**The (Mis)use of the Finnish Teacher Education Model:**

**‘Policy-based Evidence-Making’?**

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**Abstract**

**Background**

International achievement studies such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) have an increasing influence on education policy worldwide. The use of such data can provide a basis for evidence-based policy making to initiate educational reform. Finland, a high performer in PISA, is often cited as an example of both efficient and equitable education. Finland’s teachers and teacher education have not only garnered much attention for their role in the country’s PISA successes, but have also influenced education policy change in England.

**Main argument**

This article argues that the Finnish model of teacher education has been borrowed uncritically by UK policy makers. Finnish and English philosophies of teacher preparation differ greatly, and the borrowing of the Finnish teacher *education* model does not fit within the teacher *training* viewpoint of England. The borrowed policies, thus, were decontextualized from the wider values and underpinnings of Finnish education. This piecemeal, “pick ‘n’ mix” (Morris 2012) approach to education policy reform ignores the fact that educational policies and “practices exist in ecological relationships with one another and in whole ecosystems of interrelated practices” (Kemmis and Heikkinen 2012, 157). Thus, these borrowed teacher preparation policies will not necessarily lead to the outcomes outlined by policy makers in the reforms.

**Sources of evidence**

Two teacher preparation reforms in England, the University Training Schools (outlined in the UK government’s 2010 Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*) and the Master’s in Teaching and Learning (MTL), are used to illustrate the problematic nature of uncritical policy borrowing. This article juxtaposes these policies with the Finnish model of teacher education, which is a research-based programme where all candidates are required to complete a Master’s degree. The contradictions exposed from this analysis further highlight the divergent practices of teacher preparation in England and Finland, or the disparate “ecosystems.” Evidence of educational policy borrowing in other settings is also considered.

**Conclusions**

Both the MTL and the White Paper reforms overlook the “ecosystem” surrounding Finnish teacher education. The school-based MTL contrasts with the research-based Finnish teachers’ MA. Similarly, the University Training Schools scheme, based on Finnish university-affiliated, teaching practice schools, contrasts heavily with the rest of the White Paper reforms, which contradict the philosophies and ethos behind Finnish teacher education by proposing the move of English teacher preparation away from the universities. The analysis highlights the uncritical eye through which politicians may view international survey results, looking for “quick fix” (Noah 1984, 550; Phillips and Ochs 2004, 780) options instead of utilising academic evidence for investigation on education and education reform.

**Keywords:** PISA, Finland, England, policy borrowing, Master’s in Teaching and Learning (MTL), teacher education, *The Importance of Teaching* White Paper 2010

**Introduction**

International achievement studies increasingly influence education policy, thus giving further impetus to the borrowing of education policy across national borders. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), administered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), has gathered much attention since its first survey in 2000 and has provided politicians and policy makers with concrete examples of and benchmarks for education policy change. Finland’s high scores in the PISA assessment (OECD 2010; OECD 2014) have drawn worldwide attention to the country’s education system.

Research attributes much of Finnish PISA success to the high quality of Finnish teachers and the rigour of Finnish teacher education (e.g. Chung 2009). Teaching has proved an extremely popular profession in the country, and all qualified teachers undergo a demanding admissions process and study for a Master’s degree. Typical admissions rates to teacher education programmes hover around 10% of the applicant pool (e.g. Chung 2009; Raiker 2011; Tirri 2014, 602), which means that it is easier to earn admission to a law or medicine programme at the University of Helsinki than a primary teacher education course (Tirri 2014). Those admitted to the classroom teaching or primary education programme face selection based on their academic achievement and their “communication and social skills” (Tirri 2014, 602). Academic achievement is based on upper-secondary school grades and a book test - applicants are given a book to read, usually based on educational theory, and undertake a test based on this book. The applicants also undergo an interview, as well as a teaching exercise based on group interaction (Chung 2009), in order to determine their “communication and social skills”.

