

## How Finland Is Teaching a Generation to Spot Misinformation

By Jenny Gross, *The New York Times*, January 10, 2023

A typical lesson that Saara Martikka, a teacher in Hameenlinna, Finland, gives her students goes like this: She presents her eighth graders with news articles. Together, they discuss: What's the purpose of the article? How and when was it written? What are the author's central claims?

5 [...]Her goal, like that of teachers around Finland, is to help students learn to identify false information.

Finland ranked No. 1 of 41 European countries on resilience against misinformation for the fifth time in a row in a survey published in October by the Open Society Institute in Sofia, Bulgaria. Officials say Finland's success is not just the result of its strong education system, which is one of the best in the world, but also because of a concerted effort to teach students about fake news. Media literacy is part of the national core curriculum starting in preschool.

10 "No matter what the teacher is teaching, whether it's physical education or mathematics or language, you have to think, 'OK, how do I include these elements in my work with children and young people?'" said Leo Pekkala, the director of Finland's National Audiovisual Institute, which oversees media education.

15 [...]The United States was not included in the survey, but other polls show that misinformation and disinformation have become more prevalent since 2016 and that Americans' trust in the news media is near a record low. A survey by Gallup, published in October, found that just 34 percent of Americans trusted the mass media to report the news fully, accurately and fairly, slightly higher than the lowest number that the organization recorded, in 2016. In Finland, 76 percent of

20 Finns consider print and digital newspapers to be reliable, according to an August survey[...]. Finland has advantages in countering misinformation. Its public school system is among the best in the world. College is free. There is high trust in the government, and Finland was one of the European countries least affected by the pandemic. Teachers are highly respected.

25 On top of that, Finnish is spoken by about 5.4 million people. Articles containing falsehoods that are written by nonnative speakers can sometimes be easily identified because of grammatical or syntax errors, Mr. Pekkala said.

30 [...]Even though today's teenagers have grown up with social media, that does not mean that they know how to identify and guard against manipulated videos of politicians or news articles on TikTok. In fact, a study published last year in the *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* found that adolescence could be a peak time for conspiracy theorizing. A contributing factor could be social media, with its influence over young people's beliefs about the world, the study's authors wrote.

35 Still, the Finnish government says students are among the easiest group to reach. Now that programs are in place for young people, the government is using libraries as centers for teaching older people to identify online information that is intended to mislead, Mr. Pekkala said.

For teachers of any age group, coming up with effective lessons can be challenging. "It's so much easier to talk about literature, which we have been studying for hundreds of years," said Mari Uusitalo, a middle and high school teacher in Helsinki.

40 [...]Ms. Uusitalo said her goal was to teach students methods they could use to distinguish between truth and fiction. "I can't make them think just like me," she said. "I just have to give them the tools to make up their own opinions."