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This is a post-peer-review, pre-copyedit version of an article published in

Menter Ian (Ed.) (2022) The Palgrave Handbook of Teacher Education Research. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. ISBN 978-3-030-59533-3.

The final authentic version is available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-59533-3_15-1

Cite this entry

Viesca, K.M., Goodwin, A.L., Warinowski, A., Mikkilä-Erdmann, M. (2022). Towards Internationally Shared Principles of Quality Teacher Education: Across Finland, Hong Kong, and the United States. In: The Palgrave Handbook of Teacher Education Research. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-59533-3_15-1

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Towards Internationally Shared Principles of Quality Teacher Education across Finland, Hong Kong, and the United States

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Abstract

During an era of globalization and increasing geo-political complexity, strong international intellectual communities committed to quality teachers is crucial. “[H]igher expectations for learning and greater diversity of learners around the globe will likely be better met if nations can learn from each other about what matters and what works in different contexts” (Darling-Hammond 2017, 307). Yet, the successes or challenges regarding quality teacher education that occur in varied national contexts are often dismissed as being irrelevant to quality teacher education in another national context (Partanen 2011). While particular contextual nuances are relevant, the commonalities and opportunities for improved research and practice through collaboration among/within national contexts is expansive (Akiba et al. 2007; Darling-Hammond 2017; Edge et al. 2017; Zhao 2010). It is within this landscape that a team of researchers from

the Finland, Hong Kong, and the United States are collaborating to examine teacher education research and practice in three unique contexts in order to co-construct shared understandings and possibilities grounded in principles of quality teacher education. The study examines models, research, and standards utilized in teacher education in each national site that together suggest internationally shared principles of quality teacher education to inform and ground ongoing international research and practice: collaborative curiosity, wholistic self-determination, and equity through pluralism.

Keywords: Teacher Education, Teacher Quality, International Collaborative Research

Towards Internationally Shared Principles of Quality Teacher Education across Finland, Hong Kong, and the United States

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Introduction

During an era of growing nationalism and far-right extremism across many national contexts, the need to sustain, expand and foster strong international intellectual communities committed to diversity and the quality development of teachers is crucial. Darling-Hammond (2017) suggested that, “higher expectations for learning and greater diversity of learners around the globe will likely be better met if nations can learn from each other about what matters and what works in different contexts” (p. 307). Yet, the successes or challenges regarding quality teacher education that occur in varied national contexts are often dismissed as irrelevant to the successes or challenges of quality teacher education in another national context (Partanen 2011). Such dismissals are neither helpful nor necessary. While the complexities and nuances of each particular national context are relevant and should be acknowledged, the commonalities and opportunities for improved research and practice in collaboration and informed by the work occurring among/within national contexts is expansive (Akiba and LeTendre 2007; Darling-Hammond 2017; Edge et al. 2017; Zhao 2010).

Sociopolitical histories and contemporary contexts vary, as do resources and governmental structures. Nevertheless, an idea shared internationally is that teaching is an exceptionally complex and demanding profession. It requires expertise that is developed, refined, and renewed through formal and informal learning throughout a teacher’s education and career (see Metsäpelto et al. 2021). Additionally, there is also a shared international challenge of working in racial, economic, cultural, and linguistic social hierarchies that impact the work and possibilities of quality teacher education for all students. Souto-Manning (2019) specifies the ways these hierarchies impact how quality teaching itself is operationalized as well as promoted, thus suggesting a further shared opportunity of internationally interrogating and disrupting inequitable status quo narratives. Further, COVID-19, as a shared crisis, has unified the world in ways not witnessed in centuries, while also creating new divisions and social unrest. With current migration patterns of historical proportions and growing resistance to shifting population demographics in varying national contexts, along with a rise in authoritarianism and fascism exacerbated by the global pandemic, the need to expand our research and thinking globally is both real and timely.

It is within this context that a team of researchers from Finland, Hong Kong (HK) and the United States (US) is collaborating to examine teacher education research and practice in our varying contexts in order to co-construct shared understandings and possibilities grounded in multicultural/multinational principles of quality teacher education. This chapter is an examination of research, and standards utilized in teacher education in the three countries under investigation that together suggest shared principles of quality teacher education that can inform and ground ongoing international research and practice. Engaging in teacher education through global discourses can influence transnational policy processes (e.g. Bologna process in Europe) and jointly construct expanded understandings about quality teaching globally (Metsäpelto et al. 2021).

The opportunity to accomplish these things while moving towards shared principles in quality teacher education is illustrated well through some concepts from legal theory. In legal theory, there is a distinction between the use of rules, standards, and principles. Solum (2009) describes the differences and notes that rules provide the most predictability and certainty and are particularly useful in guiding future conduct. Standards can help in insuring fairness and sensitivity by allowing for flexibility and the consideration of mitigating circumstances. But principles are best suited for the kind of legal tasks that cut across doctrinal fields. In legal theory, the same principle can be relevant across different contexts such as torts, contracts, and the law of wills. He argues, “Principles are particularly well suited to give legal form to concerns which operate in a wide variety of particular contexts” (Solum 2009, The job of principles section, para 1).

A recent international study of teacher practice illustrated how these ideas about the value and ability of principles to “operate in a wide variety of particular contexts” also hold true in educational research. The OPETAN (Observations of Pedagogical Excellence in Teachers Across Nations) project collected data in 31 classrooms across four nations: Finland, Germany, England and the US, using an observation rubric grounded in the Enduring Principles for Learning (Viesca et al. 2022). In this study, the value of looking at principles rather than discrete practices or standards was clear for how it afforded meaningful analysis of classroom observation data across varied national, linguistic, and cultural contexts. Anchoring international research in shared principles created the context for shared data collection and analysis that is difficult to achieve in ways that are culturally and linguistically responsive to the local contexts while also contributing to the broader dataset and understandings across national boundaries. A major finding of this study was the value of grounding international research in principles to organize data collection and analysis.