While both academic literature and the mass media have illuminated the high quality of Finnish teacher education and thus, Finnish teachers, they overlook the effort made by the Finns to achieve this quality. “The long march of teachers from despised and underprivileged civil servants to the core of the academic elite has been more glorious and successful in Finnish society than in most other countries in the world” (Kivinen and Rinne 1994, 521). As far back as the 1860s, the establishment of teacher training seminaries went hand in hand with the quest to improve education provision nationwide (Uusiautti and Määtä 2013, 4). Many of the early teaching candidates came from peasant backgrounds, and became teachers who were some of the most important people in their communities (Tirri 2014, 601). The “Teacher Education Act of 1971” (e.g. Silander and Välijärvi 2013, 79; Välijärvi and Heikkinen 2012, 33) moved all teacher preparation to universities, and increased the time studying to four, and ultimately five years, culminating in a Master’s degree (Tirri 2014; Uusiautti and Määtä 2013; Sahlberg 2007). This helped “academize” (Begrem et al. 1997, 434; Uusiautti and Määtä 2013, 5) the teaching profession and commit to a strong foundation in education for both the profession as a whole and the teachers individually (Uusiautti and Määtä 2013; Tirri 2014). “Today the success of the professionalization strategy can also be seen in the comparatively high status of teachers, and in the huge numbers of undergraduates wanting to launch their career as teachers” (Begrem et al. 1997, 434). In addition to the efforts to make teaching an academic, research-based profession, the furthering of the already high levels of education for teachers is underway. Tirri (2014, 605) cites the efforts created to make doctoral education available to all teachers. This illustrates the considerable commitment from Finnish policy makers to establish teaching as a rigorously research-based, academic profession.

**The current study**

Due in part to the high quality of Finnish teachers, education policy makers from around the world have looked to Finland has a model for education reform, and the United Kingdom is no exception. This article explores two instances, both initiated in 2010, where the UK government used the Finnish teacher education model to provide inspiration, albeit uncritically, for education policy reform in England (the UK government’s Department for Education is responsible for education in England). Using documentary analysis, this article argues that both of these reforms misconstrued the underpinning philosophies and values that encompass Finnish teacher education, indicating that these policies were borrowed without full exploration into or understanding of Finnish education ideologies. The paper also considers some further examples of educational policy borrowing from other international settings.

**Methodology**

This comparativist analysis of education policy borrowing implements documentary analysis in order to support the arguments presented. The importance of documents as a foundation for comparative education research remains undisputed: “All comparative students must begin by extensive reading” (Bereday 1964, 11). While documentary analysis is somewhat unusual in education and the social sciences (McCulloch 2011, 248), it is well justified here with the analysis of government documents in order to draw conclusions about the “use and abuse” (Noah 1984, 550) of foreign models in education policy formation. Document analysis, although often overlooked, is just as valid as a method of data collection as, for example, interviews and questionnaires and forms its own field of research (Owen 2014, 10). Furthermore, the relationship between production, consumption, and content of documents also deserves analysis and inspection (Owen 2014, 10; Prior 2003, 26).

Papers appropriate for documentary analysis range from primary to secondary sources, and public, private, and personal documents (Mogalakwe 2006, 223). Documents specifically analysed for this paper are what Mogalakwe (2006, 223) would classify as public documents. The particular documents that are the focus of attention in this paper are *The Importance of Teaching*, the UK government’s Schools White Paper (2010), and *The Master’s in Teaching and Learning Participant Handbook*,produced by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA, 2010). In addition to this, *The Children’s Plan: Building Brighter Futures* (DCSF, 2007), *Being the Best for Our Children: Releasing Talent for Teaching and Learning* (DCSF, 2008), and *Training our Next Generation of Outstanding Teachers: Implementation Plan* (DfE, 2011) were all consulted to provide a broader range of government documents in reference to the MTL and the University Training Schools.

Government policy documents are well suited towards educational documentary analysis. They can reveal “the assumptions that underlie policy reforms,” their ideologies, and policy agendas (McCulloch 2011, 250). A careful analysis of education documents needs to take into account the context, such as the “social, political, economic and other relationships” that frame the document’s era (McCulloch 2011, 253) as well as country of origin. Exploring the document’s authorship, audience, and policy impact helps gauge the context and purpose of its publication (McCulloch 2011, 253). Fittingly, the role of a country’s context, whether societal, political, cultural, or historical, plays a strong role in both comparative education (e.g. Phillips and Schweisfurth 2006) and with documentary research within comparative education. Similarly, Owen (2014, 10) and Prior (2003, 60) also suggest that an institution’s documents provide insight into its identity.

