

# Lessons from 'top-performing' education systems



**Lucy Crehan**

**International Education Consultant and Education Explorer**

**@lucy\_crehan**

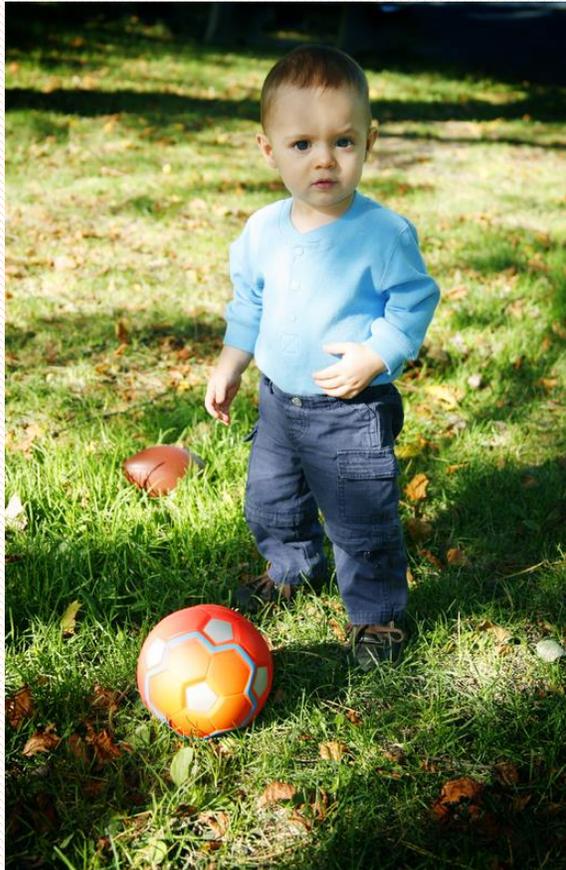
**lucycrehan.com**

# What did I do?

- Approached schools ‘under the radar’.
- Stayed with teachers. Taught with them where possible.
- Spent
  - 3-4 weeks in each country
  - 2-3 weeks inside schools
- Interviewed teachers, students, parents and policy makers.
- Identified themes and commonalities from these conversations, my own observations, other research, and TALIS and PISA data to inform my book – *Cleverlands*.



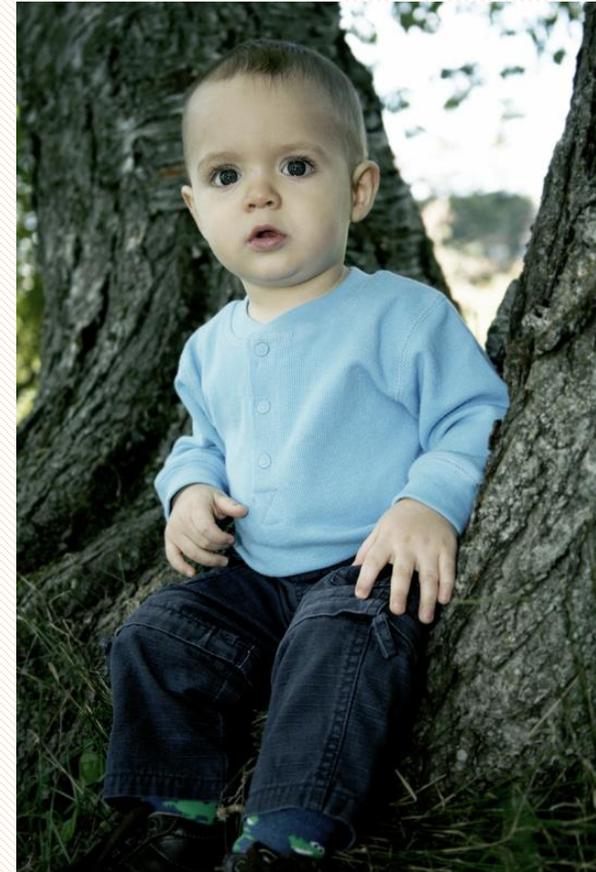
# Let me introduce you to triplets, who take three different educational journeys



**Benny**



**Albert**



**Connor**

Benny stays at home until 6, at which point he goes to school.

Albert goes to school at age 4, where he starts learning to read and add up.

Connor goes to preschool at age 3, where he takes part in educational play. He starts school at 6.

