those world-class, high-performing systems like you see Finland, South Korea, Japan, Canada and Estonia. So Australia is there just around Denmark and Sweden and the Netherlands in this positive space. So that's why this equity work is particularly important here because it would move us probably a little bit to the direction of the greater equity and towards this grey high-performing system thing.

But let me show you some other things also that comes from the same data and when I say that, the educational performance when we compare countries is much more complicated than just taking the learning outcomes in one subject and then rank ordering countries. You know, this is interesting from the same set of data from last year. So this will show you - if you look at this grey and black bar, you put them together, Australia is there somewhere in the middle doing actually a little bit better than the OECD average, but this whole length of this black and grey combined represents the variation of students' performance in reading literacy in 2018.

So the longer this total bar is, the more variation there is between students' reading literacy scores. Finland is there in the very kind of bottom of this thing because I have ordered these countries in terms of how big proportion of this total variation is between school variation. So the shorter this black bar is, the less variation there is associated to between schools. In other words, this means that the shorter the black bar is in this graph, the more similar the performance between different schools in this population that was tested is. Practically it means from the parents' point of view, for example, that all the schools are good schools.

If this between-school variation is very small, it means that within the system, the whole system, there is not much difference between one school and the other. If you have a long bar in the black, like Israel and Netherlands and Germany have, that means that the big bar of the variation, like in Israel, half of the total variation is between-school variation, which means that from parents' point of view it's a big deal to find where the good schools are. So that's one thing that is coming as part of this bar of this performance. Then we can look at the instruction hours in primary and secondary schools for students in different countries.

So what you see here is the combined number of intended teaching or instruction hours for children in different countries. The black bar there is a primary school or primary education and this orange-coloured bar is the lower secondary education and we combine those things. Finland is shown there. Again, my question, kind of a quiz for you, is where do you think Australia is here in terms of the hours. The compulsory hours, they run all the way to 11,000, that's kind of a maximum thing. I'm going to show you this right now. So you see that these are most of the OECD countries. This number there by the bar is the duration of primary and lower secondary school. You'll see that here in Australia we have the longest - basically we have the longest school days for our children in primary and lower secondary school than any other country in the OECD, a huge difference between Australia and Finland in terms of how many hours children are expected to be in the classes or instruction having teaching in the school.

This difference between Finland and Australia actually is equal to five years of schooling by the time the children here and in Finland are 15 when they are sitting this PISA test. So now of course the question is how much - the fact that countries have different amount of intended instruction hours for their students, how much does it affect the outcomes, the learnings, students' learning. The more they receive instruction should lead to better learning, right?

But take a look at this. This is just one illustration about the same similar type of thing but now we are looking at the students' learning time, the total learning time of students every week, and you will see the different countries, it's a very kind of diverse community, the OECD. You'll see that Australia is there just a little bit above the OECD average in learning outcomes and a little bit below the weekly workload. In Australia it's about 43 hours a week according to the OECD, the workload. But the overall notion here is that the more students spend time in school-related things in different countries, statistically, the less well they do in school. Of course there's no causal relationship between these things, but this just adds to the same notion that we had before that we cannot really assume that spending more time doing homework or more time in the classrooms would make the education system better. There is much more data and evidence about this, so I'm not going to get into that.

But let's look at this equity thing now and the key question here is what is the equity. I'm going to have a question for you and I'll give you one minute to think about it, okay? Tomorrow you'll go to school. If your school is closed, you cannot go to school, but then you get an email or phone call from one of your students. Let's say that your student is a 12- or 13-year-old boy or girl and she comes to you and says, "Hey, I have a question for you. "And you say," What is that? "And she says that, "I read in the newspaper that equity of education is an important thing that we have an issue here in Australia that we should fix, but I have no idea what equity in education means. "So think about this now for 45 seconds, or a minute. How would you respond to somebody who doesn't really - who is not an educator, not a teacher or parent but a child, young person, who would like to know what equity in education really means. And if you have a chance to put this in the chat box of this event, you can do that as well, but think about it a little bit. How would you answer this question of equity in education? You can take a little breather and relax as well, okay? One minute.