All researchers carry a “position” when carrying out research (Cohen et al. 2007); bias can colour comparative education research. Bereday (1964, 159) refers to cultural bias as “the plague of comparative methodology”. Therefore, he suggests that comparative education researchers remain on the “outside,” so to speak, while observing cultures. As an “outsider,” my understanding of the situation could be more limited than an “insider,” a Finn or a Briton, but an outside position allows for more objectivity (Cohen et al. 2007). As I was born outside both Finland and Britain, the research carried out brings forth issues of my own limitations and bias, whether to cast an unnecessarily positive or negative light on the policies of either country. I would cast myself as a “familiar outsider,” a term coined by Wagner (2006, 303), as a resident of the United Kingdom and a frequent visitor to Finland for research and language study. According to Cohen et al. (2007), this allows for more objectivity than an “insider.” In addition, Bereday (1964) believed travel to the countries involved in comparative study helps reduce bias in comparative research. My extensive experience as a researcher in Finland and my residence in the United Kingdom allow me, as Bereday suggested, an expansive knowledge of both countries, reducing bias and allowing for viable research.

Bereday (1964, 163), in his discussion of bias in interpretation, addresses, much like Sadler (Higginson, 1979, 49), the close relationship between education systems and society. Therefore, a researcher in comparative education must understand the history, society, economy, and culture of a country in reference to its education system and the data collected about it. Bereday implies that a researcher would most likely apply their own country’s ideologies to another, which would ultimately colour and bias the interpretation of the research. Bereday (1964, 159) lists four stages that comparative researchers must successfully achieve: the most accurate and unbiased collection, application, juxtaposition, and comparison of educational information. Thus, this article tackled the analysis of the documents in this manner.

The “ultimate purpose of examining documents is to arrive at an understanding of the meaning and significance the document contains” (Mogalakwe 2006, 227). Documents can have literal and interpretative meanings. While the literal information from the Schools White Paper (2010) and the MTL documentation is quite clear, this article aims to uncover the interpretative meanings conveyed with these documents.

**England’s Attraction to Finnish Teacher Education Policy**

Policy makers in the UK used the Finnish example to initiate reforms to teacher preparation, in the form of a qualification called the Master’s in Teaching and Learning (MTL), and in the University Training Schools. The Training School reforms were outlined in the UK government’s 2010 Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010). This article argues that UK policy makers used both the PISA data and the example of Finland not as evidence-based policy making but, rather, as “policy-based evidence making” (Yore et al. 2010, 597).

As stated previously, it is widely held that the Finnish teacher education model holds much merit and informs education policy in other contexts. However, it is argued that the UK policy reforms of teacher preparation in England did not take account of the nuances of Finnish education, although it drew upon the Finnish model in the proposals. The attention paid to the Finnish model of education in England’s policy reform also suggests the influence of international achievement studies such as PISA in education policy. Both the MTL, and the University Training Schools outlined in the 2010 White Paper seem to be influenced by Finland’s strong performances in the PISA assessment.

Frankham and Hiett (2011), for example, argue that the McKinsey report (Barber and Mourshed, 2007) influenced the creation of the MTL: Barber and Mourshed (2007) explicitly refer to the OECD and PISA (e.g., p 8) and Finland, specifically Finland’s teacher education (e.g., p 17). However, while the MTL was created with the aim of aligning England with “top” performers in international achievement studies (Frankham and Hiett 2011, 805), it stops short of specifically mentioning Finland as its model. The influence of Finland is, though, heavily implied. For example, *The Master’s in Teaching and Learning Participant Handbook* describes the intention for the MTL to be “a key lever for schools in England, helping to further raise the status of the teaching profession, and align us with the highest performing education systems in the world” (TDA 2010, 4). In contrast, the UK government’s Schools White Paper (2010) clearly and explicitly referenced Finland for teacher education reform in England by highlighting the *normaalikoulu*, or the university-affiliated, teaching practice schools of Finland as an element for emulation (DfE 2010, 25-26). Accordingly, the White Paper called for the implementation of University Training Schools to help raise educational attainment.

