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Marianne Larsen

The University of Western Ontario, mlarsen@uwo.ca

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Comparing Connecticut and Finland: Teacher Friendly Policies in an Age of Accountability

Marianne Larsen (University of Western Ontario)

Abstract: Educational policy makers across a wide array of settings have made concerted efforts to improve their educational systems by paying close attention to their teaching profession. The state of Connecticut in the north-eastern U.S.A. and the northern European country of Finland are two such jurisdictions. However, unlike most other settings, where low-trust, accountability based policies have been imposed on the teaching profession, Finland and Connecticut's policies can be considered teacher-friendly. This paper compares the teacher policies implemented in those two settings over the past fifteen years. Given the well-documented link between teacher quality and student achievement, it is worth considering these teacher friendly policies, which shift the focus from high-stakes accountability to improving teachers' working conditions and the overall prestige of the profession within a supportive policy framework.

Résumé:

Les responsables des politiques de l'enseignement public, à travers une rangée étendue de milieux, ont fait conjointement des efforts pour améliorer leurs systèmes d'enseignement en prêtant plus d'attention à la profession de l'enseignement. L'état de Connecticut dans le Nord-est des États-Unis et la Finlande, pays nordique de l'Europe sont deux de telles juridictions. Cependant, à l'opposé des autres milieux, où une confiance peu élevée et une politique ayant pour base la responsabilité scrutateuse se sont imposées sur la profession de l'enseignement, la Finlande et le Connecticut ont adopté une politique que l'on peut dire amicale envers les enseignants et enseignantes. Cet article compare ces politiques qui ont été mises en cours dans ces deux milieux pendant les quinze dernières années. Etant donné la corrélation bien documentée entre la qualité des instituteurs et institutrices et le résultat accompli des élèves, il vaut bien l'effort de considérer ces politiques amicales aux enseignants et enseignantes. Ces politiques ont remplacé le centre d'attention sur une responsabilité sévère par l'amélioration des conditions de travail des enseignants et ont rétabli le prestige de la profession dans le cadre d'une politique de soutien et d'appui.

Introduction

Across a range of countries, education reforms have been implemented to raise school standards by improving the quality of the teaching profession (Australian Commonwealth, 2005; Ontario Provincial, 2001; OECD, 2005; U.K. DfES, 2002; U.S. Federal Govt., 2002). Generally speaking, these can be considered high-accountability, low-trust teacher policy reforms that include teacher surveillance

strategies such as inspections, teacher testing, and performance-based appraisals (Helsby & McCulloch, 1997; Mahony and Hextall, 2000; Troman, 2000). Wider education reforms such as nationally prescribed curricula and standardized student testing have led to work intensification for teachers, as well as reducing opportunities for innovation and creativity in the classroom and collaboration between educators. New modes of control over teachers, such as testing and the appraisal of new and experienced teachers have also increased workload and exacerbated levels of stress, anxiety and frustration within the profession (Larsen, 2005). Critics have noted that these reforms have been implemented by policy makers who view the professional teacher as one who “does things right” rather than “does the right thing” (Darling-Hammond, 1990, p. 31).

Although few and far between, there are some exceptions to this general trend in low-trust, accountability-based teacher policy reforms. In the country of Finland and the U.S. state of Connecticut reforms have been implemented that have increased the general prestige and social status of teachers, as well as enhanced the creative, collaborative and cooperative nature of their work. While there are many similarities between the teacher policies implemented in Finland and Connecticut, there are also differences. Connecticut has developed a comprehensive, standards-based approach to improving teacher quality that focuses on evaluation and supports for beginning teachers. Finland, on the other hand, through curriculum reforms, has developed a decentralized approach that emphasizes teacher autonomy and freedom. In contrast to Connecticut, there is no teacher evaluation in Finland, nor are there any induction programs or legislated supports for beginning teachers. In both settings, close attention has been paid to improving teacher education, as well as ongoing professional development for classroom teachers.

Finland and Connecticut have recently been at the centre of public and international attention following the release of their high results in student testing. As a result, many educational researchers, scholars, and policy-makers are looking very closely at the Finnish and Connecticut education systems. Many agree that the teacher policies in each of these jurisdictions are largely responsible for the strong results in student testing at the international level in Finland’s case and nationally with regard to Connecticut.