Okay, I'm asking this question from you because, as I said earlier, often times I find myself in a conversation sometimes even debating about educational equity only to realise that we have very different ideas of what this equity is and my question was deliberately asked in a way that asks you to answer this question to somebody who doesn't have the concepts or theories or education about these issues. It's equally important to explain this thing to parents in a way that they would really understand what are we talking about? Equity has become a word that is very easy and kind of a fashionable term to mention in conversations, but it often doesn't mean that much because we don't carefully kind of explain what we're thinking about.

So if you have done this to the chat box, that's great. One thing that everybody should know, and this would be in a way my answer to a teenager or child who's interested in this, is to say that okay, we often use two terms. One is equality. That means that everybody gets the same things, we treat everybody the same way, fairly, and I could even draw an illustration, a picture like this of everyone in kind of an equal treatment, everybody gets the same thing regardless who you are. But equity is something that requires that we have to understand that people are different, they have different needs and different capabilities to do things, and equity means that we give everybody what they need to succeed and that's why these are two very different things.

One of the useful definitions for educational equity is actually from the review panel work that David Gonski was leading almost 10 years ago and you can read it there on the screen how this panel gave a definition for equity. So it means that we make sure that the differences in students' learning in schools are not primarily a result of differences in parents' or their family's home care wealth, income, power or other things. So that's what we are looking at here when we talk about equity. And it's much more - again, I invite you to take a little bit of time if you're interested in these things to make sure that we have a good understanding about this.

Now, if we go back to the first graph, remember this when I asked you to think about where Australia is and many of you probably got it right because you know this thing, but the conclusion that we can make from this first graph is a very important one and this is something that the OECD and many others have been saying all along already for the last 10 years is that the world-class education systems are the ones that they combine quality or excellence, if you wish, with equity - in other words, that this equity and quality are simultaneously included in the school improvement or educational policies or strategies. And the good news here is that just about a year ago we ran a survey by the Gonski Institute to about 2,000 Australian parents asking their kind of views and opinions about the importance of educational equity and the vast majority of parents here, according to our survey, see equity as a critically important part of the Australian education in the future and right now.

So it's not like before, probably earlier, that this equity conversation was dividing people based on their political background, but now, according to our understanding, and you can read a little bit more in this policy piece that we sent to you, the society here in Australia is ready to do more. People are ready to accept that there are children in our school system who need more help, exactly like this group of kids who were reaching this apple, that they need to be helped by the school more than they do now. It's often about school funding, it's often about having people and resources and services included in the school that will help and provide support for these particular children.

So the time is right now to do more with this equity thing according to the data that we have. I wanted to show you this just to make a reminder about my earlier points in the beginning that the schools and teachers cannot change everything, they cannot really beat this inequity or inequality in our system or any system.

You know, this is a summary of a huge amount of research that will basically ask the question how much teachers influence in students' learning, if we take into account different studies and calculate the power of teachers in students' learning. Just look at this thing. This green thing there is the range of about 60%. So 60% of the variation in students' learning in school is explained by out-of-school factors. It's mostly the family, the socioeconomic characteristics of the family, but also the community, the peer group and some other things. beyond the control of the school, of the principal or the teachers. This blue area there is the teacher.

So it ranges from 1 to 14% depending on what type of research we are looking at. So my estimate here is that about 10% is kind of the teacher effect in this total variation when we try to understand why kids are learning differently. it's a big influence, but it's much weaker than this green area here that is out-of-school factors. The other school factors, this red one is mostly leadership.

So if you take the teacher and the leadership, still we talk about less than 20% of variation, the power to explain what the kids are learning, but it's important, it's a big thing there. So let's keep that in mind. So three ideas for school leaders - and as I said earlier, these are the things that came with me in my suitcase from Helsinki.

So my purpose here is not to tell you that this is what you have to do. My intention actually is to see if some of these things you are already doing, and I'm sure that there are schools that are doing many of these things. But if you ask me to provide some ideas, some kind of assistance in thinking what the school-level thing enhancing equity in your school and through your school in the system would be, these are some of those things.

So the first one, and this goes back to understanding what this equity is. I think it's extremely important to understand the kind of systemic dynamics of the educational equity, which means that equity is not just something that one teacher can do or one school can do or even one community can do. It's linked to so many other things that often, as you saw earlier, are only loosely connected to what the schools are doing.

