Teacher effectiveness in Finland : Effectiveness in Finnish schools

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Chapter: Teacher Effectiveness in Finland

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Effectiveness in Finnish Schools

Teacher effectiveness is understood very differently in Finland than in many other countries. In fact, it is not considered a relevant aspect of the education system, because "[t]here are no formal teacher evaluation measures in Finland" (Sahlberg, 2014, 125). All Finnish schools are considered to be good, and all the teachers have the same high quality educational preparation. Thus, when it comes to considerations for determining or assessing teacher effectiveness, a culture of trust is a specific feature of the Finnish education system (e.g. Toom & Husu, 2016). Teachers and schools are trusted, both on the grassroot level by the parents, and on the governance level by the education authorities at the local and the national levels. This can be explained by at least a century old tradition of respecting learning and education as the core of the Finnish culture (i.e. Niemi, 2016, 24).

According to Niemi and Isopahkala-Bouret (2012), Finnish education policy has four main principles - *equity, high-quality education to all learners, flexible educational structures, and life-long learning* - and these principles guide the entire Finnish educational system. There are eight universities that offer teacher education in Finland. All eight universities offer similar programs that lead to a Master's degree, which is a qualification requirement for teaching in Finnish schools. Different universities can have different emphases in their teacher education programs, but the core studies, including major subject studies in educational sciences, are very similar. All of the programs educate highly qualified teachers, because all of the Finnish teacher education programs share principles and general outlines, even though they also have autonomy in designing the curriculum (e.g. Tirri, 2014; Niemi, 2016, Lavonen; 2018). Thus, all of the Finnish universities educate teachers similarly: all are research-based, have the same quantity of study points and length of the education program, and all teachers in Finland graduate with a Master's degree.

Teachers in Finland are respected and supported by Finnish society, in general, and are considered professionals. As stated in the *Teaching and Learning International Survey* (*TALIS) 2018: Insights and Interpretations* report, "Teaching is among the most highly selective occupations in Finland, with highly skilled, well-educated teachers spread throughout the country. Few occupations in the country have a higher reputation" (Schleicher, 2020, p. 10). As Darling-Hammond (2017) states, teaching in Finland is viewed as a long-term profession where people can grow into leadership positions and develop expertise over time. Darling-Hammond (2017) also points out that Finnish standards for teaching operate in two ways. First, candidates wishing to become teachers need to take an entrance examination. Second, all eight universities that provide teacher education have a shared framework for their teacher education curriculum. In the following sections, we will explain why teacher effectiveness is considered to be an assumed and, thus, almost non-relevant, matter in the Finnish educational system and discourse.

The Finnish Education System in a Nutshell

Sahlberg (2014) provides a good overview of the development of the Finnish education system. Put briefly, the main points of the development after World War II were:

- enhancing equal opportunities for education by way of transition from a northern agricultural nation to an industrialized society (1945–1970)
- creating a public comprehensive school system by way of a Nordic welfare society with a growing service sector and increasing levels of technology and technological innovation (1965–1990)
- improving the quality of basic education and expanding higher education in keeping with Finland's new identity as a high-tech, knowledge-based economy (1985–present) (Sahlberg 2014, p. 19)

The establishment of the comprehensive school from 1970 was groundbreaking. It unified schooling for all children, and different tracks were abolished. Through this step, the basic

education system was born. The fundamental principles behind the Finnish educational system are that all people must have equal access to high-quality education and training. This means that access to education is the same no matter where one lives, or what one's socio-economic background or cultural, religious, racial, or ethnic background is. Besides that, education is free from pre-primary school to the end of comprehensive school, meaning children ages 6-16. This means that schooling, including textbooks, lunch, and transportation, does not cost families anything other than the various taxes they pay as citizens or residents. According to Sahlberg (2014, p. 61), "equity ensures that differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions—in other words, home background."