#### THE KINDERGARTEN CONTINUUM



From Miller and Almon (2009)

- Attendance at pre-school significantly affects later scores (OECD).
- In the countries I visited, children start school at aged six (Canada, Japan) or seven (Shanghai, Singapore, Finland).
- Research consistently shows that later starting children catch up, and in some studies overtake their earlier starting peers.

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# Mastery learning

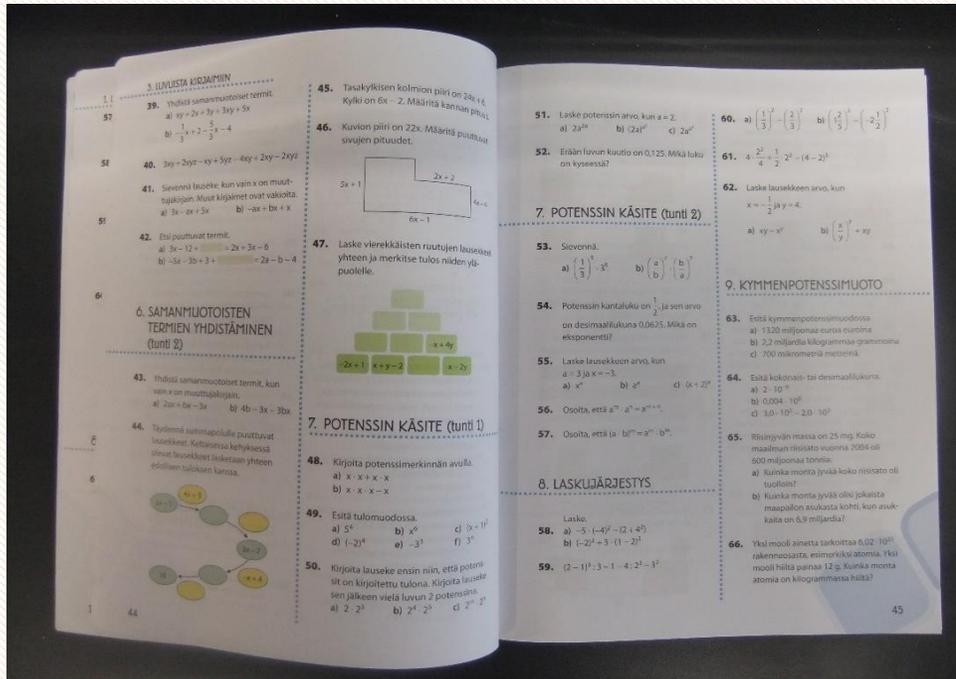
Moderate impact for very low cost, based on moderate evidence.



topics before he's fully grasped the last one.

easier work to do on his table.

stays on one topic until everyone has grasped it.



- In East Asia they take a 'mastery approach' in which the curriculum focuses on fewer topics, but in greater depth – especially in early years of school.
- The vast majority of pupils progress through the curriculum at the same pace. Those who grasp it quickly explore in greater depth.
- Subject matter and learning content is broken down into units with clearly defined goals.

Benny notices that he knows less than his peers, and thinks he is stupid.

Albert's teachers tell him that not everyone can be good at maths, and that's ok because he's good at football.

Connor's teachers explain the importance of effort, and that you can improve how well you do with hard work.