Other recent studies have examined conceptions of teacher professionalism and development across unique jurisdictions such as the United States, Hong Kong, and Australia (Goodwin 2021), or Australia, Finland Canada, Singapore, China/Shanghai (Darling-Hammond et al. 2017) in order to enable broad shared principles to emerge that can be more universally educative on an international scale. Additionally, Learning Compass 2030 offers shared principles (https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/learning-compass-2030/in_brief_Learning_Compass.pdf) through “a collaboration...among partners from around the world.” Led by OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), the project aims to identify directions for learning, and therefore teaching, that offer “a broad vision” and a “broad structure” for “a common language and understanding that is globally relevant and informed, while providing space to adapt the framework to local contexts.”

It is these perspectives and an interest in growing the possibilities of international collaborative research that undergirded this exploration. Through a brief discussion of the research and standards in each of the three countries under examination, strengths of the different systems have been identified and inform the principles put forward at the end of the chapter. These principles can play an important role in furthering efforts to create a foundation for international collaborative research--research that deliberately accounts for the varied contexts of local work while also creating the possibility to meaningfully research beyond it.

Each of the following three sections explores one national context seeking to answer the following questions:

- What are definitions and indicators of teacher quality that impact teacher education?
- What does the research say about teacher quality in initial teacher education?
- What are the lessons from this context and what are the gaps?

Teacher Education in Finland

The national context in Finland has a long history concerning education. There has been quite a rapid shift from a rural society to a modern society, in which the Finnish education system has come to be appreciated globally. In Finland, there is still high regard for teachers and the teaching profession even though there are signs that such societal status is in decline. The Finnish education system has its roots in the Evangelical Lutheran church's initiatives in teaching reading and writing for all citizens. Equity is therefore a basic principle that defines Finnish education: the same education system covers all Finnish children and the system is based on public, free-of-charge schooling from preschool through university. Additionally, targeted support for children with any type of learning difficulty is consistently developed and offered for all. For example, entrance to university is possible via a variety of pathways in the secondary school system, making university attendance itself more equitable. While equity has been a basic principle in Finnish education for decades, there are contemporary issues that need to be addressed like attending to the varying contextual backgrounds of different learners as well as disrupting segregation issues in the teaching profession based on gender.

Definitions and Indicators of Teacher Quality in the Finnish Context

There are three main components of teacher education in Finland that impact quality teaching. First, teacher education in Finland is highly selective, so efforts to impact quality teaching begin with recruiting the best potential candidates via student selection through entrance exams. Finnish teacher education programs are competitive and have entrance examinations that include two phases, then admit only around 10% of the students who seek entrance. Second, teacher education in Finland occurs at the master's level through university studies, which means that teachers build a strong relationship between research and practice. And third, the relationship between research and practice is further strengthened as teacher candidates conduct their own research and have substantial experience via guided teaching practice in training schools associated with universities. The current Finnish teacher education model is a result of major reforms that took place during the 1970s. Since that time, teacher education programs from early childhood education to secondary content teacher training have all taken place in universities, deepening a relationship between research and practice in developing quality teachers across these three articulated teacher education components.

Since 2016, the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland has been developing teacher education and improving its quality. For instance, they launched the national Teacher Education Forum to enhance national collaboration in teacher education. Also, in recent years, tens of millions of euros were targeted to development projects in teacher education. One of these projects was the OVET (DOORS) project which developed a national entrance examination and research-based aptitude testing measures for the selection of teacher candidates into teacher education (Mikkilä-Erdmann, Warinowski, and Iiskala 2019).

Quality teaching in the Finnish context is constructed around key competencies that are perceived as critical for the teaching profession. In the OVET project, seven universities collaborated to develop a Finnish research-based competence model for teaching, the MAP model (Multidimensional Adapted Process for teaching). The MAP model is based on Blömeke's model (2015) that distinguishes between teacher competences (performance) and competencies (knowledge and skills) underlying and enabling quality teaching and situation-specific skills such as perceiving, interpreting, and decision making in classrooms.

This multidimensional model articulates general competencies that all teachers in Finland should share. The emphasis of each competency varies depending on the context in which a teacher is working (e.g., the developmental age and stage of students or the specific school subject). The MAP model competencies work comprehensively to illustrate holistic characteristics regarding teacher competence, viewed as a continuum that begins with selection and admission into teacher education programs through pre-service preparation and into in-service teacher learning opportunities (Metsäpelto et al 2021). For teacher candidates, some competencies can be achieved even before they enter initial teacher education and are therefore viewed as potential that is accounted for in the selection phase. Based on the MAP model, the initial teacher education phase is considered pivotal in the professional development process (Mikkilä-Erdmann, Warinowski, and Iiskala 2019). Currently the MAP model defines teacher quality in the Finnish context.

The five dimensions of competences in the MAP model are the following: 1. Knowledge base of teaching and learning (e.g. content, pedagogical, and contextual knowledge), 2. Cognitive skills (e.g. critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity, and metacognition), 3. Social skills (e.g. emotional skills, diversity, and intercultural competence), 4. Personal orientations (e.g. values, motivational orientations, and professional identity), and 5. Professional well-being (e.g. stress management strategies, and resilience).

As described above, in Finland, teaching is considered an exceptionally complex and demanding profession that requires different kinds of expertise which is developed, transformed, and renewed through formal teacher education and informal learning throughout a teacher's education and career. Such a complex process of teacher learning necessarily entails transformations and requires cognitive, motivational, and affective skills teachers use in their classroom practices (Metsäpelto et al. 2021). Furthermore, teacher quality is operationalized in Finland as including a strong professional identity and clear understandings of the professional values and ethics of teaching in the larger societal context. Therefore, quality teaching is assumed to have an impact on both student achievement (cognitive outcomes and emotional well-being) as well as on societal development. In Finland, teachers are considered important agents for the future (Metsäpelto et al. 2021).