Finnish children start pre-primary education at the age of six and basic education at the age of seven. Basic education lasts for nine years, until the age of 16. It is divided into primary school consisting of grades 1–6, and lower-secondary school consisting of grades 7–9. In pre-primary schooling the early childhood education teacher is responsible for the children's holistic education. In primary school, class teachers teach all subjects to the students, whereas in lower secondary school subject teachers are responsible for teaching their own subjects. Basic education is compulsory, and at the moment continuing studies to upper secondary schools are optional. However, starting from August 2021 the Finnish government is extending compulsory education to age 18 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

After comprehensive school, students can continue their education either in an upper-secondary school or in vocational training. The latest available statistics from 2018 show that 53% of Finnish 9th graders continued in upper secondary education and 41% continued in vocational training (Statistics Finland, 2020a). This shows that in 2018 only 6% of 16-year-olds did not continue studies after basic education. Secondary education lasts three years (ages 16-19). After completing secondary education, Finnish students are qualified to apply to university or college education, but only about 30% of the graduates are able to continue to university or college right

after graduating from upper secondary school, although 82% did apply to further education (Statistics Finland, 2020b). Further education (universities and colleges) are also free of charge for the students, although they do need to purchase their own study materials. However, the students receive government monthly financial aid for living costs as well as housing (Kela, 2020).

Standardized tests and measuring is almost non-existent in the Finnish education system, both in elementary and secondary schools as well as colleges and universities. Because of the absence of standardized tests, teachers and schools are responsible for assessing student achievement themselves. As Sahlberg (2014) state: "A high-performing school in Finland is one where all students perform beyond expectations. In other words, the greater the equity, the better the school is according to the Finnish criterion" (p. 63).

In reality, there is only one standardized test, which is the matriculation exam at the end of upper secondary school. And even this examination is only taken by about 50% of the age cohort, since approximately half of that age group do vocational training rather than attending upper secondary school. Because of the lack of standardized tests, teachers can focus on teaching and learning, and not on practicing for tests (Sahlberg2014, p. 95).

The Finnish population is so small, only about 6 million people, that Finland cannot afford to leave any child behind. As Sahlberg (2014, p. 65) points out, "investing as early as possible in high-quality education for all students, and directing additional resources toward the most disadvantaged students as early as possible, is a cost-effective strategy that will produce the greatest impact on improving overall academic performance." Finland has decided not to use standardized testing for monitoring learning outcomes, but instead uses a sample-based assessment system as well as local ways of monitoring the equity and functionality of basic education, which include the screening of support needs and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the provided support (Vainikainen et al. 2017).

Finland implemented a new special education strategy in 2010. The core idea is a three-tier

support system that guarantees support for learning for any students needing it. The levels of support are determined as general support, intensified support, and special support. General support means that any student who has a temporary need for extra support will get it. This basically means the same as temporary tutoring that was mentioned earlier in this chapter. Intensified support requires that the student has more intense difficulties in studying and learning and the decision to provide intensified support requires consultation with a special education teacher. The teachers negotiate a pedagogical learning plan that is also approved by the parents. The broadest support is special support, which requires more special needs consultation, tests, diagnosis or other statements. Special support can be realized, for example, as part-time special education or full-time special education services. Students receive intensified or special support as long as they need it and can move flexibly between these support levels. This model emphasizes multi-professional collaboration (also see Thuneberg et al., 2014; Björn et al., 2016).

About the Finnish National Core Curriculum

Finland's national core curriculum for basic education (FNCC, 2014) originates from two curriculum traditions: the Anglo-American curriculum tradition that emphasizes educational psychology and rational planning and the German Bildung tradition. According to Kujala and Hakala (2020), in German Bildung tradition, Lehrplan, highlights knowledge that is valuable for education and a curriculum that is subject-based highlighting the content. The American curriculum tradition emphasizes educational psychology and curriculum, and is organised as child-centered with comprehensive aims and focus on learning experiences.

As Saari, Salmela, and Vilkkilä (2014) stress, the result of this combination is the emphasis both on the teacher's autonomy as an implementer of the curriculum and the role of educational research related to curriculum objectives, means, implantation, and assessment.

The national curriculum may be considered from three viewpoints. Firstly, it is an administrative document aimed at promoting the continuous development of quality teaching.

Secondly, it is an intellectual document where the values and knowledge significant to a culture are defined and recreated. Thirdly, it serves as a pedagogical support for teachers by setting goals and guidelines for teaching and learning (Vitikka et al., 2012).

The core values of the curriculum are humanity, equality, democracy, cultural diversity, and sustainable development. Schools are seen as learning communities where students' uniqueness and right to grow to their full potential as a person and as a member of society is emphasized. This means that every student has the right to good teaching and success in school work.