So make sure that everybody in your school understands what equity means. If you haven't had this conversation before, I think it's an excellent way to bring teachers and educators together and have a good conversation so that your school, you have the same understanding what equity is and what it isn't and also understand that many of these things that are needed for more equitable education are beyond your kind of control. Teachers have to be - you have to liberate them from this burden that sometimes media and others put on them that if all the teachers work harder we can somehow fix this inequity. It doesn't happen that way. We need to understand this dynamics how it works. The parents and students are equally important. If you really want to take the equity and quality as kind of a driver, two drivers of your school improvement, improving your school, then the parents and students, they need to understand - not only do they need to understand equity and excellence or quality, but they need to understand how they are linked together and the easy way to say this is that there's a lot of evidence coming now not only from the international data and research but also in case studies that when the schools or when the systems are strengthening equity, that is somehow kind of pushing the quality of learning outcomes up. It's a very interesting and important notion. And then make sure that the equity is included or even better it's a priority of your school improvement plan. So that's one thing.

Then the other one, and this is something that the Finnish school systems do and many schools do, they speak about positive discrimination strategy. I don't know how this resonates in your language, but that basically means that when we are thinking about resourcing schools or resourcing within school the teachers and classes and students that we give more resources to those who need more. So that is kind of discrimination in a positive way when it comes to resourcing.

So again here I think it's very important to accent that you cannot fix the inequalities in your school, let alone in your system or your community. It's much broader and more complex work than this. Make sure that you engage each and every one in the effort to enhance equity. That's something that you need to have everybody on board if you want to be really successful with this one.

And then finally, this allocating the resources in your school or if you're thinking about the system that resources must be allocated based on the needs in your school or in your system and people have to understand and accept that we are not talking about equality here, where everybody gets the same treatment or same things. We need to understand where those needs are and then give more money and resources and human resources and other things, attention and help to those who need it. This is exactly what Finland has been doing now for a number of years and it's a critically important part of this equity work.

And then finally my recommendation, my kind of idea here for you is to establish the early intervention systems in your school for kind of preventing problems and issues that often are linked to declining equity. Again, this is something that is a hallmark of the Finnish way of educating children. Invest much more and early on in prevention than repairing things. In many education systems I've seen there's much more attention to repairing, kind of fixing things and much less attention to prevention.

So, for example, if you don't have something like this, you could have a student wellbeing or student welfare or what you call it, kind of a team established in your school that meets weekly as your colleagues do in Finland. Every single school in Finland have a student welfare wellbeing team and they meet every week. There's somebody from leadership, there's a special ed teacher, there's a nurse, there may be some social workers and somebody - five, six people meeting weekly and the main purpose of this team is to try to prevent the issues before they get too serious. Then the other one is to rethink what the special needs education actually means. What are we talking about when we talk about special needs. Here in Australia I have learned that the special education means a very different thing than it means in Finland. In Finland people seem to think that everybody has special needs. You have and I do and everybody. They just manifest themselves in different ways. And children and parents and everybody have to understand that we are all special and the special education is not only for those who have visible disabilities, for example, or something else. It's kind of again a preventive service that the school is providing early on to each and every child to make sure that they feel well, that they learn well and that they get along with everybody else and that's the kind of purpose of this special education thing.

And then finally make sure that your students are empowered and engaged in doing things. Some of the best schools in the world I've ever seen are here in Australia actually. Some of them are in Victoria, where the schools are doing exactly this, engaging students more and more into what the school is doing. I hope that you find this interesting because I'm going to stop now and just give you three ideas, again from my kind of experience, now to the state of Victoria, the education state in this country to think about.

Again, it may be that - and I know, I've met your Minister a couple of times and I remember that probably all of these things are already in the agenda, but just to make sure that these are clear and accepted and well implemented ideas. You know, these are the things that I would do if I was a Minister of Education in Victoria or if I was a king of Australia to change something. I would make sure that firstly we keep equity as a clear policy priority in the state and not just that we write something about the education - the purpose of education is access and equity. These are easy things to say. It's much harder to translate this equity into concrete goals and operations so that you as school leaders will understand what my intentions here would be.

So I would take a look at the education - the policy and the strategy and ask these hard questions, how are these plans or these policies really pushing this equity of education, education outcomes, forward in this state. Secondly, I would - particularly in times like this, I would invest heavily in wellbeing and health across the system, meaning the education system here. We need to understand that wellbeing and health are actually outcomes of education. They are not just things that we do in the school for kids to learn.