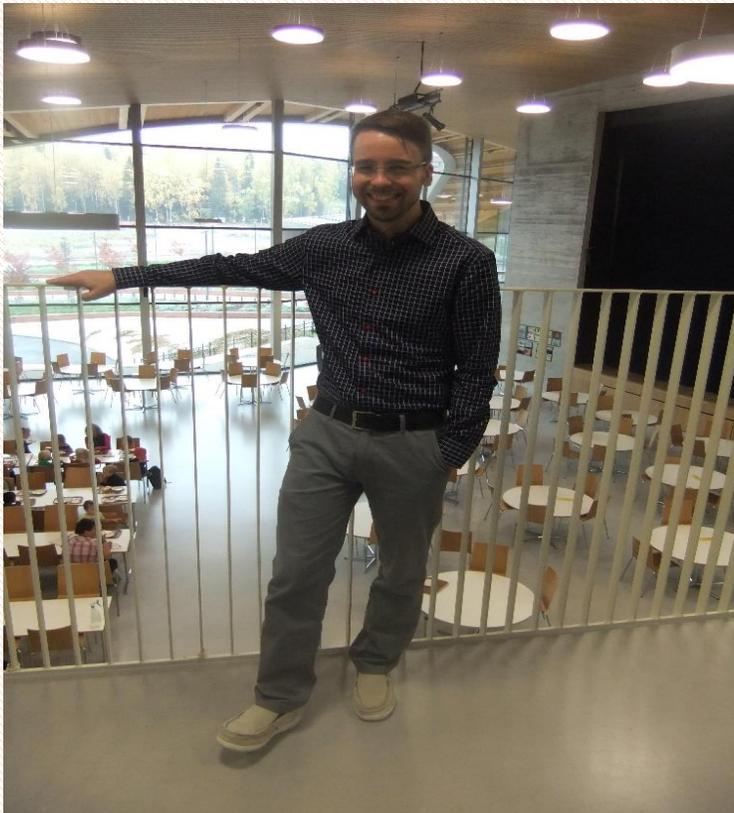


- Having a 'growth mindset' and believing that your ability can improve with effort leads children to put in more effort in the face of failure, rather than giving up.
- In Finland, they believe 'we can't afford to leave anyone behind', and in East Asia, studies have shown parents and students to believe that effort has a bigger role in success than innate ability.
- Children learn this through stories, careful use of praise, and supportive criticism.

Benny gets no additional support when he finds something difficult.

Albert often has a teaching assistant working with him in class.

Connor occasionally gets support in class or after class from a qualified teacher, to help with a specific topic.



- In Finland and Canada, additional teachers are employed to work with small groups of students who need help with particular topics.
- In East Asia, this role is taken by the class teacher, who usually has fewer lessons than teachers in Western Europe, and supports children after class.
- Canada also makes use of peer tutors, by training older students to support younger students with their work, and some children in East Asia use private tutors.

## Setting or streaming

Negative impact for very low cost, based on moderate evidence.



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as he can't keep up.

less challenging work.

needed.

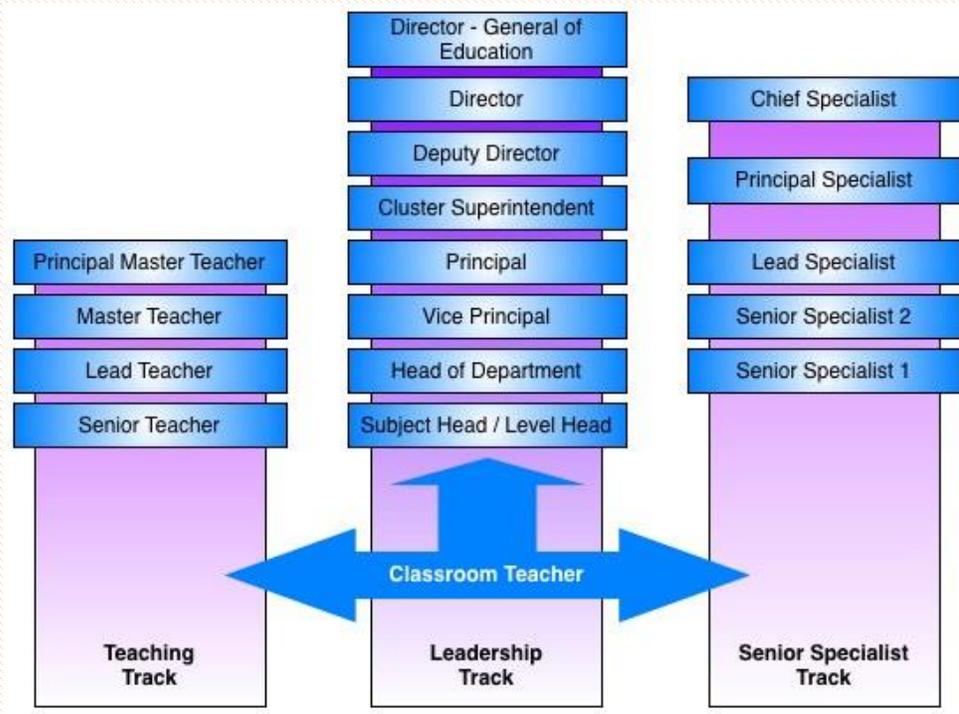


- Of the six countries I went to, only one sets children into different classes or schools before the age of 15.
- The research on setting is fairly consistent in suggesting that it has a negative effect on those in lower sets, and a small positive effect on those in higher sets.
- Some schools in Canada take an interesting approach from age 14 of 'setting to the top'.

