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## Understanding Teacher Evaluation in Finland: A Professional Development Framework

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## Understanding Teacher Evaluation in Finland: A Professional Development Framework

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*Abstract: This study explores the characteristics of the teacher evaluation model in Finland. Highlighting the unique qualities of the Finnish case, we also compare these teacher evaluation practices with the increasingly applied value-added model (VAM) for teacher evaluation across the globe. Our analysis revealed that the Finnish Model prioritises teacher empowerment and professional development by carrying out bottom-up evaluation practices. With a clear focus on teacher empowerment and professional development, this framework substantially differs from accountability measures such as VAM, which emphasize rigid data collection procedures and the use of standardized test scores to hold teachers accountable based on their students' academic performance. This study also revealed that professional development endeavours of teachers are highlighted as the key elements in Finnish teacher evaluation. Ongoing needs analyses for professional development also form the basis for assessing teachers in Finland.*

**Keywords:** Teacher evaluation, Finland, value-added modelling, teacher accountability

### Introduction

Maintaining its status as one of the high achievers on Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Finland has become a country of focus for researchers. Several scholars argued that Finland's success was based on the unique characteristics that the national education system had (e.g. Kaiser, 2005; Malaty, 2007; Niemi, 2012; Sahlberg, 2010, 2011a, 2011c). In Finland, education is the basic right for all citizens, and the main aim of the educational policy is to ensure equal educational opportunities free of charge. Furthermore, Finnish society has a very positive attitude towards education and considers high-quality education as one of the main assets in international competition (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006). This policy has proved to be successful since Finland has been considered as one of the best in the world (Darling-Hammond, 2010b; Kupiainen, Hautamäki, & Karjalainen, 2009; Rinne, 2000; Sahlberg, 2007; Simola, 2005; Soinen, Merisuo-Storm, & Korhonen, 2014; Takayama, 2013). The PISA 2015 report showed that Finland maintained its status as a high achieving country in education despite a drop compared to the results in 2006 and 2003 (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018).

There are many reasons with which the success levels of Finnish students can be associated, but Malaty (2007), Niemi (2012), Sahlberg (2010), and Välijärvi et al. (2007) stated that one principal reason for the success of Finland's educational system is the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher education. Teaching as a profession is very popular among high school graduates but getting into teacher training programs is a competitive process with only 10% the applicants being accepted into teacher training programs every year (Sahlberg, 2010). The competitive nature of the admission policy of teacher education programs results in having only the most motivated of all applicants as prospective teachers (Kaiser, 2005; Sahlberg, 2007). In addition to the admission policy, Finland's teacher training policy also played a key role (Yglesias, 2008). Since Finnish teachers are regarded as having the key role behind the success of the Finnish education system, it is important to investigate the national policies that govern the teaching profession in the country.

### **Teacher Evaluation**

Teacher evaluation is "the systematic assessment of a [teacher]'s performance and/or qualifications in relation to a professional role and some specified and defensible institutional purpose" (The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 2009, p. 27). Definitions of teacher evaluation share certain characteristics (Liu, 2011). First, teacher evaluation is a systematic process, which means it is purposeful, it requires preparation, and there is an expected product. Secondly, the data for teacher evaluation needs to be collected and analysed through rigorous methods even though the tools for collection and the type of data collected might differ. In addition, teacher evaluation should aim to improve teachers' personal and professional development by providing them with an understanding of both how they are performing based on the expectations and what needs to be done to perform better.

Teacher evaluation is a two-fold process that aims to enhance teachers' pedagogical skills and expertise and improve students' success levels (Marzano, 2012; Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Pamela & James, 2005; Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995). However, as The National Education Association (NEA) (2010) report noted, current systems of teacher evaluation fail to "improve teacher practice and enhance student growth and learning" (p. 2) because most of the frameworks developed to assess teacher effectiveness "have largely failed to identify teachers' professional growth needs and failed to provide the support and professional learning opportunities required to meet those needs" (p. 2). The NEA report also underscored that "the core purpose of teacher assessment and evaluation should be to strengthen the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and classroom practices of professional educators" (p. 2). Thus, there is a call for a continuous focus on teacher education and professional growth that will pave the way for teachers to take better care of their professional progress and develop critical ways of analysing their students' performance as well as theirs.