Wellbeing is something that the children should be learning in school - in other words, it's an outcome. If you look at some of the advanced Canadian provinces, for example, Ontario is one of them, Ontario has three or four like state-level strategies - raising the bar, closing the gap and enhancing student wellbeing. So that's something that I would really try to figure out how we can take this wellbeing and health issue to the next level in the state and make sure that all the schools would see it almost as an outcome of what they do, rather than something that we need to do to the kids as a kind of input.

And then finally I would encourage schools to lead the change. I know some of you - I have been in some of your schools, I have been in many schools here and I know that Australian and Victorian schools and school leaders could do much more than you are actually allowed to do right now, so that's why my hope in this equity work across Australia is in people like you and your professionalism and leadership and wisdom and experience that you have and as a minister or as a system leader kind of a bold way of thinking about this change would be to let you do more. I know that in Victoria it's a different way of governance than here in New South Wales, but I would still work harder to make sure that the schools - that includes students as well - would have a voice and power to solve this problem and be part of this mission.

So this is what I wanted to tell you, and again I invite you to take a look at this mission possible thing that Gonski did a couple of weeks ago and this should be in your mailbox, so take a look at this. It's something that you can take from here and start to do something. The only way to fix this inequity thing here is to start to do something. We need to stop talking and strategising and wondering what to do and start to do the change. There's something for each and every one of us to do in this field if we want to do that.

Thank you very much and I'm looking forward to your reactions and comments and maybe questions after this. Thank you. Are you still there, everybody?

**KATE:**

Thanks, Pasi. There's some incredible comments in the chat that may be of interest to you, but I'm sure some of the audience might like to ask a question which they could post in the chat and think about how they're going to take action or what they're doing now that you might be interested in.

**PASI:**

Yes. Are we able to take some comments from people or how does it work?

**JILL BROWN:**

Pasi, there's one here how can we as rural school leaders ensure - understand inequities?

**PASI:**

To understand equities?

**JILL:**

Inequity.

**PASI:**

Inequity. It's a very good question because of course in small rural schools this type of work that focuses on equity is much more complicated. You know, one thing that I've seen - this goes back to my experience. I've been working almost 20 years, with the Canadian province Alberta, that is one of the most advanced education systems in the world. They have done brilliant work in equity, and Alberta, just like Ontario, has a lot of remote very small schools and one powerful thing that they did particularly linked to equity was that the government policies and programs were supporting the small schools to network, to get together. And again I do not know exactly how much this is happening there in Victoria, but we can help small schools in many other ways as well, in many other areas than equity, by supporting their kind of networking and doing these things together. Because in one small remote school the equity issues or challenges can be very different than they are in some other small school. Often if we look at the urban or suburban schools in Sydney or Melbourne the issues are really similar when it comes to the equity thing. I can almost kind of list down the things these schools are considering as important things. But in the smaller schools alone it's going to be much harder.

So probably my best answer to this question is that let's ask the system if it's not doing that yet to support and help kind of good networks or clusters of the smaller schools that would then work together and try to identify these equity-related issues and then help one another to first make sure that they have a good understanding of what equity is and where the roots of these kind of inequalities are and then that they would have good ways to address those things. Very good question. Thank you.

**JILL:**

There is another question, Pasi, relating to the divide caused by a split system, private versus public. What role does this play in us achieving equity?

**PASI:**

Meaning like different systems independent and public --

**Jill:**

Fee paying versus government schools.

**PASI:**

Yeah, you know, I think we need to - this is what I think, that we need to distinguish a couple of things here. The first conversation that people often have is the kind of a public education versus independent or private schooling. You know, these debates are useless unless we again are absolutely clear what types of systems we are talking about. Like Australia is unique in a way that they're not - within the OECD - I don't know if there's any other system in the OECD that is spending public money the ways the Australian governments are spending. In other words, a lot of public money is going to subsidise the often wealthy independent schools. Then the other question is about where the money should go and it's very clear here in Australia how the public money is spent. It's not spent on making the system more equitable. The money is spent on mostly driving the choice, this kind of idea that when parents can choose the children's schooling, somehow these systems will get better. But we have seen here now it's long enough to say that it doesn't work, it doesn't work in favour of equity. If we had a system here in Australia where - the system like Canadians have or most other countries, where the government would be responsible for this public school network and make sure that that's equitable, we would have a very different situation here. Now, let's be clear here, I'm not saying - I'm actually not against independent schools if they are operating as independent schools should be operating, but here it's a different thing and that's why much of this kind of opportunity that we have here through the governments is not used for the public systems here to become more equal and fair. So that's why I think this school funding thing that David Gonski's panels have been trying to do now twice and many others is an important thing. It's not going to solve the entire problem, but it's an important element of this whole thing to see what do we really want to have.