This paper will describe the teacher policies implemented in Connecticut and Finland over the last fifteen years. This is followed by a review of some of the effects of these policies, both positive and negative, intended and unintended. In attempting to understand the effects of these policies, I draw upon Stephen Ball’s policy-sociology approach. Policy, according to Ball (1994), is “both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended”. Policy sociology acknowledges the different ways that policies are ‘taken up’, shift and change across different educational settings. Across countries, states, and provinces, but within and between individual schools and classrooms, policy plays itself out in very different ways. Attempts to measure the effects of policy often blur over local specificities with attempts to generalize about education policy reform. However, it is important to acknowledge the degree to which policy

responses vary between settings as we see with the case studies of Connecticut and Finnish teacher policies. Further, this analysis takes into account complex and changing historical, socio-economic and political contexts, and acknowledges the complex and multifaceted nature of education reform.

Background on Connecticut and Finland

Finland, a northern European social democratic country, is comprised of 5.2 million citizens living in sparsely populated rural and urban areas. Finland, like many other western states, was particularly hard-hit by the 1990s economic depression and in response the government scaled back the state, bringing in a set of economic restructuring policies premised on state deregulation and decentralization. The country emerged from deep economic recession during the second half of the 1990s. Much of their economic success occurred as a result of widespread political consensus beginning first with the election of the conservative National Coalition Party in the late 1980s, following by the assemblage of two 'rainbow coalition' governments headed by Social Democrats, in the 1990s (UNESCO, 2005).

Economic pressures, a long-standing commitment to social security, independence and initiative, and the development of coalition based governments help to understand Finnish educational policy making over this period. Education restructuring during the 1990s consisted of significant changes through small and gradual steps. Reforms included the deregulation and decentralization of educational authority to local municipalities, shifts in education funding, school district reform, the discontinuation of the school inspection system and reorganization of the national curriculum. The latter allowed for significantly more autonomy to local school districts (and teachers) than had previously been the case (Simola et al., 2002).

Connecticut, the third smallest state in the U.S. has a population of approximately 3.5 million, and derives most of its wealth from industry. Nearly all of the state's 169 towns and cities maintain their own school districts, which like Finland's districts are small. Connecticut schools are funded out of municipal budgets and are heavily reliant on local funding. In fact, local control dominates educational governance in the state. Local school districts retain discretion over operation, attendance, transportation, libraries, textbooks and the curriculum. As in Finland, the central (state) government sets broad guidelines for curriculum, which are implemented at the local level (McDermott, 1999).

The 1990s economic crisis also spurred Connecticut policy makers to look very carefully at the relationship between economic and educational reform. As in Finland, policy makers from across the political spectrum put aside partisan differences and voted together to bring in wide-ranging educational reforms, including curriculum changes, higher standards for high-school graduation, longer kindergarten classes, local requirements for homework and attendance and the teacher reform package outlined below. All of these reforms were aligned according to state-wide standards for students and teachers (Connecticut, 2005a; Wilson et al, 2001).

In both Connecticut and Finland, policy makers realized that teachers were essential levers for reform. A commitment to improving teacher quality was therefore embedded within wider education policy reform. Governments in both settings recognized the importance of investing in teachers as a part of their broader education reform agendas. As far back as 1981 Connecticut education policy makers, for example, targeted four critical teacher quality issues: recruitment, initial preparation, induction and ongoing professional development, as essential for their wider education reform goals. As a result of these types of policy commitments, significant gains were made in student performance, which are reviewed next.

Student Achievement Success

From 1992 to 1996, the proportion of fourth grade Connecticut students who scored at or above a proficient level in mathematics in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP) Trial State Assessments went from 17% to 19%, and for eighth grade students, from 22 to 31%. By 2004, these results had increased dramatically with 74% of grade four students and 79% of grade eight students scoring at or above proficiency in mathematics on final NEAP mathematics assessments. Connecticut has become one of the top scoring states in the U.S. in reading, with their students now 17 percentage points ahead of the rest of the nation. Further, in state level evaluations of writing, the average Connecticut students have scored well above national norms (Connecticut State Department, 2005a; Wilson et al, 2001).