Recent developments and challenges in society, like Covid-19, climate change, and international conflicts, have presented huge challenges to teacher education in Finland as well. These large issues can be tackled with wide national and international collaboration and dialogue. The most important feature of the Finnish educational system and teacher education is the dialogue between all stakeholders, including teachers, the educational research community, and the government. Such dialogue is how teacher education in Finland is striving to move successfully into the future given all the local, national, and international challenges.

By focusing on collaboration and dialogue locally, nationally, and internationally, anticipatory work that creates new educational futures is possible (See also Mikkilä-Erdmann, Warinowski, and Iiskala 2019). Such forward thinking collaboration began after the OVET project ended and its work continued in a new project to build the Finnish Teacher Education Database (FinTED). FinTED (<https://sites.utu.fi/finted/en/>), a research infrastructure that is a dynamic national database for teacher education/ FinTED will be constructed and implemented through extensive national collaboration between higher education institutions. The basis of the database is national research data collected first to establish a baseline, and then in follow-up research. Another important national research collaboration between the Universities of Jyväskylä and Turku, is the SITE-project (“Student selection and competence development in the continuum of preservice and in-service teacher education” 2021-2025), that was funded by the Academy of Finland. The SITE-project examines how competencies measured at the selection phase predict the competence development of future classroom teachers during the first three years of study as a teacher candidate as well as the subsequent teaching quality at times of transition to working life. In addition to survey methods and modelling based on big data and case studies, process methodology, such as eye tracking and narrative methods, were used to capture the development of student teachers’ professional vision. This kind of collaborative research activity is important to boost the research-based development of teacher education and for the quality of teacher education in Finland to remain high.

Research-Based Teacher Education Supporting Quality Teaching

The Finnish definition of teaching quality includes the ability to use and engage in research and inquiry as a central component of serving children well (Darling-Hammond 2021). This is accompanied by a deep knowledge base around both content and child development that encompasses a robust definition of what an educated person will experience and learn and a well-developed set of skills for reaching and teaching diverse learners. The general design principle in Finland’s teacher education curriculum is to socialize students into university studies and give them a robust introduction to the educational sciences, empirical research methods, and basic skills and knowledge in teaching subject studies. Students also study communication and foreign languages, especially English and Swedish, for educational purposes, because research literature and many scientific sources needed for academic study are in foreign languages. The idea of research-based studies is to give future teachers tools to develop their competencies and observe complex instructional processes in classroom and support diverse learners.

To use research knowledge and skills as the basis for teacher education indicates the professionalization of teaching (Toom 2010). Finnish teachers also have the possibility to continue into doctoral studies because of their Master’s level education. As a result, the teaching profession is valued and teacher quality is defined as “highly intellectual and deeply clinical” (Darling-Hammond 2021).

Lessons and Gaps

From the Finnish context, at least two lessons can be learned. First, collaboration and dialogue among different stakeholders are seen as an important factor in teacher education. This collaboration includes universities and vocational teacher education, the Ministry of Education

and Culture, and other impactful actors like the Trade Union of Education, OAJ (Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö). Second, research provides the core for teacher education both in terms of content and practice. This also includes the development of methodological empirical research skills for teacher candidates during teacher education. However, there is a gap between initial teacher education and in-service teacher education in Finland, which should be linked to research-based professional development. More focused and longitudinal data are needed to support a research-based development of a teacher learning trajectory that includes initial teacher education and in-service teacher learning. Other gaps in Finland include diversity issues. For instance, language and ethnic diversity have been a focus of research and practice for some time, but there is still much that must be done. Especially, diversity needs to be interrogated and attended to more broadly to include, for example, sexual and gender minoritized groups. While gender equity has been a general focal feature of the Finnish society for some time, there still are gender disparities in learning outcomes, especially in relationship to integrating into the labor market.

Teacher Education in Hong Kong

A context deeply rooted in Chinese traditions and Confucian philosophy, education is highly valued in Hong Kong as the route to individual betterment and social progress, with an emphasis on hard work, sacrifice for long term goals, community advancement, and self-discipline. Indeed, a focus on education and quality schooling has been a feature of the Hong Kong system for the past 60 years beginning with the expansion of compulsory and free schooling, changes in curriculum, and increased university enrollments, alongside industrial and economic development (Bray and Koo 2006). The 1997 return of the territory to China as a special administrative region with its own independent education system headed by the Education Bureau (EDB), sparked another period of focused educational reform. This movement, ongoing for 20 plus years, has been in keeping with changing societal needs, the forces of globalization, economic growth (and ebbs), and evolving conceptions of an educated citizenry framed by a shifting political context. By all counts, Hong Kong can be seen as having made remarkable progress in a relatively short period in terms of universal schooling supported by qualified teachers, comprehensive and enriched curriculum, up-to-date facilities, and ample funding and resources. One indicator of progress is Hong Kong's performance on international benchmarking assessments, ranking amongst the top 10 for the past 20 years across almost all the subjects assessed by PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS. Research indicates that the quality of teachers is directly related to students' achievement, bringing this discussion to a closer look at how teacher quality is conceptualized in Hong Kong.

Definitions and Indicators of Teacher Quality

Hong Kong's educational reform movement has maintained a focus on teacher development undergirded by attention to credentials, knowledge, and skills as well as competencies and the professionalization of teachers (Cheng in press). This focus was apparent as early as 1984 with the establishment of the Education Commission to advise the government on education directions and policy, and which targeted six key areas including teacher quality. Other noteworthy actions supporting teacher quality included the policy "all-graduate, all-trained" adopted in 1997 requiring teachers to all be university degree holders by 2004 (University Grants Council, n.d.,

https://www.ugc.edu.hk/doc/eng/ugc/publication/report/hkied_AfUT_review_report/annex_f_e.pdf); the establishment of the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (ACTEQ) that took the place of the Education Commission as advisor to the EDB on education matters; and the crafting of a Teacher Competency Framework (TCF) by ACTEQ (2003). The TCF defined teaching as a “learning profession” with an emphasis on the life-long learning and continuing professional development of teachers. It seeded the notion of continuous learning among teachers as a defining characteristic of quality teachers and teaching: “Every teacher should be a continuous learner in order to advance the quality of our education system and the quality of students’ learning. Continuing professional development of teachers today is crucial to preparing the citizens of tomorrow” (ACTEQ 2003, p. 1).