The curriculum is based on the idea of students as active learners. This denotes that learning is a process where students learn to set aims, think, investigate, reflect, and evaluate alone and in collaboration with other people. Developing the ability to learn together is highlighted in the overall process of learning. Furthermore, the curriculum stresses intentional and life-long learning. This requires that students are encouraged to develop self-regulation skills, to become self-aware, and to master their own ways of learning. The national goals for teaching and education in the core curriculum are 1) growth for humanity and membership in society; 2) necessary knowledge and skills that create a foundation for the formation of the students' broad general education or *bildung;* and 3) promoting education, equality, and lifelong learning (FNCC, 2014).

The curriculum defines the aims and core contents of each subject, and it also determines the objects for support, differentiation, and teacher-conducted assessment. Based on a common structure, a local curriculum is built by school officials and teachers (Vitikka et al., 2012). In addition, the curriculum aims to ensure student mastery of the skills that are needed in every area of life. It emphasizes seven transversal (i.e., wide-ranging) competences that a changing society demands: thinking and learning to learn, cultural competence, interaction and self-expression, taking care of oneself and managing daily life, multiliteracy, information and technology (ICT) competence, working life competence and entrepreneurship, participation, involvement, and building a sustainable future. A teacher's duty is to guide students into being lifelong learners by

increasing the students' interests in learning and in their motivation to learn. In addition, the national curriculum obliges every school to organize a multidisciplinary learning module at least once every semester to promote dialog between different subjects (FNCC, 2014).

The core curriculum for general upper secondary schools has been renewed and the new curriculum will be introduced in 2021. There are eleven objectives of the reform, among others supporting wellbeing and learning, communal and participatory school culture, broad general knowledge, transversal competences (covering skills in life management and responsible involvement), and building a sustainable future (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2020). Like the basic education curriculum, the upper secondary school curriculum is based on the three basic values of antiquity: truth, goodness, and beauty. Based on them, the upper secondary school curriculum emphasizes growth as human beings and emotional intelligence (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2020). The aim of general upper secondary education is to promote students in "growing into good, balanced and enlightened persons and active members of society, and to provide them with the knowledge, skills and capabilities they need for the world of work, hobbies and versatile personal development. The education also aims to give the students capabilities for lifelong learning and continuous self-development" (Section 2 of the General Upper Secondary Schools Act 714/2018; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2020).

Finnish Research-based Teacher Education

Finnish teachers must hold a 5-year Master's degree in order to be employed as a permanent full-time teacher. The only exception to this is early childhood education teachers, whose qualification requirement is a 3-year Bachelor's degree. Teacher education can be roughly divided into primary school teacher education and secondary school teacher education. Both graduate as masters, but primary school teachers' major subject is education, whereas secondary school teachers' major subject is one or two academic subjects. These teacher education programmes also differ based on which faculty the degree studies are completed. Primary school teachers complete

their studies in the faculties of education, whereas secondary school teachers complete their studies in different disciplinary faculties. These are, for instance, the faculties of arts, natural sciences, or theology (for more, see Maaranen & Stenberg, 2020). The content of *teachers' pedagogical studies*, which is one of the mandatory teacher qualifications, include philosophy, history, psychology, pedagogy and research aspects of education.

Finnish teacher education is described as research-based. This means that research is integrated into studies from the very beginning, both as content, as well as methodologically (see e.g. Toom et al., 2010). Students acquaint themselves with research methods and learn skills to conduct research projects, such as Bachelor's and Master's theses work (e.g. Byman et al., 2020). About 20% of the studying is related to research (Niemi & Lavonen, 2020). Furthermore, research-based teacher education means that educational theory is integrated with practice and research methodologies, and the studies form a systematic continuum (Sahlberg 2014). Besides that, Finnish teacher students' studies include practicums in order to practice teaching in real situations. Teacher students have opportunities to practice teaching in the university teacher training schools or in a field school, which is a regional partnership school.