Finland has had similar successes, but at the international level as there are no national standardized tests there. The country was rated first in international literacy testing and outscored 31 other countries in the 2003 O.E.C.D. Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests for 15 year-olds in mathematics and science (OECD, 2004). As a result, much international attention has subsequently been directed towards Finland to understand why the country is leading the world in international student testing. The high quality and social standing of Finland's teachers has been viewed as a factor contributing to their high ranking in these international tests.. When asked the reasons for Finland's educational successes, the principal of Arabia Comprehensive Schools said that there were three reasons: "Teachers, teachers, and teachers" (Kaiser, 2005).

Pundits have also pointed to improved teacher quality within Connecticut to explain high student achievement gains. Wilson et al (2001) claims that the most consistent highly significant predictor of student achievement in reading and math during each year of NEAP testing was the proportion of well-qualified teachers in Connecticut. There is other research demonstrating that states such as Connecticut that undertook the most comprehensive teaching policy initiatives during the 1980s showed steep gains in student performance from the early to mid-1990s (Darling-Hammond, 2000b). This is unsurprising given the well-documented positive correlation between student learning and teacher quality, as measured by certification, educational background, and verbal ability (Darling-

Hammond, 2000a; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Philips, 2002; Whitehurst, 2002). Further, “value-added” research studies have revealed a positive relationship between teacher quality and student achievement in reading and math, independent of external variables such as the language and socio-economic background of students (Jordan, Menro & Weerasinghe, 1997; Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

Teacher Education Reforms

Connecticut and Finnish education reformers were both committed to raising teacher quality by improving their initial teacher education programs and standards for certification. Policy makers in both jurisdictions initiated reforms to elevate standards within teacher education programs by tightening up admissions and graduation criteria. At the University of Helsinki in Finland, for example, applicants must complete an admission test comprised of a book exam, an interview, and a group session. Responses on the exam are evaluated according to the candidate’s ability to receive and critically process information, to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information, and for creativity and argumentation. Candidates must also hold a group teaching or activity session and take part in those led by other applicants. As a result of these more rigorous admissions standards, entry to teacher education programs is extremely competitive (and therefore considered very prestigious) with only an estimated one out of every nine applicants admitted (Cavanagh, 2005). In fact, it is claimed that these admission requirements explain, to some degree, the high results that Finland achieved on the PISA tests (Meri, 2005).

Admission to initial education programs in Connecticut is also rigorous. There are two basic routes to teacher certification. To obtain Connecticut educator certification, individuals must either have documented proof of at least 20 months of successful full-time teaching experience and complete the appropriate general academic and professional education required course work for their teaching level and subjects. Most candidates take the mainstream route and complete a state approved teacher education program at an accredited institution. In both cases, candidates must successfully complete the basic skills test PRAXIS I and the subject matter test PRAXIS II administered by the national Educational Testing Service. Both of these tests operate as gatekeepers to prevent the least-skilled candidates from becoming certified teachers and to raise the status of the profession (Wilson et al, 2001).

Initial teacher preparation in Connecticut takes place through a university-based program. To be certified, candidates must either complete a one-year degree in education, following a 3-4 years Bachelor’s degree or a concurrent undergraduate and graduate degree in education. Although not a formal requirement for certification, almost 80% of Connecticut teachers hold a Masters degree, which is significantly higher than the national average (Connecticut, 2005a). Course work at the faculties of education is rigorous. *All* candidates preparing for teacher certification at the University of Connecticut, for example, also work towards a Masters degree. Standards are high and the program work

intensive within the two certification programs (either a 1 year post-undergraduate degree or 5 year concurrent degree). This past year the average GRE score of incoming education students rose 23 points, attesting to the high quality of candidates for teaching in the state (University of Connecticut, 2006).

All teacher education in Finland, from pre-school education to secondary school/ subject-teacher education takes place in universities. Up until recently, student-teachers were required to complete a five-year Masters degree either in education or in one or two teaching subjects in order to be qualified to teach. As of August 2005, teacher education in Finland moved to a two-tier degree system in line with the European and North American models of higher education degrees. The successful combination of a three-year Bachelor's degree and a two-year Master's degree in appropriate subjects now qualifies individuals to teach (Niemi, 2005).