A second key characteristic of teacher quality revolves around self-assessment and decision-making. Thus, in contrast to teacher standards in many other parts of the world typically designed to ensure “standardization, accountability, and teacher performance for licensing purposes” (Goodwin 2021, p. 10), the TCF was intended to be “generic,” “a common reference framework for establishing direction and creating momentum in continuing professional development” so as to “enable individual teachers to make meaningful self-evaluations of their learning needs over a wide spectrum of professional experience” (ACTEQ 2003, p. 1, 6). The language throughout the TCF is similarly revealing and reinforces professional choices and self-assessment. Thus the TCF “provides a template” (p. 6), offers “a traveller’s guide to the world of teachers’ professional development...[and]... lays out the landscape of professional growth,” a “map” that “does not dictate the routes that the traveler has to undertake” (p. 9).

The same sense of choice and autonomy applies to Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs) which are not held to specific standards as mandates. Undoubtedly education policy is the purview of EDB, which engages TEIs in the consideration of new policies. Yet, TEIs are self-accrediting and can independently interpret standards; there is no official mechanism to ensure compliance even while TEIs are encouraged to implement them, and there is consistency across the TEI programs despite no formal consensus amongst them about teacher preparation curricula.

Choice and teacher autonomy continue as defining aspects of teacher quality reflected in the 2018 *T-Standard+* which outlines “The Professional Standards for Teachers of Hong Kong” (PST) recently launched by the Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals (COTAP) (formerly ACTEQ). This is reaffirmed in the preamble to the standards (COTAP 2015):

When teachers grow, so do learners.

Dr. Carrie Willis, Former Chairperson, COTAP

They (standards) have been developed with the teaching profession for the growth of the profession. With full respect to professional autonomy, T-standard serves as a reference tool for the profession and its supporting partners, ensuring flexibility in its use.

Professor HAU Kit-tai, Convenor of T-standard Consortium

The language of the PST re-emphasizes the standards “as reference for professional

development planning for teachers” to make individual decisions about their growth and levels of competence. Teacher autonomy is further underscored by the provision of a “Self-Reflection Tool” for teachers to self-assess where they are on the “Professional Growth” continuum of “Threshold, Competent, Distinguished” (COTAP, 2015).

However, the PST departs from the TCF in significant ways that illuminate a third indicator of teacher quality. Specifically, the PST is anchored by a student-centered approach, focused on teaching the whole child, and attending to socio-emotional learning and dispositions. Quality teachers are defined as “Caring Cultivators of All-round Growth, Inspirational Co-constructors of Knowledge, and Committed Role Models of Professionalism” who emphasize positive values and attitudes and support students’ personal development, including understanding and management of oneself. “Moral virtues”, “collegial harmony” and “deep learning” are also threaded throughout the PST, further highlighting the importance of soft skills and teachers’ pastoral role.

What Does Research Say About Teacher Quality?

The Government attaches great importance to teachers’ professional development, and has implemented various measures to enhance teachers’ professional competencies and sustain excellence in education. (Task Force on Professional Development of Teachers 2019, p. 6)

*...the **T-standard+** describes teachers’ and principals’ competences, which are a combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values and attributes in action as they perform their duties. Teaching and leading require far more than technical skills. This explains why in the Standards, teachers’ and principals’ missions are interpreted as professional roles they play and the descriptors are written as stories or narratives of teachers and principals taking up their professional roles at different stages of professional growth. (COTAP 2015, Guiding Principles)*

A recent report by the Task Force on Professional Development of Teachers (TF-PD 2019) outlined recommendations for achieving greater levels of teaching excellence. Undoubtedly there is much attention being paid to increasing teacher quality in Hong Kong through mechanisms such as “full implementation of the all-graduate teaching force policy as soon as possible” (p. iii), alongside a professional ladder and other leadership or career advancement opportunities for teachers. The report indicates that teacher quality is associated with a qualifying university degree from a teacher education institution, the possession and demonstration of competences as described by the PST, teachers’ continual growth through ongoing professional development, and further professionalization of teaching.

The report relied on “research and literature reviews to learn about the systems and practices in other regions” (p. 3), but does not frame its recommendations with any specific empirical works that analyze or assess notions of teacher quality or professional competence. A scan of scholarship from Hong Kong researchers revealed a similar absence of studies that directly focused on teacher quality—what it means, what evidence supports how it is defined, etc. This is not to suggest that Hong Kong academic literature does not evidence studies that relate to teacher

quality, or as it is typically labeled in this context—teacher professional competence. Indeed, there are many researchers asking questions about professional competence, albeit typically included as a taken-for-granted concept that needs no detailed explanation. Thus, rather than study what teacher professional competence is or how one might use inquiry to determine teacher quality, the research reviewed seemed to focus on a wide range of contexts or variables in relation to teachers' professional competence, for the purpose of learning how different factors could lead to or enhance the professional competence of teachers.

The literature review conducted was layered and involved multiple searches of electronic databases using key descriptors such as teacher quality, preservice teacher preparation, teacher competence, etc...plus “Hong Kong.” To supplement this review, a targeted “hand” search of the profiles of Hong Kong scholars on the websites of (their) local teacher education institutes or on Google Scholar was conducted, in order to identify relevant research outputs. Given the limitation placed on the number of references that can be included in this chapter, a summary of findings will be shared for illustration purposes. One observation was the preponderance of discipline-based studies evaluating specific strategies, methods, knowledge levels or interventions in relation to the teaching of a particular subject (e.g., science), context (e.g., inclusive classrooms) or age group (e.g., early childhood). A second category of studies focused on preservice students' beliefs, perceptions, or conceptions of professional competence, usually in response to an activity or (field) experience within their initial teacher preparation program. A third kind of study centered on the impact of particular courses or professional development offerings on pre-service (as well as in-service) teachers. Most of the studies concluded with considerations for initial teacher training programs, but with minimal conversation about enriching or specifying definitions of teacher quality or professional competence.