However, despite this use of Finland as a model, the underlying principles of Finnish teacher education are not evident in either of these educational reforms. In England, there has been an ongoing tendency to move teacher preparation away from university settings and towards school settings in an evolving approach which pre-dates the 2010 Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010). For example, in the late twentieth century, teacher preparation moved from the university setting in order to create partnerships with schools (King 2004). Thus, it is argued that Finnish teacher preparation is best described as an education, while English teacher preparation is seen as training. Stevens, Tønnessen, and Kyriacou (2004) analyse the nuances of difference between teacher training on the one hand, and teacher education on the other. They relate the difference to “specialized training” versus “cultivation” and argue that England’s view of teacher preparation focuses on practical skills (2004, 110). In contrast, Finns would view “[t]eaching is an art as well as a profession; it is an art because it is concerned with human values. The good teacher transcends his curriculum and the methods taught him and becomes an artist” (Valentine 1938, 654).

Clearly, the disparity between the English and Finnish education systems did not begin with the UK government’s policy initiatives of 2010 described earlier in this paper; rather, they existed before that time. Taking a historical perspective allows us to see that the Finns and the English differ greatly with their education policies and approaches to education. Their views differ on a whole array of educational issues including a national curriculum, inspections, teaching practices, pedagogy, and testing (Webb et al. 1998; Webb et al. 2004; Webb et al. 2009; Webb and Vuilliamy 1999). The diverse directions Finnish and English education have taken in the past few decades further illustrate the immensely disparate “ecosystems” (Kemmis and Heikkinen 2012, 157) in which the two education systems operate.

While the White Paper proposed implementing teaching practice schools in England, it has been argued that the wider aims of the Paper undermine the Finnish teacher education model. It is possible that this stems from a shift of viewing teacher preparation from education to training in England, illustrated by the replacement of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) in 1994 (Chung et al. 2012; Ostinelli 2009). Further, it should be noted that while it upholds the Finnish model of teacher education (but ignoring its university-based nature), the White Paper advocates the increase of school-based pathways into teaching, rather than strengthening the university’s role in preparing England’s future teachers. Interestingly, there is only one path to becoming a qualified teacher in Finland, but as many as 36 in England (Furlong 2008). In this way, it is argued, much like Morris (2012, 87) asserts, that White Paper does not engage with the underlying principles of Finnish teacher education, and instead borrows ideas from the Finnish system in a superficial, piecemeal manner. Due to these disparities, the English “ecosystem” (Kemmis and Heikkinen 2012, 157) would not prove hospitable for the Finnish implantations. In other words, even a small practice such as a University Training School exists in a wider ecosystem of teacher education and school culture. According to this model, it could not flourish within an educational ecosystem so different from its own.

The MTL can also be seen to contradict the Finnish ethos of teacher education. Launched in April 2010, it marked a UK government initiative for a fully funded, postgraduate degree for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in England. While the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) heralded this change, the initiative was met with scepticism from some in the teaching profession[[1]](#footnote-1). The MTL, unlike “traditional” university-based Master’s programmes, based itself in the workplace, emphasising the personalised, flexible relationship between the university tutor, school-based “coach,” and participant/student. While it can be easily argued that this approach to professional development is beneficial, it contrasts with the focus on Finland in the UK education policy rhetoric.