Theory, Research and Ongoing Professional Development

Teacher education in Finland emphasizes both the practical and theoretical aspects of teaching and learning. However, it is the latter that stands out (from a North American context) as being unique. In addition to the wide range of subject based courses that teacher candidates enrol in, there are also compulsory theoretical and foundational courses, such as the social basis of education, philosophy, didactics and the history of education. As McPhee and Humes (1999) in their comparative study of teacher education in Europe conclude: "Far from avoiding theory, in Finland it is positively encouraged." Further, educational research is highly valued and all students are trained in research methods, statistics and must present at research seminars. It is argued that in order for teachers to internalize a research-oriented attitude, they require a "profound knowledge of the most recent advances of the research in the subjects they teach [and] to be familiar with the newest research on how something can be taught and learnt" (Niemi, 2005, p. 5).

The emphasis on academic research in Finland does not end after initial teacher education. Cross-disciplinary national research programs on learning and teaching have been established to provide teachers with opportunities to engage in continual professional development and other forms of life-long learning (Niemi, 2005). Teachers continue to enrol in other forms of in-service education to enhance their professionalism. As one study concluded, teachers are left with a feeling of empowerment and confidence after having participated in in-service workshops (Estola and Syrjälä, 2001).

Lifelong learning is also valued within the Connecticut teaching profession. To maintain their Professional Educator Certificate, teachers in Connecticut are obliged to complete 90 hours of professional development training every five years. Since 1999, the state board of education has aligned professional development with standards for student learning. These standards, known as the *Common Core of Learning*, operate in conjunction with the *Common Core of Teaching*, a comprehensive set of standards, developed in conjunction with teachers' associations, which define the knowledge, skills and competencies that teachers need to ensure that students learn and perform at high

levels. Both sets of standards underpin all of the teacher policies in the state, including pre-service and in-service teacher education, and the comprehensive induction program and licensure system for new teachers (Connecticut State Board, 1999; Connecticut State Department, 2002).

Connecticut's BEST (*Beginning Educator Support and Training*) Program, described in more detail in the next section, contains many professional development opportunities for new teachers and their mentors and portfolio assessors. As of 2000-01, mentors for beginning teachers in Connecticut are provided with opportunities to learn how to support new teachers. This professional training addresses a range of topics related to mentoring new teachers, the Connecticut teaching standards and the BEST portfolio requirements (Youngs, 2002). A survey of special educators who were trained as mentors and portfolio scorers showed that 83 percent of participants made at least moderate changes in their classroom practices as a result of the training. One teacher commented, "Going through the portfolio process has reminded me to include conscious reflection on lessons to target what worked and what needs to change"(Carroll & Carroll, 2004 in Fisk, 2005a). This confirmed results from another earlier study on the impact of assessor training that found that nearly 80 percent of the educators reported that training had significantly improved their own teaching and promoted greater self-reflection on their teaching (Fisk, 1997). In effect, the new teacher induction program was designed to enable on-going professional learning amongst both new and experienced teachers.

Induction and Other Supports for New Teachers

BEST, a two-year comprehensive and mandatory induction program, is one of the most significant components of Connecticut's teacher reform package. Each school district has been required to develop an induction program for beginner teachers based on mentoring, support and evaluation, and professional development. To this end, between 1986-87 and 1996-97, over 11,000 new teachers have entered the Connecticut educational system through the BEST program (Wilson et al, 2001). According to the program, licensure is dependent upon the successful completion of a subject-specific teaching portfolio over the first two teaching years. The portfolio is comprised of documentary evidence of a unit of instruction on a significant concept, including lesson logs, videotapes of classroom teaching, teacher commentaries, samples of student work, and reflections on their planning, instruction, and assessment of student progress. Teachers are asked to demonstrate how they think and act on behalf of their students, and in so doing, show their skills and knowledge in relation to their own specific classroom contexts (Wilson et al, 2001).

Resources and an elaborate support structure exist to assist new teachers to meet BEST licensure requirements. For a minimum period of one year, beginning teachers are expected to make thirty hours of significant contact with their mentor, support team, other teachers in their content area, the principal and/or the district facilitator. Mentors observe or videotape first-year teachers' classroom practices and analyze their lessons with them, discussing effective

teaching strategies and reflecting upon the progress of the new teacher's students. Mentors and beginning teachers are provided with time to meet and work together and, as noted above, with opportunities for shared professional development experiences (Connecticut State Department, 2005b; Fisk, 2005a).