These observations align with systemic priorities and contextual factors. First, the exam-driven nature of education in Hong Kong that privileges content knowledge on high-stakes tests likely fuels an emphasis on disciplinary instruction and what works best for subject-matter teaching/learning. Second, most of the studies use surveys and interviews, relying on self-report data, so researchers rightly stay within the boundaries of perceptions and experiences. Third, the teacher quality frameworks promulgated by the government have underscored teacher autonomy and self-evaluation, so it is reasonable for researchers to be asking their participants what they think about teacher competence, versus telling them. The recommendations from one article reviewed illustrates this third point well:

(1) Teachers are recommended to develop their own sets of competencies that reflect their own pedagogical and educational priorities...

(2) Promoting self-learning or independent learning would be vital for constructing student teachers' own knowledge in a process of reflection, and transforming the student teacher into an active agent. (Cheng, Cheng and Tang 2010, p. 101)

But in self-determination, one can choose to ignore or misinterpret; gaps and silences could be in place but simply missed. The issue of equity education and supporting diverse students might be one such example. The majority of the articles reviewed did not include diversity as an issue, goal or analytic lens, suggesting a gap and opportunity for growth.

Lessons and Gaps

As illustrated above, in Hong Kong, there is explicit attention to wholistic self-determination for teachers and students in teaching and learning processes. This is a promising approach that other nations may wish to take note of and learn from as teacher and student agency can play a strong role in supporting meaningful learning outcomes. However, also in the case of Hong Kong, divergence and diversity for the purpose of achieving equity are still at the somewhat embryonic stage, while the identity of a teacher as a researcher and knowledge generator is just beginning to be a formal systemic aspiration.

Two initiatives launched by COTAP to promote teacher/practitioner research include the Sabbatical Leave Scheme for Professional Development of Teachers and Principals in 2018/19 (<https://www.cotap.hk/index.php/en/t-train/SabbaticalLeave>) and the Education Research Award Scheme in 2021 (<https://cotap.hk/index.php/en/t-share/educational-research-award-scheme>). Both schemes aim to “enhance teachers' professionalism and support their continuous professional development, and promote a research culture within the education sector.” During the sabbatical, “Participating teachers and principals are required to apply their professional learning in completing planned educational research or school development projects,” while the education research scheme “aims to encourage teachers to try out, improve and share new or effective pedagogical practices through conducting educational research.” These new schemes provide teachers/principals with support (release time and/or funding), to engage in inquiry that allows them (alone or in teams) to follow their own questions and curiosities as “applicants are free to choose any education themes” and engage in “self-directed planning of local/non-local structured and/or individualized professional learning activities.”

In terms of equity and teacher quality, a recent policy directs teacher preparation programs to include special education instruction in their curriculum for all student teachers. The idea of core competencies for teachers, regardless of grade level or subject, is not well-developed, but this policy suggests some new thinking about what all teachers should know and be able to do to address academic diversity. Policy change continues to be a necessary lever for change, but changing educators' minds from deficit- to assets-based perceptions of ethnic minority students is a greater challenge in a context “that privileges Chinese and oppresses ethnic minorities such as South Asians,” and holds them to low expectations and stereotypes (Bhowmik et al. 2018, p. 665). Deficit constructions are also perpetuated by “the politics of belonging embedded in the ‘NCS’ (non-Chinese speaking) label” (Gao et al 2019, p. 194) that emphasizes what is missing versus what is in place. Further, Confucian epistemologies of fairness are fundamentally egalitarian with equal distribution seen as most fair, compared to targeted distribution of resources according to need to achieve common outcomes. No doubt there is work to be done, yet there is emerging and visible interest among teacher education researchers in tackling more challenging question surrounding equity for those disadvantaged by society, and in expanding or challenging prevailing definitions of fairness.

Teacher Education in the United States

The reigning feature of education and teacher education in the United States (US) is difference. For example, each state has different standards and expectations that guide teacher education policy and practice, which means that a teacher certified to teach in one state may need additional courses or further fieldwork before they qualify to teach in another. Similarly, there are varying pathways into teaching both within and across states—some pathways require a mere

few weeks of training before becoming the teacher of record in a classroom and others require extensive coursework and multiple practicums. In some states, teachers have to be certified as graduate students after they have earned their undergraduate degree. In others they can become certified with their undergraduate degree. Teacher candidates in some states have to pass standardized tests (eg. PRAXIS) and or performance-based assessments (e.g., edTPA, PACT) to either enter and/or exit their teacher education programs. This diversity is further intensified through school demographics and contexts where cities and neighborhoods in the US remain heavily segregated based on factors like race and socio-economic status. In the context of such expansive difference, ongoing conversations and efforts have been developed to achieve equity in teaching and learning. However, within that work, there are also different ideas of what equity is and what inputs and outcomes regarding teacher quality can achieve equity. Therefore, in this context of expansive difference where equity is often a focus, the sections below explore definitions and indicators of teacher quality as well as research on teacher quality with a particular attention to the roles and operationalizations of equity.

Definitions and Indicators of Teacher Quality

In the United States, quality teaching is often operationalized around the learning that students demonstrate in teachers' classrooms, especially through their performance on standardized assessments. While there are some who disagree with this operationalization of teacher quality, it is an approach that has a lot of political power and attention. Related to teacher quality understood through measures of student learning, there are some wide-spread perceptions of what inputs will create it. For instance, one powerful input regulator comes from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP)—a national accrediting body that many teacher education programs comply with to be nationally accredited. CAEP organizes its accreditation around six standards (e.g., content and pedagogical knowledge, clinical partnership and practice, program impact, etc.). While their reach is extensive in teacher education, their work focuses on accrediting programs, so their standards are not strictly indicators of teacher quality. They also look at aspects of teacher education programs like candidate recruitment and quality assurance mechanisms in teacher education. However, their work is intended to impact teacher quality through ensuring the base-line quality of teacher education programs.