One of the unique features in Finnish teacher education is teacher training schools, where student teachers practice teaching in different phases of their studies (e.g. Sahlberg 2014). The ten teacher training schools in Finland are governed by the universities and administered by the teacher education faculties they are located in (see Hammerness, Ahtiainen, & Sahlberg, 2017), but they follow the same curriculum as any public school (Sahlberg, 2011; Kansanen, 2003). Practicum studies serve a platform for student teachers to build their professional identity by offering experiences about teachers' work and how the theories of teaching and learning may be implemented in practice. Student teachers are observed and supervised by experienced and educated supervisory teachers, many of whom are actively engaged in research activities or other academic activities (see Hammerness et al., 2017). Thus, besides implementing teacher practice, training

schools carry out diverse research, development, and in-service training activities. Teachers in training schools are also expected to develop and explore their work and collaborate with various networks both nationally and internationally.

The aim of research-based teacher education is to educate pedagogically thinking professionals who are able to produce and consume research in a teacher's work (e.g. Tirri, 2014). As Sahlberg (2014) claims: "Not only are better-educated teachers more effective in the classroom, but they're also better equipped to keep their education systems healthy and free from reform ideas that are harmful to both teachers and children" (pp. 132–133).

To enter teacher education, candidates must pass an entrance examination, which is an aptitude test. Successful candidates need to have high scores in the matriculation exam or pass the first step of the entrance exam in order to be able to participate in the second step, the aptitude test, which resembles an interview, the aim being to find out the motivation of the candidate for teacher's career. Each year there are more applicants than there are study places. In 2020, about 29% of applicants were accepted to the Finnish universities to study educational sciences as their major subject. This includes all teaching professions as well as general educational subjects. This means that Finnish universities can select future teacher candidates among many excellent applicants (for more, see e.g. Schleicher, 2020; Tirri, 2014). So, being accepted to teacher education is highly competitive, and the students are often very high-performing students to begin with. This can be seen as a factor, combined with high-quality university level education, that Finnish teachers can be trusted as autonomous professionals, who have the necessary knowledge and skills in order to perform well in their work.

For developing teacher education further, the Finnish Teacher Education Forum has set holistic competence goals for teachers' pre- and in-service education and continuous life-long professional development (Niemi et al., 2018). These holistic aims that a quality teacher should have are described in the following:

A broad and solid knowledge base

- Subject matter knowledge, pedagogical and pedagogical content knowledge, contextual knowledge;
- Interaction skills, skills for collaboration in different networks and partnerships (experts at school, family, society);
- Knowledge about learning and diversity among learners (special needs, multicultural backgrounds);
- Competence to act as an autonomous professional who can plan, implement, and assess his/her own practices and students' learning;
- Competence to act in various digital (digital skills) and physical (including out of school) learning environments;
- Professional ideology, including a shared understanding of professional values and ethics codes (ethical conduct toward (i) students, (ii) practices and performance, (iii) professional colleagues, (iv) parents and community);
- Research skills (skills to consume research-based knowledge);
- Awareness of the different dimensions of the teacher profession: social, philosophical, psychological, sociological, and historical basis of education and schools' societal connections;
- Awareness about the different cross-curricular topics, such as topics related to human rights and democracy, entrepreneurship education, sustainable development, and globalization;
- Competence to act in the role of an "adult" in a classroom.

Expertise in generating novel ideas and education innovations

- A positive attitude toward continuous change, which requires tolerance of uncertainty and new and innovative ways of thinking;

- Willingness to create a positive atmosphere supportive of creative processes and curiosity, risk-taking related to classroom teaching and learning, and creation of educational innovations and, moreover, awareness of the importance of this attitude for creative outcomes;
- Competence for the implementation of creative processes, generation of ideas, and evaluation of ideas related to classroom teaching and learning and the creation of educational innovations;
- Research skills (skills to produce research based knowledge).

Competence for the development of their own and the school's expertise

- A supportive attitude towards different occupational groups;
- Self-regulation skills and skills for control over the work (skills for self-assessment);
- Competence for working in networks and teams, like multiprofessional teams at the school site;
- Competence in curriculum design and as an innovator for pedagogical approaches and learning environments;
- Ability to facilitate, coach, mentor, or train other teachers;
- Competence to reflect on their own personal pedagogical views (reflection for, in, and on action);
- Competence to use assessment outcomes for school development and the ability to develop the school culture in different networks and partnerships with students, parents, other experts, and stakeholders;
- Competence for the development of their own expertise through reflective activities, research-based knowledge, mentoring, in-service training, and seminars and workshops and is also willing to use this competence. (Niemi et al., 2018, 54–55)