In contrast to Connecticut, there are no structured beginning teacher support systems or teacher evaluations in Finland. Since abandoning school inspections in the 1980s, there has been little interest in teacher evaluation reforms in Finland (Eurydice, 2004). As Schliecher, the head of the OECD's education indicators and analysis division explains, "Finnish teachers aren't being constantly watched and monitored, they don't have to comply with masses of government bureaucracy and they are allowed the freedom to teach they way they want" (Quoted in Crace, 2003). Perhaps it is the very autonomy of the Finnish teaching profession, reviewed next, which helps to explain Finnish teacher's aversion to any form of teacher evaluation, even if it is embedded within a supportive, mentoring system such as that taken up in Connecticut.

Curriculum Changes and Teacher Autonomy

Finnish schools enjoy much autonomy. The 1990s educational reforms ushered in a new National Curriculum, which is more flexible and attentive to local contexts, allowing municipalities the freedom to develop their own curriculum to reflect their own needs. Some schools focus on particular curriculum areas, such as sciences, arts and music, sports or languages, and students have more optional credit choice (Sarajala 2005).

Specifically, the Finnish teaching profession has been entrusted with considerable freedom and pedagogical autonomy to determine how to implement the curriculum. Compared to their colleagues in other OECD countries, teachers in Finland have more influence in determining which textbooks to use and how to assess students. Teachers are involved in school based decisions about course offerings and the allocation of school budgets. Such a high degree of school and teacher autonomy in decision making is assumed to be one decisive factor contributing to Finland's high performance in PISA (Valijarvi et al 2002).

Teachers have benefited from this increased freedom, which has enabled them to develop a host of new teaching methods to suit the needs of their students. As one elementary school teacher explained:

If you think about the situation at the beginning of the 1990s when the legislation was changed, there is a huge difference. As a profession, teachers' work has been liberated and the classroom has changed into a learning environment, excursions and visits are made to an altogether different extent than before. Also this work is done using many different methods, e.g. group work, project work, pair work, and bus stop work are being used (Quoted in Webb et al 2004b, p. 174).

While there is little evidence in the research literature proving that Connecticut teachers enjoy the same degree of autonomy of their Finnish counterparts, it is

interesting to note that local school districts (as in Finland) also have control over the curriculum and selection of textbooks. This is unlike most other U.S. states where curricular and textbook control is centralized with very little local autonomy. One can posit that as a result of this localized control, teachers in Connecticut have opportunities to influence the ways that the curriculum is implemented at the local level.

Policy Effects of Teacher-Friendly Reforms

Teaching: High Status and Satisfying

Overall, the teaching profession in Connecticut enjoys public prestige and is highly valued amongst students, parents and principals. The surplus of teachers, competition for teaching positions, high and rigorous admission standards for initial teacher education, a comprehensive induction support system for new teachers, and a range of carefully developed professional development opportunities for all teachers have all contributed to raising the status of the profession. Perhaps this is why Connecticut is only one of a handful of states which does not have a teaching shortage (Bradley, 1999)

Finnish teachers similarly seem to enjoy much public respect. Principals view their teachers' commitment as the cornerstone for school and student success, judging the teacher's influence on the school's atmosphere to be more positive than in the OECD countries on average (Finland National Board, 2005). The rigour and high-standards of initial teacher education and the emphasis on theory and research are also factors contributing to the high status of teachers within the country. As well, their high degree of autonomy is claimed to be one of the most attractive features of teaching. Rasku and Kinnunen (1999), in their study of well-being and job satisfaction of Finnish teachers, found that "of the job conditions, the major predictor for well-being outcomes turned out to be the amount of perceived control in one's job" (p. 1). In fact, a 1999 study undertaken by the Finnish Economical Information Bureau reported that 85% of Finnish teachers are content and very committed to their work (Webb et al, 2004b).

A related measure of the success of these teacher-friendly policies is the impact on teacher retention rates in each of these settings. Researchers assert that positive teacher policies may contribute to higher retention rates (Fisk, 2005a). In Finland, about 10% of newly-qualified teachers change their work with some returning to teaching later (Webb et al 2004b). A 2001 study of beginning teacher attrition demonstrated that approximately 6–7 percent left the profession in Connecticut within the first five years of employment. While these rates may appear high, they are below OECD and national U.S. estimates of teacher attrition rates. Further, there are surpluses of qualified teachers in both settings. Newly qualified teachers in Finland often have to work part-time or in other provinces for at least five years before being hired in the capital Helsinki, where most applicant desire to work (Kaiser, 2005). Similarly in Connecticut, competition for teaching positions is high and the pool of qualified applicants impressive. Baron (1999) noted that "when there is a teaching opening in a Connecticut elementary school, there are often several hundred applicants."