But one thing is - my opinion is this, this idea, this belief that school choice will give us a better education system as a whole doesn't work and we should accept that it hasn't worked until now and it will not work unless we change the way we do about these things. But it doesn't mean that we have to close down the private schools and independent schools or Catholic schools. I think there's a space for all of those things, but we need to be clear what do we want and then spend the money accordingly. Thank you, Pasi.

**JILL:**

There's another question here that relates to the changes that have occurred through COVID-19. So the question goes like this: "In remote learning, the most vulnerable students are falling even further behind and the equity gap is even more pronounced. How as a system in this environment do we bridge these gaps? What can we learn from others who have been more successful in this space? "

**PASI:**

A great question, thank you. You know, nobody has been successful with this one. I've been reading - spending the last couple, three months really to closely follow what's happening around the world, not only in Finland but really around the world in this and nobody has been able to kind of figure out how to do it. This is the same thing everywhere. It's the same thing in Finland that the most vulnerable kids are the ones who are likely to suffer the most from this.

But the first thing is that we don't really know what's happening, that we have some initial data and initial evidence, but we don't know really how serious these gaps are. The other thing - you know what we can do here in Australia probably more is to probably worry less about how much kids have been losing or left behind because there's no way that we can know that and I think that we should be much more careful in thinking and using the language of helping some students to catch up, and I'm saying this because I think the most important thing now from the point of view of children, and I have two primary school aged kids at home here, it's not how much they have missed mathematics and literacy. That may be an issue for some people, but in general that's not the point.

The point is their health and wellbeing, how do they understand this horrible thing that we are going through, how do these little primary school and middle school kids cope and deal with these fears and stress and anxiety that they have because they may have lost loved ones or their parents may have lost work or they don't see the future anymore. These potential gaps between those kids who have been able to stay on course and on a schedule and those who haven't, they are much minor in the end than this kind of potential damage that we will do to some of these children if we now begin to point to them and say that you are three months behind of the others, so you need to work harder and longer during the weekends or holiday breaks to catch up. This is not what the kids need. I'm not talking about the year 11 and 12 kids, I know that in Victoria they are going to school and it's a different thing, but in primary school, let's change the way we think a little bit and let's think less about these achievement gaps.

The fact is that these achievement gaps will be there anyway even if the kids go to school. Just look at the NAPLAN or PISA results, there are huge gaps there. I don't understand why now all of a sudden within this horrible crisis people get so excited about these things when most of those people have been silent when we could have done something to this equity thing before. So that's why - I'm not kind of trying to undermine the importance of these things. I'm just saying that there are some things in the lives of our children that are much more critically important than, you know, thinking about how much they miss. There's a lot of research that shows that even if the kids have lost half a year of schooling or one year of schooling, in the end, kind of in the longer run, most kids don't really recognise that. There are a lot of kids who are doing very well regardless of school being closed.

And finally - and this is for all of you and you probably know this - I think here in Australia we should be asking much more often from these children what did you learn when you went out in school, what did you learn when you were home with your grandparents or parents or your siblings, what did you do there? Personally I think that many of us we would be probably quite surprised to hear all these things that these kids have been learning that often have nothing to do with the things that we have in the curriculum.

But let's change the way we think at least for a moment. Let's break, let's stop for a moment worrying about those things and let's focus on the wellbeing and health and kind of happiness of these children. That's my view as a father.

**MARIA ODDO:**

Pasi, I think we've got time for one more question which was asked earlier in the webinar and it was how strong is the link between communities' health outcomes and educational outcomes?

**PASI:**Yes, health and - I don't know exactly the situation there, but health - health outcomes and education outcomes are very strongly linked and again, we need to probably be more clear about what are the health outcomes we are talking about. You know, one thing that is kind of an increasingly serious thing here in Australia and in many other countries is the mental part of the health and you all know how common it has become here and elsewhere that we have parents and children with some type of mental health issues and it's very clear that if you're not healthy, if you're not mentally feeling - if your mental wellness is not there, it's very difficult to learn well and get good outcomes there.