Another mechanism in teacher education around teacher quality are performance-based assessments for teacher candidates that have gained traction in many states across the U.S (e.g., PACT, edTPA). The edTPA (Teacher Performance Assessment), supported by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) is used in varying ways across states including for teacher education program completion requirements, state certification/licensure requirements, program approval, program accreditation, and for external accountability in areas outside of accreditation (Reagan et al. 2016). However, much push-back around this assessment has occurred due to decision making around standards and assessments of teacher performance being removed from the local level (the edTPA is managed by a large publishing company, Pearson, so there is also a for-profit concern related to the decision making behind the assessment). In the context of so much difference across varying contexts in the US, concerns around who is making the decisions that determine quality teaching and performance is well justified. Further, the edTPA has also been criticized for its lack of attention to social justice and multiculturalism. It was explicitly examined by Souto-Manning (2019) and illustrated to uphold

white supremacist notions of “good teaching” and teacher quality that do not include knowledges and practices from minoritized populations.

Another group has offered standards that suggest what quality teaching is and should look like. In 2013, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), through its Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) released a document that combined their 2011 Model Core Teaching Standards with Learning Progressions for Teachers (https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/2013_INTASC_Learning_Progressions_for_Teachers.pdf). With this document, the CCSSO claimed to be providing “a new vision of teaching for improved student achievement” (p. 3). The InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards are composed of 10 standards around the concepts of The Learner and Learning (#1: Learner Development, #2: Learning Differences, & #3: Learning Environments), Content (#4 Content Knowledge, #5 Application of Content), Instructional Practice (#6: Assessment, #7 Planning for Instruction, #8: Instructional Strategies) and Professional Responsibility (#9: Professional and Ethical Practice, #10: Leadership and Collaboration). For each standard, performances, essential knowledge, and critical dispositions are identified, as well as a learning progression that illustrates what development on each standard should look over time.

The explicit language used to define the standards alongside the learning progressions suggest a distinct picture of teacher quality. Much of the document explores and suggests that differences in context and learner background matter for how teachers engage and support strong learning outcomes. There is a great deal of nuance and openness in the definition of quality teaching from these standards in terms of who teachers are and who they are working with in a variety of different classrooms. However, across the standards, the outcomes of learning are discussed in fairly monolithic terms focusing on “high standards” and “student achievement” that, while not officially operationalized, consistently point to “state standards” and thus allude to student performance on standardized tests. The work around assessment in the standards, does discuss the need for formative and summative assessments, suggesting that a variety of data can be used to achieve and determine “student achievement,” however, there is an implicit commitment to sameness in outcome that appears across the standards. Teachers and students should be embraced for their strengths and learning abilities, but only for the purpose of the same, shared outcomes. In this sense, these standards define teacher quality in terms of varied inputs but for the purpose of similar/same outputs. As noted above, such a focus on sameness in the context of defining teacher quality can privilege white normativity and overlook the valid and varied ways of knowing and being from minoritized populations (Sleeter 2017).

To some, taking the inherent differences that students and teachers bring to the classroom and turning them into the same “high quality” learning outcomes is what equity and quality teaching should produce. However, there is another perspective on equity that questions the value of such over-standardization in terms of how those standardized outcomes are constructed and whose epistemologies and ontologies are privileged. The InTASC standards represent a common perspective on equity in the United States at the moment—one where differences are an asset for learning, but learning outcomes are operationalized around monolithic White, western, Christian, middle-class, able-bodied, English-speaking norms. In this sense difference is only an asset as long as it can be utilized to generate a certain level of sameness in output.

What Does Research Say About Teacher Quality?

There are several lines of research in the US regarding teacher quality, the two selected here as worthy of exploration represent approaches and paradigms that have had and will continue to have a strong impact on teacher education and notions of teacher quality, albeit from different paradigms and perspectives. They both come from a substantial lineage of research and research-based perspectives and they both are currently playing a substantive role in conceptualizing teacher quality in initial teacher education spaces.

Core Practices

Grounded in years of research, especially that of researcher Deborah Ball, a research consortium currently exists with researchers from multiple institutions exploring the “core practices that matter for student learning and how the practices might vary by subject matter” (<https://www.corepracticeconsortium.org/>). Ball has long argued that teacher education should be practice-based. In 2009 Ball and Forzani argued that teaching should be conceptualized as “unnatural work,” thus necessitating careful design. This careful design should focus on the practice aspects of teaching (Ball and Forzani 2009). The core practices research suggests that teacher education has spent too much time teaching *about* teaching rather than teaching teacher candidates *how* to teach (Phillip et al. 2019). Some of the core practices that have been examined through research include eliciting and interpreting student thinking, leading group discussions, pushing for evidence-based explanations, and providing feedback (Matsumoto-Royo and Ramírez-Montoya 2021). And while the core practices research literature is impacting conversations and work across teacher education programs in the US, it is also receiving substantial critique. Phillip and colleagues (2019) argue that when the role of teachers is reduced “to performing core practices to raise student achievement on standardized measures, reform efforts that center core practices in the name of equity obscure the historical legacies and contemporary processes of social reproduction” (p. 253). They call for work that (re)emphasizes “the social, cultural, political, and situated dimensions of teachers’ practices and how they stand to reproduce, challenge, and/or transform systems and hierarchies of power in classrooms and society” (p. 259). They also suggest that centering justice and exploring if, when, and/or how core practices might not align with commitments to justice is important.