Finally, teacher salaries have often been viewed as an indicator of professional status. The state of Connecticut made increasing teachers' salaries one of their key commitments. Throughout the 1980s, teachers' salaries were raised in local negotiations through 'salary grants' to local school districts. The average teachers' salary increased from a 1986 average of \$29, 437 (USD) to a 1991 average of \$47, 823 (Wilson et al. 2001). Moreover, teachers' salaries have been equalized across the state in order to attract and retain teachers in rural areas and ensure that students across districts are all taught by highly qualified and well-paid teachers (Collins, 1999). On the other hand, pay for teachers in Finland has remained relatively stagnant over time and it cannot be said that high salaries explain the elevated prestige of teaching in the country. While Finland's starting salaries are above the OECD average, they did not rise in accordance with rates in other OECD countries. The average teacher's salary after fifteen years in 2000 was \$31, 687 (USD), well below the U.S. average of \$42, 801 (Cavanagh, 2005).

Collaboration and Collegiality

The teacher policy reforms outlined above provide many opportunities for enhanced collaboration amongst teachers, their principals and members of the wider educational community. For example, the BEST program involves a wide spectrum of Connecticut educational employees working closely together to support beginning teachers. Experienced teachers and administrators were involved in its design and implementation. Over the last fifteen years, nearly eighty teachers-in-residence worked with state department staff in designing the BEST portfolio assessment system and training for mentors, assessors, and beginning teachers. Moreover, more than 40 percent of the current teacher and administrator workforce have trained to serve as mentors or assessors (Fisk, 2005a).

The BEST program provides time and opportunities for teacher teamwork, including collaborative research and projects, and the sharing of best teaching practices. Research suggests that these features of the program have improved professional school learning cultures. Fisk (2005b) states that the impact of BEST on capacity building within schools has been one unintended positive result of the program. As reviewed above, mentors and assessors receive numerous opportunities for in-depth professional development. Miller et al (2002) note that the "collaborative relationships that have evolved are the key to the success of the BEST program." Moreover, a significant percentage of educators who have participated in the program either as mentors or assessors claimed that it allowed for the development of common language to discuss what constitutes good teaching amongst new and experienced teachers. When interviewed, many considered the BEST system to have "raised the level of discourse about what constitutes good teaching" (Fisk, 1997). This reinforced similar findings from another study that found that over 95% of mentors reported moderate or significant positive impact on collegial relationships, the improvement of their professional knowledge and skills, and the development of a common professional language (Wilson et al, 2001).

Collaborative and cooperative work have been at the cornerstone of Finnish educational policy for much of its history. The small size of the majority of Finnish schools has facilitated collaboration amongst teachers and school administrators. For instance, one study showed how teachers derived satisfaction from in-school collaborative processes and viewed co-operative planning as a creative process that contributed to their professional development (Webb & Vulliamy 1999). Other Finnish teachers have remarked upon the positive nature of in-school teacher cooperation, which contributes to an appreciation of and respect for each other's work (Naumenen 2005). Furthermore, the National Board of Education claims that curricular reform depends on the promotion of "active collaboration between schools, surrounding communities and commerce and industry" (Quoted in Webb et al. 2004a, p. 94).

Encouraging creativity and innovation

Collaborative curriculum work amongst teachers can also facilitate creativity and innovation. Dr. Pasi Sahlberg, education specialist at the World Bank (and former Finnish Ministry of Education official) explains how teachers in Finland are encouraged to be more innovative by being "given flexibility and more importantly, respect to manage their curriculum under the national framework" (Quoted in "Finland" 2005). This reflects wider government goals for the future development of the Finnish education system. A Finland Ministry of Education (2003) strategic plan emphasizes the relationship between creativity and caring:

Creativity is a source of development – optimism and innovativeness its expressions. Productive creativity entails appreciation of diversity...A dynamic society values initiative, activity and enterprise, tempered with communal responsibility and caring (p. 5).