Trust and Appreciation for Teaching

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Finland lacks explicit effective teacher models. Instead, the entire education system, including schools and teachers, are considered to be trustworthy and effectively achieving good learning results. According to Tirri & Toom (2020, p. 2), "pedagogy is moral in nature, and the teacher's main task is to reflect the values underlying her teaching and the purposes she wants to advance in her teaching." Historically, high trust and respect have been given to teachers, schools, and education in general in Finland (i.e. Tirri, 2014; Toom & Husu, 2016). According to TALIS (2014), 60% of Finnish teachers believed that the society values their profession.

The teacher's profession is highly appreciated in Finland and, consequently, the number of applicants to various teacher education programs many times exceeds the number of study places. One example of the appreciation that all Finnish universities offering teacher education programs have is that the entrance examinations for educational fields are done in collaboration among the Finnish universities. This means that the universities have the same entrance examination and the applicant can take one exam, but can apply with that exam to up to three universities. The *Finnish Magazine* has surveyed the appreciation of different professions and occupations in Finland. The latest survey from 2018 had 2000 respondents. It consisted of 379 professions and occupations and shows that different teachers were quite highly appreciated. Vocational teachers were in 9th place, special education teachers in 11th place, subject teachers in 12th place, and class teachers in 31st place. The top eight professions were different kinds of medical doctors, with the exception of the 4th place, which concerned midwives (Suomen Kuvalehti, 2018).

Teachers as Autonomous Professionals

Finnish teachers have a great degree of pedagogical autonomy and freedom in their work, and Finland has held on to this non-regulative, non-controlling and non-testing tradition for decades (see e.g. Niemi, 2015; Tirri, 2014). For example, there are no school inspections or teacher evaluations in Finland. Teachers are trusted as professionals, have pedagogical autonomy, and

exercise a high amount of freedom to realize their work (see, for example, Sahlberg 2014; Niemi, 2016, Toom & Husu, 2016). As Saari et al. (2014, p. 195) suggest, "the 'success' of education might be dependent on the autonomy of teachers and on [a] less centralized and standardized curriculum." Since the 1980s the decentralization in governance caused the dropping of school inspections, control was loosened, and teachers could decide independently how to implement the curriculum (Saari et al., 2014, 194; Simola, 2015; Aho et al., 2006). Textbooks are no longer inspected, nor are there school inspectors or supervisors (Vitikka et al., 2012). Teachers have the freedom to choose their instruction materials. Thus, in Finland the national curriculum gives very broad guidelines and does not restrict the pedagogical autonomy of the teachers, and neither does the government standardized testing on a yearly or national basis (e.g. Simola 2015).

Finnish teachers' work is regulated by the Basic Education Act, the National Core Curriculum, and the local curriculum (Jyrhämä & Maaranen, 2016). The Finnish context of education and teachers' work differ from many other countries, for instance, having broad pedagogical freedom, but along with that freedom, there is great responsibility (Toom & Husu, 2016). Schools can design their work independently, and teachers do not have to worry about someone auditing their skills or their ability to teach. The principals lead the school and its teachers, but there is no evaluation or criteria for a good teacher or good teaching (Jyrhämä & Maaranen, 2016).

Sahlberg (2014) mentions student assessment as one of the indicators of teacher responsibility. According to him, standardized tests are not markers for success in school, and they justify this by the following arguments:

1. Education policy in Finland gives high priority to personalized learning and creative teaching as important components of schooling. Therefore, students' progress in school is primarily judged against their respective characteristics and abilities, rather than by a reliance on uniform standards and statistical indicators.

2. Education developers insist that curriculum, teaching, and learning are priority components in education that should necessarily drive teachers' thinking and school practice, rather than focusing on assessment and testing, as is the case in some other education systems. Student assessment in Finnish schools is embedded in teaching and learning processes and is thereby used to improve both teachers' and students' work in school.

3. Determining students' personal and cognitive progress is regarded as a responsibility of the school, not of external assessments or assessors. Most Finnish schools acknowledge some shortcomings, such as comparability or consistency, where teachers do all student assessments and grading. At the same time, there is wide acknowledgment that the problems that are often associated with external standardized testing can be even more troublesome. These problems, according to teachers, include a narrowing curriculum, teaching to the test, and unhealthy competition among schools and teachers. Classroom assessment and school-based evaluation are therefore important and valued components of Finnish teacher education curricula and professional development.