Only eight months after its launch, the then-newly-elected UK (Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition) government withdrew funding for the MTL. In a letter to the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), the then-Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, announced that there would no longer be central government funding for the MTL and that only those who had already started the programme would continue to be funded[[2]](#footnote-2). In the letter, which was quoted in the educational media[[3]](#footnote-3), the continued support for teachers’ professional development was affirmed. However, the letter also explained the belief that a single, government-prescribed qualification was not the way forward. Hence, it can be seen that UK policy makers initiated the MTL by using Finland as a model; however, the withdrawal of the MTL illustrates a lack of commitment to academising the teaching profession, by both creating a Master’s degree with significant amounts of distance and removal from the university setting, and withdrawing the commitment to and funding of the MTL soon after its launch. The MTL can thus be characterised as a missed opportunity by the UK government to expand the academic parameters of the teaching profession, following the Finnish model. Furthermore, it highlights the lack of alignment between educational theory and education policymaking.

**Educational Policy-Borrowing: the UK and beyond**

The UK is, evidently, not the only country that uses international achievement studies to guide reform and initiate education policy borrowing. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, along with other large international assessment studies, has, with increasing frequency, been used to drive, inform, and uphold educational reform around the world. The influence of such studies on education policy, including teacher preparation policy, has become ever more apparent. As a result, PISA, the league tables it generates, and the potential policy borrowing that ensues can be seen as significantly contributing to “globally influential policy agendas” (Crossley and Watson 2009, 643). Dale and Robertson (2002) argue that international organisations, such as the OECD, can strongly influence leading nations as well as the rest of the world, by increasingly defining educational aims. In this way, education policy borrowing has undergone something of a transformation (Moutsios 2009). Educational policy makers create policy change and make comparisons in reference to PISA; the search for supposed “best practice” is now set within a transnational context (Moutsios, 2009, 469).

Policy borrowing, or policy transfer, has been a fundamental theme in comparative education (Beech 2006, 2). The terms used for the process defined as ‘the movement of educational ideas, institutions or practices across international borders” (Beech 2006, 2) does not have consistency even within the comparative education field. For example, Crossley and Watson (2009, 643) refer to this process as transfer. Phillips and Ochs (2003, 451) cite how the words “’copying,’ ‘appropriation,’ ‘assimilation,’ ‘transfer,’ ‘importation,’” have all been used when referring to education policy crossing borders, and how the term used is often prone to criticism. As Phillips and Ochs (2003, 451) use “‘borrowing’ to cover the whole range of issues relating to how the foreign examples are used at all stages of the processes of initiating and implementing educational change,” this article also uses “borrowing” as the preferred term to denote the education policy of one country moving into another.

Researchers have theorised about education policy borrowing from a range of different perspectives. However, in essence, the theories behind the models of education policy borrowing or transfer can be seen to follow a similar general structure. First, a local problem is identified. Then, foreign solutions are sought. Finally, the borrowed policy is adapted and implemented into a new context (Beech 2006, 2). Phillips and Ochs (2004) describe a cycle of policy borrowing that consists of four stages: cross-national attraction**,** decision**,** implementation, and internalisation/indigenisation.However, it is also widely acknowledged that the actual process of educational policy borrowing is complex and does not tend to follow a straightforward pathway. It has often been observed that the decision phase can succumb to “quick fix” and “phony” solutions (Phillips and Ochs 2004, 779), providing “tempting” policy actions (Noah 1984, 550) for “immediate political impact” (Phillips and Ochs 2004, 780).

Context plays an important role in policy borrowing. Alexander (2000, 172) stated that education systems are not “hermitically sealed,” but that history and culture nearly always play a role in a country’s education. The “ecologies of practice” (Kemmis and Heikkinen 2012, 157) analogy of policy borrowing further illustrates this. It highlights the “interdependence among particular clusters of practice”; therefore, “practices exist in ecological relationships with one another and in whole ecosystems of interrelated practices” (Kemmis and Heikkinen 2012, 157). Thus, certain “ecosystems” provide inhospitable environments for foreign implantations. Policy implementation, therefore, requires an informed process where a policy is “internalised,” and “indigenised”, through a process that inevitably “distorts” the original features which were the original attraction (Phillips and Ochs 2004, 779; Ochs and Phillips 2004, 16).