Caring, as the report continues, is demonstrated through the Finnish commitment to equal educational opportunities for all citizens. Promoting equality of opportunity for students led educational reformers to end streaming in the 1971 with the advent of the comprehensive school system and to abolish ability grouping in 1985. As a result, Finnish teachers have had to become adept at dealing with mixed ability classes and groups at the primary and secondary levels of schooling. It is widely accepted that no student can be excluded and that the teacher needs to take into account each student's interests and choices. Teachers in one Finnish study felt that smaller class sizes and in-class groups made teaching easier and more flexible, allowing for closer teacher-pupil relations (Estola and Syrjälä, 2001).

Teacher policies in Connecticut have similarly provided the conditions for teachers to become more creative and innovative with their work. Through the BEST program, beginning teachers are provided with opportunities to take responsibility and ownership for their learning and improvement of their practice. Exemplary teaching is recognized and reinforced and teachers are encouraged to take risks, be creative, and innovative in their teaching. In one study, 72 percent of beginning teachers reported that the BEST portfolio process had significantly

improved their self-reflection and nearly 60 percent claimed that the portfolio helped them focus on the important aspects of teaching. Half indicated that the portfolio had improved their teaching practice (Wilson et al, 2001). As one teacher explained:

I have not reached a point this year where I just said, I have no idea what to do- nothing is working. I have a really solid pool of information and skills and ideas to work from...in no way am I trying to insinuate that “Oh, I have been so successful; everything has worked perfectly,” because you have good days and you have bad days. But I think it is knowing and understanding why it was a bad day and a good day, and in my program they had us reflecting on those things a lot. I think it gets you into a good habit (Quoted in Wilson et al, 2001, p. 27).

This type of control over one’s work and emphasis on critical reflection not only contributes to teacher’s opportunities to be more innovative, but also to develop a greater sense of professionalism and autonomy.

Work Intensification and Contrived Collegiality

Despite the positive effects of these reforms, in some cases they have contributed to increasing workloads for teachers, and contrived, rather than authentic forms of collegiality. For example, although the BEST program aims to support and assess the work of new teachers, it has resulted in additional work for beginning teachers and their mentors. Wolf (1994) argues that relative to other forms of assessment, teaching portfolios are time-consuming to construct and cumbersome to review. Interviews with beginning teachers in a mid-sized school district attest to the additional workload involved in portfolio completion, claiming that the portfolio requirements are “difficult” and “add a lot of pressure” to an already very busy teaching workload (Wilson et al. 2001, p. 17).

Increasing levels of work is also an issue for some Finnish teachers. One set of researchers who conducted interviews with primary school teachers concluded that work intensification was becoming a contentious concern (Webb et al, 2004b). Teachers in this study claimed that the downloading of curriculum reforms to local schools devalued and undermined their achievements and caused unhelpful fragmentation amongst themselves. Ironically, a return to a more centralized and prescribed curriculum process was viewed by some teachers as a favourable scenario, which would allow them more time for classroom preparation and students’ needs.

Further, another study of primary school teachers showed that they resented being ‘forced’ to collaborate with their colleagues in curriculum development and reported increased levels of stress and tension in their work (Webb et al, 2004a). Hargreaves (1994) has written extensively about school cultures where collegiality is contrived. His argument is that contrived collegiality exists as a state in opposition to a culture of collaboration. In these situations, collegiality can be used on co-opt teachers or control their work. It would appear that this has been the case for at least some teachers in Finland, despite the long history of classroom collaboration within the country.

Conclusion: What can we learn from Finland and Connecticut?

In both Finland and Connecticut, like many other places around the world, considerable attention has been directed towards reforming the teaching profession. Teacher reforms in these two jurisdictions stand out from most other teacher policies as they are educator friendly, building upon, reflecting, and enhancing the value and high-status of the teaching profession. This paper has reviewed the teacher policy packages that have been implemented in Connecticut and Finland over that past fifteen years. In Connecticut, improvements have been made to teacher education programs, as admissions and graduation requirements have been raised with the aim to elevate the standing of the profession. The state has developed a supportive, mentoring system for new teachers, which has also had the unexpected advantage of increasing collaboration and collegiality amongst and between beginner and experienced teachers. While teachers in Connecticut face reforms that some may characterize as accountability based (e.g. on-the-job licensure evaluations), these reforms have been implemented within a comprehensive, context-based and policy-aligned environment. Beginning teachers are prepared for constructing their portfolio for licensure through their teacher education programs and within a supportive induction program.