4. The Finnish national strategy for student assessment is based on the principle of diversified evidence in which test-based performance data are just one part of the whole. Data regarding student achievement in various subjects are collected using sample-based standardized tests and thematic reviews. Municipalities are autonomously designing their quality assurance practices according to their needs and aspirations. (Sahlberg 2014, pp. 123–124)

As noted earlier, Finnish teachers are not evaluated by formal or specific evaluation measures. As part of the teachers' work contract, the teachers participate in an annual performance review with their supervisor, i.e. the principal or vice-principal. This, however, is mainly based on the teacher's own conception, along with the principal's conception, of his/her performance. The

performance review has a developmental aspect and offers an opportunity for teachers to share their professional developmental wishes. Naturally, if there were problems in the teacher's performance they would be brought up during this discussion. The problems would be known to the principal either from the colleagues', parents', or the students' complaints. In a study by Maaranen & Afdal (2020), it is shown that Finnish teachers do experience a lot of professional space and trust. The role of the principal is extremely important in how teachers experience professional space. They play a significant role in allowing freedom, showing trust, and providing an atmosphere that allows teachers to use much professional space (Maaranen & Afdal, 2020).

In Finland, schools are by law open to the public. This means that, in principle, anyone could walk into a school and a classroom and observe teaching. In reality, this possibility is limited. But if, for instance, a parent wanted to observe their child's classroom, this should be possible. Only on rare occasions would access to the classroom be denied. This openness also creates an atmosphere that a teacher's work is open for anyone's eyes and, thus, is transparent and justifiable.

Co-teaching has also become more popular in Finland in recent years. This also opens up a possibility for teachers to share their work and work in an open environment (for more, see e.g. Pesonen et al., 2020; Rytivaara et al., 2019). As Sahlberg (2014) states: "the basic assumption in Finnish schools is that teachers, by default, are well-educated professionals and are doing their best in schools. In real professional learning communities, teachers trust one another, communicate frequently about teaching and learning, and rely on their principals' guidance and leadership" (p. 125–126).

Built on the assumption that all teachers are effective, they are not paid performance-based salaries, but instead receive a twelve-month salary for their work during the school year. As Sahlberg (2014) notes, it is not part of the Finnish culture to think that teachers would be paid based on the success of their students (e.g., based on the results of standardized tests). Finnish society

considers “that caring for and educating children is too complex a process to be measured by quantitative metrics alone” (Sahlberg 2014, p. 26).

Finnish Teachers’ Ethical Principles

The National Core Curriculum establishes the values that are behind and guide school work, teaching and education in Finland. “In Finland, for example, teachers are considered ethical professionals who can be trusted and who share similar basic values about their work. These values are established in the ethical codes for teachers, which were first published in Finland in 1998” (Tirri & Toom, 2020, p. 2). The Trade Union of Education in Finland (2020), to which nearly 97% of Finnish teachers belong, has published the ethical principles as well as the Comenius’ Oath for teachers. The four basic values are dignity, truthfulness, fairness, and responsibility & freedom.

> **Dignity** means respect for humanity. Teachers must respect every person, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, gender diversity, appearance, age, religion, social standing, origin, opinions, abilities and achievements.
>
> **Truthfulness** is one of the core values in teachers’ basic task, which involves steering learners in navigating life and their environment. Honesty with oneself and others and mutual respect in all communication is a basic aspect of teachers’ work.
>
> **Fairness** is important both when encountering individual learners and groups but also in the work community. Fairness involves in particular promoting equality and non-discrimination and avoiding favouritism.
>
> Teachers are entitled to their own values, but in their work, teachers’ **responsibility** is tied to their basic task and its standards such as legislation and the curriculum. (The Trade Union of Education in Finland, 2020)

Tirri & Toom (2020, 2) state that the Finnish teachers are challenged by the freedom they are given. This means that they constantly need to develop their ethical skills (Tirri & Toom, 2020, .