Applying these theories to the context of this paper, we now apply Phillips and Ochs’ (2004) cycle of policy borrowing and Kemmis and Heikkinen’s (2012) ecology analogy to the MTL and the Schools White Paper (2010). As observed earlier in this paper, UK policy makers exhibited clear “cross-national attraction” (Phillips and Ochs 2004, 779) to Finland, and the initiation of the MTL and the proposal of University Training Schools show strong interest in Finnish teacher education policy and, especially, the results achieved by Finland in various PISA surveys. This article also argues that the “decision” phase succumbed to “quick fix” policy change, due to the “negative external evaluation” (Phillips and Ochs 2004, 779) presented by England’s comparatively less successful performance in international surveys. In terms of policy borrowing analyses, it is important to note that while the MTL reached the “implementation” stage, it never completed the full Phillips and Ochs (2004, 779) policy borrowing cycle, as the policy was withdrawn (Chung et al. 2012, 265).

The practice of looking across national borders for educational inspiration has existed for some time (Phillips and Schweisfurth 2006). It is, though, the case that international achievement studies, and especially PISA, have increased the impetus for cross-national attraction and education policy borrowing (Phillips and Ochs 2004). The influence of PISA has increased since the first survey took place in 2000, and politicians now turn to PISA results in order to fuel political and educational debate, or to reinforce education policy reform (Baird et al. 2011). It has been observed that responses to the PISA survey add to the “sabre-rattling political rhetoric to drive through educational reforms” (Baird et al. 2011, 2) and the fuel the “’edu-political’ chess match” (Rappleye 2006, 238) of politicians. Surveys such as PISA give policy makers a “powerful ideological tool” which helps justify otherwise controversial education reform (Takayama 2008, 391).

There are many examples of countries other than England using PISA results to debate and justify educational reform. For example, the French, German, Norwegian, and Japanese governments used PISA data to instigate policy reforms. Over the years, France’s reaction to its PISA reading literacy results has influenced the political debate about grade repetition among French students (Baird et al. 2011, 18). Furthermore, the French government received criticism for positioning international survey results in a negative light to rationalise education policy reform (Baird et al. 2011, 18). Germany's so-called “PISA-Shock” has been well documented in academic literature (e.g. Ertl 2006; Gruber 2006). The country’s disappointing performance led to national education standards, and a standardisation of the curricula (Neumann et al. 2010).

Norwegian and Japanese policy makers have also used PISA as a catalyst for policy reform. Norway experienced its own “PISA-Shock” in response to its poor performance, especially in comparison with the other Nordic countries. This had a major impact on Norwegian education policy making, as it allowed for the “political shaping of policy content,” moulded by the “political spin” of the media (Elstad 2012, 18). The Norwegian PISA-Shock resulted in the legitimisation of education policy based on accountability, measurement, and targets with reforms for both curriculum and assessment (Baird et al. 2011, 24-25; Elstad 2012, 18). Japan, traditionally a high-scoring country in cross-national achievement studies, also succumbed to PISA pressure on policy reform, following its own “PISA-Shock” (Takayama 2009). Takayama (2008) documented the influence of PISA in Japanese education reform debates. The Japanese feared that their once-admired education system had been declining; thus, educationalists suggested that Japan's educational reforms should align themselves with those praised by the OECD. Takayama (2008, 389) argues that “political necessity”, rather than careful interpretation of the PISA data, fuelled these educational debates. Further, it is suggested that the competition for economic success and global standing in international league tables leads to an “international educational horserace” (Takayama, 2008, 389), thus increasing the influence of these surveys on education policymaking.