Benny's teachers had little training at the beginning of their careers, or since.

Albert's teachers had some initial training, and the occasional INSET day since.

Connor's teachers had initial training, and are expected to improve against standards throughout their careers.



- Top-performing countries take two different approaches to ensuring well-trained teachers.
- In Finland and Canada, the training is 'front-loaded' and teaching is an attractive profession.
- In Singapore, Japan and Shanghai, teachers are expected to improve throughout their career, and are assessed against teacher standards or descriptions.

Benny's teachers are left to get on with teaching as they see fit.

Albert's teachers get bonuses, based on their students' results.

Connor's teachers meet to plan together weekly, and observe each others' lessons.



- In Finland, Japan, Singapore and Shanghai, teachers meet at least weekly to plan together.
- In East Asia and some Canadian schools, they practise 'lesson study', where they observe each other teach a lesson they've planned together.
- This collaboration allows for continuous learning and positive relationships within schools.

# In summary

Connor's teachers explain the importance of effort, and that you can improve how well you do with hard work.

Connor occasionally gets support in class or after class from a qualified teacher, to help with a specific topic.

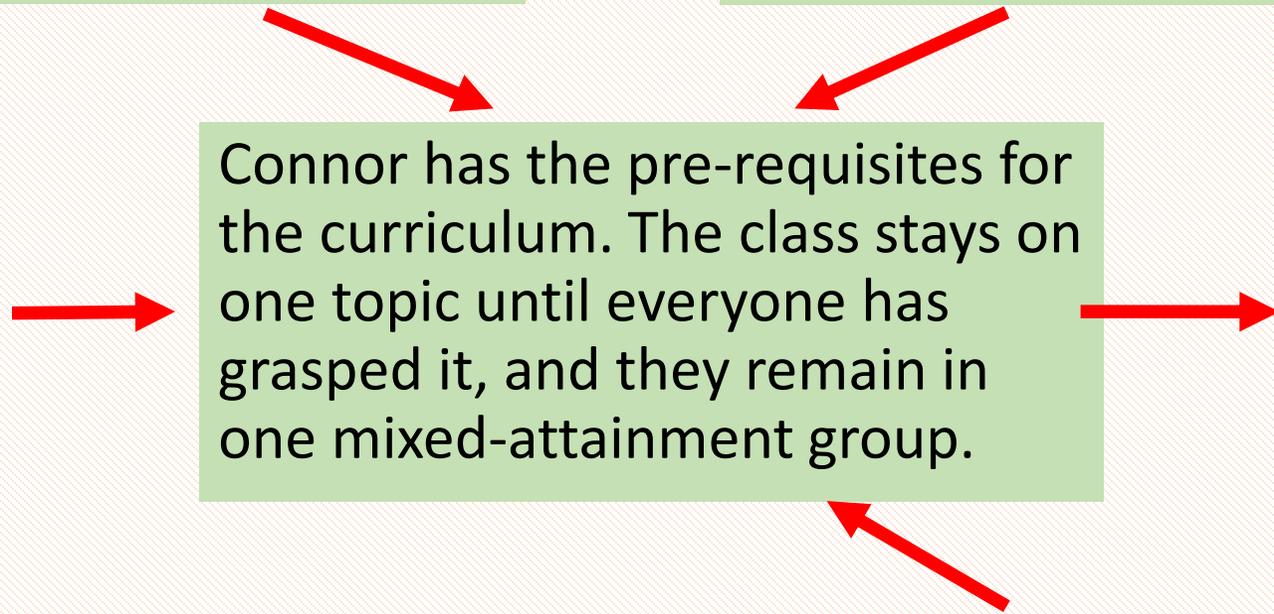
Connor goes to preschool at age 3, where he takes part in educational play. He starts school at 6.

Connor has the pre-requisites for the curriculum. The class stays on one topic until everyone has grasped it, and they remain in one mixed-attainment group.



Connor's teachers meet to plan together weekly, and observe each others' lessons.

Connor's teachers had initial training, and are expected to improve against standards throughout their careers.



# Cleverlands



LUCY CREHAN

One teacher's journey through the world's classrooms  
to reveal what really matters in education

## Any questions?

- Ask me now
- Read the book!
- Tweet me at [@lucy\\_crehan](https://twitter.com/lucy_crehan)