Schiera (2021) argues that the work on core practices and the work on social justice in teacher education (e.g., that of Phillip et al. 2019) represent two distinct communities of practice in teacher education and come from different paradigms and theoretical starting points, thus creating tension between the two. He argues for an approach that bridges core practices with social and critical learning theories to construct teacher education as a “community of praxis” (p. 462). However, despite exploring the tensions and possibilities of bringing core practices ideas in conversation with work on social justice in teacher education, the notions of what the learning outcomes of quality teacher education and quality teaching were not clearly defined. Without an articulated commitment to pluralism in input and outcome, Schiera’s arguments suggest a similar perception of quality teaching with the limitations discussed above.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

Another line of research with a long history in teacher education is the research on culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012; Alim et al., 2020). In 2012, Paris suggested that the work started in the 1990's largely by Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay around culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching laid an important foundation to build upon. He argued that quality teaching should be more than relevant and responsive to culture—that it should proactively sustain it. His work has been built upon by other scholars and more and more research is being conducted suggesting the value and impact of culturally sustaining pedagogies. In 2020 a team of researchers, including Paris (Alim et al., 2020) offered what they consider the six principles of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies. They suggest that these principles are because, “we sustain what we love” (p. 269) and that five of the principles come out of the center principle—decentering the white gaze. The white gaze can be defined and understood in a variety of ways, but it is often the perspective that operationalizes things like quality teaching and student learning outcomes (e.g., Souto-Manning 2019). And for that reason, approaches that uncritically assume certain practices and outcomes are meaningful and relevant for all are centering the white gaze and through such, ensuring inequitable outcomes and experiences for minoritized populations (e.g., Phillip et al 2019). Therefore, in culturally sustaining pedagogies, the core is de-centering that gaze and creating space for various ways of knowing and being in the world and for those ways of knowing and being to matter in teaching and learning. This is accomplished with the five other principles. The first names culture as complex and notes that it is evolving, intergenerational, and locally-sustained. The second is about “sustaining, revitalizing and imagining toward socially just, pluralistic societies.” The third is about a “desire-based approach to teaching and learning.” The fourth is about “sustaining lives and reviving souls.” And the final principle is about “loving critique and critical reflexivity.”

These six principles construct a definition of teacher quality that is about self-actualization for teachers and students in reciprocity and with accountability. This definition of teacher quality embraces diversity as positively productive and proactively creates the space for pluralism in inputs and outcomes. Further, this definition of quality teaching centers humans as loving, whole, soul-filled agents of their own experiences in learning and teaching. Grounded in pluralism and focused on the comprehensive well-being of the whole student and teacher, the six principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy provide the most insights into defining and enacting quality teaching that make equity for all students from a variety of communities a distinct possibility.

Lessons and Gaps

With the competing paradigms, varying operationalizations, and differing historical legacies and policies across the various spaces in the US, a common conception of teacher quality in initial teacher education simply cannot exist. Nor are there consistent practices. One major focus in the US is a focus on equity, though even that concept does not share a common operationalization. For instance, the research on core practices often uses the language of equity and suggests that the purpose of the core practices is to promote equity (<https://www.corepracticeconsortium.org/>). However, the major critiques of core practices research are around equity and justice concerns (Phillip et al 2019; Schiera 2021).

When equity is formulated as sameness in outcome, diversity becomes a tool to accomplish that goal of sameness. But when equity is formulated as varied in inputs and outcomes, diversity of ideas, culture, language, etc. can be embraced and sustained for creative possibilities in teaching and learning. In the US where there is much standardization of teaching and learning in both input and outcome, such embracing of pluralism is far from an expansive reality. And, the intellectual work that is occurring holds possibilities for pushing notions of quality teaching and quality teacher education to more comprehensively embrace the wholistic experiences of students and teachers and generate creative, transformative possibilities for pluralist teaching and learning that is both rigorous and justice-oriented. Therefore, equity work is both a lesson from the US for the world as well as a gap in the US that should be a continued area of focus.

Towards Internationally Shared Principles of Quality Teacher Education

Each narrative shared thus far reveals that notions of teacher quality result from the complex interaction of policies, practices, culture, history, fixed and emerging ideologies, economics, and research, all driven by specific national imperatives. Each of the three tales is characterized by strengths and challenges, yet each seems anchored by a central idea or principle. Teacher quality and development in Finland is undergirded by research and the positioning of teachers as curious enquirers who pursue questions of practice. Choice, decision-making and self-determination frame conceptions of strong teaching and teachers as professionals in Hong Kong. Diversity exemplifies teacher quality discourse in the U.S. along multiple dimensions including standards, teacher education research, and pedagogical approaches.

Collaborative Curiosity

Based on the description of teacher education and quality teaching in Finland above, the positive possibility of the internationally shared principle of collaborative curiosity emerges. This attends to both the longitudinal nature of teacher learning in focus in Finland (from admission through in-service), but also suggests the value of integrating research into teaching and teacher education practices. Further, as recent developments in teacher education in Finland highlight—there is great value in the collaborative nature of engaging curiously with teaching and learning. From co-constructing admissions requirements across multiple teacher education universities (through collaborative research) to co-constructing a shared national database of teacher education data, Finland provides a variety of examples and possibilities for other countries to consider ways of applying the principles of collaborative curiosity grounded in dialogue and inquiry into teacher education as well as teaching and learning generally.

Essentially, collaboration is where the important dialogic work happens across meaningful educational stakeholders. Successful collaborations across different groups of people will typically grapple with power issues and imbalances and create contexts for varied voices and perspectives to be meaningfully accounted for. In Finland, such collaboration often occurs with teachers, educational researchers, and government representatives (with varying experiences regarding power-sharing). Perhaps there are other important education stakeholders that could be included in both Finland and other spaces—e.g., students and families as well as community and religious organizations. Further, such collaboration should continually work to ensure the power dynamics in collaborations across diverse groups are thoughtfully attended to.