Like Connecticut, teacher education entrance and graduation requirements in Finland have been made more competitive. This has resulted in improvements to the quality and standing of teacher education and of the teaching profession. More individuals are attempting to enter the profession and as a result there has been a surplus in highly qualified teachers. While Connecticut education reformers have concentrated on providing a mentoring program for new teachers, which has enhanced professional collegiality, curricular and other education decentralization reforms have had similar consequences for most Finnish teachers. Finnish educators now have considerable autonomy in terms of curriculum planning at the local level. Further, traditional forms of control over teachers' work such school inspections, teacher testing and performance appraisals do not exist in Finland.

To many, these reforms would appear to be positive in nature, as teachers in Connecticut and Finland enjoy much public and professional prestige that is less common amongst their colleagues in other countries that have embraced a low-trust, high-accountability teacher policy reforms. However, there is research evidence to suggest that there have also been some negative policy outcomes. By examining policy implementation in specific school contexts, we can see that reform, without the proper supports, can lead to work intensification. Further, the possibility of contrived collegiality also exists if conditions are not in place to ensure the development of authentic collaboration and collegiality. The point here is not to downplay the positive impact of these reforms as a whole. Trade-offs in education reform, as Levin (2001) notes, are rarely discussed. However, it is imperative in any policy analysis not to ignore the potential (and real) negative effects of education policies that appear at first glance to be 'friendly' to those most affected by their implementation. Any change, especially reforms to improve teacher quality, will involve additional teacher time and effort. The key is to put

in place supports at all levels to sustain meaningful change that teachers feel they have ownership over.

Education systems are reflections of local socio-economic and political systems, deeply rooted in complex and changing histories and local contexts. Finland and Connecticut are no different in this respect. In line with other education researchers and policy-makers, this paper has argued that the success of the Finnish and Connecticut education systems can be largely explained by examining their teacher policies. However, there are other factors that cannot be dismissed in attempting to understand the policy outcomes of these reforms. For instance, some education researchers have noted the extent to which Finns value education and the simultaneous emphasis on equality of opportunity and results. Others have pointed to a commitment to equity for all Finnish students and the lack of a penalty-based standardized testing regime (Alvarez, 2004; Cavanagh, 2005; Crace, 2003; Finland, 2005; Kaiser, 2005).

Further, some have also pointed to the fact that Finland has a small, homogeneous and relatively prosperous population to explain the country's educational successes. However, similar arguments cannot necessarily be made with respect to Connecticut, which is much less homogeneous and financially well-off. In fact, despite drops in median household income during the 1990s and the growth (by nearly fifty percent) of its poverty index, factors contributing to an increase in low income students and students with limited English proficiency in local schools, there have been significant gains in national levels of student achievement (Wilson et al 2001). In addition, the small size of school districts and emphasis on local control in both Finland and Connecticut may also be factors that have contributed to the high standing of their students in national and international testing competitions. Indeed, these different aspects illustrate the need for further research to tease out local specificities in order to understand the complex roles and relationships between student success, school cultures, teachers' work, and factors and forces outside the realm of the school.

In 1900 the comparativist Sir Michael Sadler asked "How Far Can we Learn Anything of Practical Value from the Study of Foreign Systems of Education?" and concluded that: "We cannot wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower from one bush and some leaves from another, and then expect that if we stick what we have gathered into the soil at home, we shall have a living plant" (p. 49). An argument is not put forward for Canadian provincial education policy makers to wholeheartedly embrace either model, as doing so would miss the point of the complex nature of education reform policies and the role of policy to reflect (and construct) local and national cultures. What is particularly interesting about the Finnish and Connecticut cases is that they have chosen to focus on improving teacher education, teaching conditions and the overall status of the teaching profession, rather than directing their attention towards accountability as the motivating force behind educational reform. Perhaps this is the most important lesson to learn from studying Finland and Connecticut in a day and age when

accountability education reforms within new managerial policy regimes have claimed centre-stage.

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Dr. Marianne Larsen is an Assistant Professor in education at the Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario. She completed her Ph.D. in Comparative Education at the Institute of Education, University of London and remains active in the field of comparative and international education. Her research interests include critical analyses of teacher policies and more recently on global citizenship education. She teaches Social Studies curriculum and Multicultural Education, and at the graduate level, Sociology of Education and Comparative Education