Teacher Recruitment, Induction, Professional Development and Newly Qualified Teachers in Finland

Although the employment of teachers in Finland is good in general, according to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland's (2020) statistics, teacher unemployment has started to rise. This is partly explained by the COVID-19 pandemic. In autumn 2020, the unemployment rate for primary school teachers was 5.4% and for secondary and upper secondary school teachers 11.2%. Furthermore, 96.1% of primary schools teachers are qualified in their profession. (Finnish National Board in Education, 2020).

Although teacher attrition in Finland is not as alarmingly high as in many other countries, it is approximately estimated to be 20% (Lanas, 2017; Heikonen et al., 2017). For example, compared to the U.S. about 41% of American teachers left teaching within five years of entry according to Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey (2014). Nonetheless, in Finland it is worrying if beginning teachers decide to leave their profession. Usually, newly qualified teachers have the greatest problems in managing the diversity of the work, solving pedagogically and socially challenging student situations, working outside the classroom, collaborating with colleagues, enhancing holistic support for students, and cooperating with parents (see e.g. Harju & Niemi, 2020; Heikonen et al., 2016). These factors may contribute to the turnover of these new teachers.

Finnish pre-service teacher education is world famous for its high quality. However, induction programs in Finland have been almost non-existent until recent years (Niemi, 2015) . Formal induction programs are not common enough, since over 60% of primary schools do not provide mentoring (Niemi, 2015). This is clearly a shortcoming of the Finnish education sector. According to Beijaard, Buitink, and Kessels (2010), mentoring of beginning teachers, along with other activities, seems to make a difference. Although there is a lack of systematic induction, there are a few programs that offer induction for newly qualified teachers. One of these programs, and possibly the most widely spread in Finland is peer-group mentoring, which has proven to provide

positive results for newly qualified teachers (e.g. Korhonen et al., 2017; Heikkinen et al., 2018). The Ministry of Education has recognized the need to develop the induction of novice teachers and plans for better induction and in-service training are being drawn. Still, mostly the supporting and guiding of newly qualified teachers is the responsibility of schools and principals.

Continuing professional development in Finland is very much dependent on the teacher's own interest and willingness to participate in professional development. The teacher's working contract includes three mandatory professional development days in an academic year. These professional development days are organized and financed by the education provider, and the themes and topics can vary from very practical and concrete issues to the development and educating of the entire school community. Besides these obligatory days, teachers can develop themselves voluntarily. However, the financing of, for example, professional development courses depends on the financial situation of the education provider, that is, the local municipality and the school. Sometimes it is possible that the employer is able to finance further education for the teachers, but sometimes the teachers, if participating in a course, have to pay the fees themselves. Still, the Finnish teachers and principals are quite active in participating in professional development. For example, in 2018 more than 84% took part in in-service training (Kola-Torvinen & Kumpulainen, 2020).

Teaching as a Holistic Profession

Finnish teachers have less teaching hours than in many other countries. According to Sahlberg (2014, 89, 91), primary school teachers and lower secondary school teachers teach approximately 800-900 45-minute lessons annually. Typically, upper secondary school teachers teach four lessons a day on average, totaling to approximately 750 lessons annually. Besides teaching lessons, the teacher's work includes planning and assessing, as well as curriculum development and, for some teachers, various administrative tasks. Communication with parents is an integral part of the primary school teacher's work. Additionally, the teacher's work is considered

to be a holistic profession. A certain amount of teachers' working time is dedicated to joint planning within the school community (Trade Union of Education, 2019).

Assessment is a core task of Finnish teachers. The internal, teacher-conducted assessment policy in Finland also supports teachers in varying their classroom practices. According to Krzywacki, Koistinen, and Lavonen (2012), the autonomous role of teachers influences the way assessment is integrated as part of teaching and learning in Finnish classrooms. The purpose of the assessment is to improve and develop teaching and learning inside the classroom. The purpose is not to produce school rankings or to ensure adherence to a standardized syllabus. Teachers use enhancement-led evaluation in student learning, thus, formative evaluation methods are used to decide how to support various learners (Niemi et al., 2018).

Based on the TALIS 2018 report, the number of responsibilities besides teaching lessons exceeds the OECD average and, for example, the United States average. Finnish teachers do take part in the curriculum development, together with their colleagues at the school level, and some also in the municipal or national level (Schleicher, 2020). Local curricula are created in collaboration with principals, teachers, parents, and other local partners (Vahtivuori-Hänninen et al., 2014).