Combining collaboration with curiosity as an overall principle to guide quality teacher education internationally suggests both the opportunity for transformative problem solving to occur when collaborative groups work in curious ways to explore what is known about problems, what needs to be known about problems as well as meaningful solutions to those problems. Therefore, collaborative curiosity creates the context for teaching and learning to focus on growth through exploration and inquiry. Collaborative curiosity can happen inside and outside of classrooms, but should fundamentally be for the purpose of creating teaching and learning that embraces pluralism across process, product, and outcome, thus disrupting many typical practices (as in the US) grounded in standardization and sameness. Collaborative curiosity in teacher education and for quality teaching and learning shifts the focus from mastery to growth, from memorization to exploration, and from standardization to generative difference.

As an internationally shared principle, the ideas around collaborative curiosity should be understood broadly and operationalized in locally relevant ways. For instance, it may not be feasible to co-construct shared admissions requirements or a national dataset in a country as large and diverse as the US, however, that does not mean collaborative curiosity in teacher education cannot deeply impact both research and practice. It is possible for local groups in varying national contexts to grapple with this idea of collaborative curiosity in teacher education and co-construct ways of researching this principle as well as enacting it, to be able to learn and inform the collaborative curiosity occurring in other spaces.

Wholistic Self-Determination

From our exploration of teacher education, research, and notions of teacher quality in Hong Kong, an internationally shared principle of teacher education around wholistic self-determination emerges. In Hong Kong, teachers and teacher educators enjoy a great deal of professional autonomy and ability to make professional decisions about teaching and learning as well as teacher education. There is a wide-spread focus on this notion of self-determination that also includes attention to student-centered teaching and learning practices as well as the wholistic well-being of students and teachers, thus wholistic self-determination.

Much of teaching and learning is often performed through acts of control (e.g., teaching as monitoring and surveillance) and obedience (e.g., learning as compliance) (Viesca and Gray 2021). This has been characterized as the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM), which forwards “standardization of education...focus on core subjects...low risk ways to reach learning goals...corporate management models...test based accountability: (Sahlberg 2012, paras. 5-9). In contrast, Hong Kong teachers are encouraged to exercise their own judgement. For example, they are invited to self-assess where they are on the “Professional Growth” tool by deciding where they are on the continuum, with the caveat that if “an accurate/appropriate descriptor is not available, you can choose the stage you belong to and edit the descriptors to substantiate your choice.” Moreover, wholistic self-determination and choice can shift teaching-learning from actions designed to control students’ learning towards pre-specified ends, to child-centered guidance beyond content knowledge to support future possibilities. Thus, the PST frames professionalism as teachers nurturing “three essential attributes of students”: “whole-person wellness; key competences for adulthood; change agility for tomorrow.”

The exercising of professional agency was especially apparent (or absent) during the pandemic when schools around the world had to quickly pivot to online instruction even as they faced a

myriad of unprecedented challenges. Educators in Hong Kong were no different, but the school-based management model in place, “has allowed ample room for schools to exercise their discretion, and in turn for teachers within schools to make decisions” (Cheng in press). Bolstered by “the shared mission for students’ well-being” the school suspension period galvanized teachers, who “have never waited for directives from above,” into action because they “see themselves as professionals, as masters of education, rather than just another kind of employee” (Cheng in press).

This notion of professionalism for teachers as well as wholistic self-determination in making teaching and learning decisions is a principle that is also apparent in the Finnish context. When it is considered in relationship to collaborative curiosity, the possibility for power-imbalances to be grappled with and humanizing practices to be centered emerges. Such work can focus on how individual self-determination (of teachers and students for example) can impact collective well-being of communities and schools. In this way, each forwarded principle herein is individually important, but most successful when understood in connection with the other principles.

Equity through Pluralism

While not totally achieved in the US context, the research explored herein does suggest the value of focusing on equity through the lens of pluralism. When diversity is valued only as much as it can be leveraged to create monolithic standardized outcomes, it is not truly about equity. When equity through pluralism is a guiding principle of teacher education and quality teaching, human variety in idea, culture, language, etc. can be embraced and elevated for quality teaching and learning across inputs and outputs. This also allows for localized varieties in teacher education and teaching and learning to be embraced and elevated in collaborative international research.

By embracing equity through pluralism across all aspects of teaching and learning, humanizing connections can be developed from one person to another across varying diversities. For this to occur, the relationships and practices developed in teaching/learning spaces need to be purposeful in order for the community’s inherent diversity to be co-constituted as positively productive and thus capable of generating wide-spread love and belonging. To accomplish this, the principles of equity through pluralism in practice creates teaching and learning spaces where self-actualization can occur through reciprocity and accountability (Simpson 2017). In this way, individual self-actualization (informed by wholistic self-determination) ensures collective self-actualization (perhaps operationalized through collaborative curiosity) through reciprocity and shared accountability. With such commitments in place, all forms of diversity can come into relationship in ways that are positive and productive while co-creating authentic love and belonging at the individual and collective level.

Summary

From exploring the current teacher education practices as well as research and indicators of teacher quality across three differing national contexts, three potential principles to guide international collaborative teacher education research and practice have been forwarded: collaborative curiosity, wholistic self-determination, and equity through pluralism. While each of these principles is best understood in relationship and connection to the other, there is thoughtful collaborative, international work to do with these principles in research and practice. For instance, self-study of teacher education practices can occur in a variety of spaces examining the

presence and absence of these three principles in teacher education spaces. By sharing the results and developing understandings around teacher education research and practices across international contexts grounded in these principles, further growth of the possibilities of putting these principles into practice in varied local contexts in ways that are responsive to local communities and needs emerges. Additionally, locally relevant learning opportunities for teacher candidates and practicing teachers can be developed that connect with pre- and in-service teachers in different national contexts. What do pre- and in-service teachers think about these principles? What possibilities and affordances do they see when considering them for their own teaching and learning practices? What other principles should be attended to in order to grow equitable and socially just teaching and learning practices across varying national boundaries? This chapter explores the possibilities of these shared principles—working to engage across varying contexts to grow the understandings and possibilities of quality teacher education for all in globally relevant yet locally meaningful ways—and lays the foundation for collaborative international research and practice that is just beginning.

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