Many countries have used Finland as a model for educational inspiration, and for policy borrowing. The Finnish education system has been described as representing a “hero” image for education policy makers (Takayama 2009, 68). For example, the perceived decline in PISA performance between the 2000 and 2003 surveys led many Japanese advisors to look towards Finland for educational inspiration. This has led to much Finnish influence in Japanese education. For example, a “Finnish Method Promotion Association” took Finnish textbooks and translated them into Japanese (Takayama 2009, 51). Furthermore, what became known as the “Finnish method” of teaching gained so much attention and popularity that Japanese authors published books on the matter (Takayama 2009, 52). The Finnish teaching methodology gathered so much respect that even the Japanese Ministry of Education promoted Finnish reading strategies in national reading plans. This case of policy borrowing has been termed the “Finlandisation phenomenon” (Takayama 2009, 52). However, Takayama (2009) argues that the Japanese policy makers borrowed uncritically. Methodological weaknesses characterise the data that was collected. An image was constructed of Finnish educational success and Japanese educational decline. This uncritical acceptance of Finnish education’s merits therefore became a basis for Japanese educational reform. The Japanese case illustrates a pattern by which policy makers use Finland and PISA to drive through and legitimise their own ideas on education reform.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The education systems and teacher preparation methods in Finland and England illustrate a wide attitudinal difference towards education in the two countries. Finnish researchers (e.g. Maaranen 2009) would argue that the strong research and academic element of teacher education in Finland supports teachers’ professionalism by helping individuals adjust their teaching, allowing for more knowledge and reflection, building self-confidence and cooperation with colleagues, and finally, developing research skills and criticality. Whilst some Finnish teacher education students found the 25,000 word dissertation too strenuous and difficult (Maaranen 2009, 234), this example of the academic focus of teacher education highlights the difference between the Finnish and English attitudes towards teaching. The MA dissertation and its potential for professional development illustrate the importance of research, scholarship, and the academic ascent that has taken place in the Finnish teaching profession.

In the UK, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and The Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufacturing and Commerce (RSA) published a report of their inquiry into the role of research in teacher preparation. It stresses the importance of “self-improving education systems in which all teachers become research literate and many have frequent opportunities for engagement in research and enquiry” (BERA-RSA 2014, 4). It is argued that this supports the Finnish methods of teacher education, whilst countering the direction of travel represented by the 2010 Schools White Paper and the MTL.

Comparativists have warned repeatedly of the difficulty in policy transfer. Not all policy borrowing ventures result in successful implementation and indigenisation of the transferred policy. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000, 17) cite three reasons for potential policy failure: uninformed, incomplete, or inappropriate transfer. Uninformed transfer occurs when there is insufficient information about the borrowed policy. Incomplete transfer happens when critical factors of the policy are not included. Finally, inappropriate transfer transpires when inadequate attention was paid to the context and ideology of both the borrowing and lending contexts. In the case of both the University Training Schools in the 2010 Schools White Paper and the MTL, using Dolowitz and Marsh’s (2000, 17) categorisation, I argue that both of these borrowed policies are policy failure, as both policy borrowing attempts would fall under incomplete and inappropriate transfer. Both of the policies succumbed to inappropriate transfer as well, for UK policy makers did not consider the disparate “ecosystems” (Kemmis and Heikkinen 2012, 157) of England and Finland when initiating the borrowing of Finnish teacher education policy.

Successful policy borrowing requires commitment and vision. Ochs (2006) documented successful policy transfer from Switzerland and Germany to the London borough of Barking and Dagenham in England, by following these steps: (1) A strong commitment to improving the school system; (2) Strong key partnerships to provide support in the process; (3) Awareness of the challenges at hand when implementing a foreign system into one’s own; (4) Recognising that the process would require continuous commitment and repetition and (5) Considering the contexts of both countries throughout the policy borrowing stages (Ochs 2006, 616).

This article has suggested that the Finnish policies were borrowed uncritically, incompletely, and inappropriately, and thus, did not follow the steps outlined by Ochs (2006). Policy borrowing from any context proves to be a difficult process. As both the MTL and the 2010 Schools White Paper reforms are relatively recent, it is too soon to assess, categorically, their future success or otherwise in the English educational context. However, what this analysis suggests is that they represent significant examples of policy borrowing with insufficient regard for the wider context: a phenomenon that is also apparent in other educational policy-borrowing settings across the globe.

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1. see, for example, *Times Education Supplement*. 6 March 2009, <https://www.tes.com/article.aspx?storycode=6000649> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110316231736/http://tda.gov.uk/teacher/masters-in-teaching-and-learning/funding-change.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. e.g. <http://newteachers.tes.co.uk/news/masters-pieces-gove-pulls-funding/45632> ; <http://www.subjectassociation.org.uk/newsitem.aspx?id=286> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)