Evidence of Effective Teaching in Finland

Deemphasis on Private Tutoring and Private Schooling

One evidence of the perceived effectiveness of the Finnish education system is the lack of need for private tutoring and private schooling. There is hardly any market for private tutoring, except for some preparation courses for the matriculation exam. Besides that, Finnish students do not seem to need extracurricular tutoring. The Finnish law requires teachers to offer tutoring to students who have fallen behind in their studies. The reasons for falling behind are usually lengthy absences from school due to illness.

There are very few private schools in Finland. Even those few are not allowed to charge significant tuition fees, except for some nominal fees for materials. These private schools often have

the special task of developing teaching for a special emphasis or ideology, for instance a foreign language (the French school, the German school) or religious ideology (the Christian school). However, private schools must also follow the National Core Curriculum, and they are also funded by Finnish authorities.

Performance on PISA

Besides the lack of need for extra tutoring, one evidence for effective teaching in Finnish schools is the Finnish students' success in the PISA studies, especially in the early 2000s (e.g. Hautamäki et al., 2008). In the 2003 PISA, Finnish students were the best in the world in mathematics and reading (Välijärvi et al., 2007). According to Välijärvi et al. (2007, p. 3–4) "the successful performance of Finnish students seems to be attributable to a web of interrelated factors having to do with comprehensive pedagogy, students' own interests and leisure activities, the structure of the education system, teacher education, school practices and, in the end, Finnish culture." To put it simply, there is no one reason behind the PISA success, but a multitude of factors that belong to the Finnish way of living. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2019) 15-year-old Finnish young people were one of the best in reading literacy in the OECD countries in PISA 2018, together with Estonia, Ireland, Canada and Korea. The mean score fell by 6 points compared with PISA 2015, but it was not statistically significant. Mathematical literacy, too, was above the OECD average. Finland's ranking was between 7 and 13 among OECD countries and between 12 and 18 among all participating countries. The science literacy ranked among the best in the OECD countries, directly after Estonia and Japan. However, the worrying thing is that although over 14% of students have excellent reading skills, the number of low-performing readers increased significantly when comparing previous PISA 2009 and 2015 results. Furthermore, differences between Finnish schools have always been small by international standards while the gender gap in reading literacy performance has been one of the highest in the participating countries. In addition,

Finland was the only country where both reading proficiency and satisfaction with life were at a high level.

How to Keep Up the Good Work?

Between 2015 and 2019 the numbers of applicants to educational sciences in Finland has decreased. There are, however, some natural explanations for this, including a decreased number of a certain age cohort (Heikkinen et al., 2020). Besides that, the decreasing trend might be a temporary dip, as we experienced an upturn in 2020. However, it is not self-evident that the appreciation for the teaching profession stays high. Teachers' work has become more strenuous and demanding. "The call to teach" (Hansen, 1995) is not enough to attract high quality applicants or to keep them in schools. The TALIS (Schleicher, 2020, p. 14) findings highlight the importance of five aspects that predict job satisfaction:

- Selection of candidates with strong motivation and the right attitudes to become lifelong learners and professional workers.
- A strong focus on induction and mentoring throughout the career.
- A strong focus on providing meaningful and impactful opportunities for professional learning.
- Working conditions and a school climate conducive to teacher well-being.
- The importance of a sense of trust and respect.

Many of these previously mentioned issues have been core elements in the Finnish education system, but we can still do better and enhance the well-being of teachers, and thus the well-being of students. The tradition of respect and trust for education, schools, and teachers is a core element of Finnish culture. In addition, Finnish teachers are considered to be autonomous professionals and the teaching profession is still extremely attractive to young people. Finnish education sector does not believe in standardized testing and measuring, and sees no need for increasing them in Finnish schools, not for the students, nor for the teachers. In conclusion, we offer the following quote that

emphasizes the importance of understanding teaching as a highly demanding, respected profession in Finland:

> A critical condition for attracting the most able young people year after year to teacher education is that a teacher's work should represent an independent and respected profession rather than merely focusing on the technical implementation of externally mandated standards, endless tests, and administrative burdens. Indeed, teaching is not rocket science—it is much harder than that. (Sahlberg, 2014, p. 133)

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