So that's why - you know, again going back to the Finnish example is that we - and some of you probably have visited Finland, but if you have a chance to go and see a Finnish school, one important question you need to ask the principal, your colleague there, is what's the role of the health and wellbeing work in your school and you will see that all the Finnish schools provide all these kind of basic essential health services within the school. It's part of the work of the school. That's how important kind of the link between health outcomes and learning kind of educational outcomes are, that it has to be - they have to be integrated in the same place. School is the only place where basically all the children go to every day for a number of years and that's why the natural place where the health is provided and the health kind of control and monitoring is provided is the school, not necessarily the health clinic. Wonderful questions, people.

**JILL:**

Pasi, we're almost finished. There was just one comment that somebody made that if we take this all onboard, we should be making greater connections. So if 60% of outside of school factors is influencing student achievement, it would make sense then that we connect to exterior services and community. Absolutely. Would you like to comment on that?

**PASI:**

Yes, absolutely. of the number of statistical studies, so it doesn't mean that in your school or in any particular child this 60% rule would apply. There are some schools and some teachers that can have much higher influence on kids. But on average, if you look at the community, then you can use this as kind of an average thing.

So one thing you can do is to make kind of a conversation the way you want to do it with your community, community leaders and parents and others, about these particular facts that if we want to affect our children or have a positive impact on them through school, how does it happen. As people understand that the school has an important role, but it's not able to do things beyond their reach, then maybe there will be more people who will join in. But all these successful systems, all those kind of - remember the grey box, Finland and Canada and Estonia and others, they all have done the same thing, that they bring kind of these non-educational things like health care and dental care and counselling and those other things as close to the school or even within the school as possible.

**MARIA:**

Thanks, Pasi. I think we've come to the end of the hour and we might throw to you, Kate.

**KATE:**

Thank you, Maria, and thank you, Pasi. Just fantastic to have you in the room. A couple of comments about we couldn't have timed this better. And I think for our educators who are with us today across the state, their contexts are different, their challenges locally are different, but certainly one vision, one mission and "mission possible, fix inequalities" I think is a brilliant way to couch how each educator can take action.

So thanks for helping us to understand this is something we can hold on to ourselves, that we can each do small things both personally and with our school communities to make a difference and it's a very powerful message, so thank you.

**PASI:**

Yes, thank you, Kate, and thank you everybody, each and every one of you, and thank you for your leadership. You know, being an education state is not a joke, it's a serious thing, and as I said, I've seen amazing things in your state, the schools that you do. Just keep on doing that thing and don't give up in the times like this. You are needed much more than ever and take care of yourselves. And as I said earlier, remember to also care for your children's happiness and wellbeing. Those are the most important things. If they grow through this thing healthy and happy and strong, they're going to be much better learners in the future. Thank you so much. Stay in touch if there's anything personally you want to tell me. I'm at the University of New South Wales. I'm happy to have a chat.

And thank you, Kate and Bastow. Wonderful work, thank you.

**KATE:**

Thank you, Pasi. That was great. So perfectly timed, Pasi. Okay, good. Thank you so much. Thanks, Jillian and the team. Great to have you all here. Thanks, everyone. Doing a great job out there. Thanks. That was fantastic, Pasi. Thank you. Yes, wonderful. Thought provoking. It was really engaging. Well done, Pasi. Very great questions and comments. Good. How are you, John? Where are you beaming in from? Me? Yes. I'm at work at Furlong Park. I've got my improvement team here.

So, yes, it's just really good. To get that message from Pasi, it's fantastic because I've read a bit of his stuff. So yeah, brilliant, brilliant. Great. Good to have your team with you too. Yes, it is, yes. Building their capacity, isn't it? I suppose can you - you can make a record out of these questions and comments, right? Yes, we can. That's correct. We'll save the chat, Pasi, so that we've got a record of it, yes. Okay, good. If it's possible, can you send it to me? Oh, absolutely, yes. Jill will save the chat. Yes. I would love to see.

Thanks, Pasi. Are you going to stay on, Pasi, for a minute? We'll just wait for everybody to leave. Thanks, Kate. Thanks, John. Well done. Do you want me to stay still? Yes, that would be great. If you could just stay on, that would be great. Okay. He's got to go on his run. He's got to make dinner, don't you, Pasi? You're on the cooking tonight. Yes, I am. I am actually. Jill, are you ready to end it? I'll end the recording, yes. Thanks.