Traditionally, teacher effectiveness has been dependent on the extent to which teachers' performance influenced students' achievement levels (Makkonen, Tejwani, & Venkateswaran, 2016; Prince et al., 2009; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). However, Little et al. (2009) asserted that although student achievement is an important aspect of education, it should not be regarded as having the key role in investigating teacher effectiveness. Brookfield (1995), in a similar manner, noted that defining teaching quality based on student feedback may weaken the quality of teaching because the learning process always involves various feelings, challenges, anxiety, and frustration, and oftentimes requires learners to move away from their comfort zone. Building on their previous work (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008), Little et al. (2009) propose that there are certain characteristics that every effective

teacher should possess such as helping students set a future vision for them and supporting them to that end, contributing to positive outcomes in terms of academic performance, developing positive attitudes, and pursuing social benefits, using various resources, and collaboration with colleagues. In addition to such characteristics, there are other considerations that might play a key role in the effectiveness of a teacher, which include the classroom characteristics such as class size, number of students, and technological affordances and student characteristics such as gender, age, and educational and socioeconomic background (Pagani & Seghieri, 2002).

### **The Need for Monitoring Teacher Quality**

Throughout the world, teaching has been considered one of the most important professions associated with social progress. Since antiquity, teachers have been at the heart of education. As the U.S. National Board for Professional Teaching Standards underscores, “one of the most important actions the nation can take to improve education is to strengthen the teaching profession” (as cited in Larsen, 2005, p. 292). With labels such as *builders of nations* (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013) and *a key factor in student achievement* (Little et al., 2009), however, high levels of expectations from teachers continue to be voiced in societies across the globe. For instance, The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2009) started its comprehensive report on teacher evaluation with the following argument:

*As the most significant resource in schools, teachers are critical to raise education standards. Improving the efficiency and equity of schooling depends, in large measure, on ensuring that teachers are highly skilled, well resourced, and motivated to perform at their best. Raising teaching performance is perhaps the policy direction most likely to lead to substantial gains in student learning (p. 9).*

High expectations from teachers brought together an increased level of effort, attention, and investment in teacher growth and development systems (Johnson, 2015; Rockoff, 2004). Teaching has become a popular career choice due to the respectable status of teaching as a profession. This paved the path for employers to develop more systematic ways to define the best and brightest of the candidates to teach (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2011). This selective mindset was not only at work in hiring prospective teachers. The interest in adding accountability related elements to all teaching work generated various domains of inquiry because there was growing scepticism and concern that “teacher tests [administered in pre-service level] don’t directly measure what teachers do in the classroom, and they don’t indicate how well teachers will do in the classroom” (Darling-Hammond, 2010a, p. 5). Nevertheless, educational concerns were not always the only reasons that introduced the need for a clearer understanding of quality in teaching. As Larsen (2005) noted, the discourses promoting the need for teacher evaluation are getting more prevalent, and the efforts towards “restructuring processes aimed at modernising and professionalising teachers are couched in the neo-liberal language and practices of accountability, quality control, standards and performance” (p. 293). Such initiatives have often been associated with economic globalisation and market-driven global forces (Held & McGrew, 2000). Whatever the actual motivations behind these calls might be, there was a clear need to exhibit the differences between good teachers who turned out to be worth the effort and investment and those who were performing below the par (The National Education Association, 2010).

### **A Brief Review of Developments in Teacher Evaluation**

Teaching has been associated with varying degrees of respect in societies. In the past, teaching was not regarded as a profession, and anyone who was deemed somewhat knowledgeable on a subject was entitled to teach it (Marzano et al., 2011). The hiring of teachers and the judgement regarding their performance were oftentimes carried out by prominent figures. As the teaching profession grew more complex and teachers faced increasingly more challenging expectations, the task of evaluating the effectiveness of teachers and helping them develop professionally became the focus for designated evaluators. As a consequence, the evaluation process started to be taken more seriously, and the head teachers of schools, who were knowledgeable of both the subject matter and the pedagogical skills in addition to the values of societies, were usually given the responsibility to evaluate teacher performance (Tracy, 1995).

The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a remarkable change in teaching and teacher evaluation. Teaching began to be regarded as a complex endeavour that requires practitioners to go under rigorous preparation and receive continuous feedback to thrive (Marzano et al., 2011). Although most of the evaluation was still carried out in the form of supervision and in-class observations, the focus had shifted from checking conformity to moral values to improving instruction (Blumberg, 1985). Towards the mid-1800s, pedagogical skills were attached more importance than ever, which, as Marzano et al. (2011) stated, “might be considered the first step in the journey to a comprehensive approach to developing teacher expertise” (p. 13).

Shinkfield and Stufflebeam (1995) noted that the view of teacher evaluation changed from “what might vaguely be termed attempts to evaluate and regulate the behaviour of teachers” due to the growing understanding of “the importance of interpersonal relationships” (p. 11). This period also marked the realisation that the physical characteristics and appearance of the teacher had nothing to do with the quality of teaching. Instead, teacher evaluation needed to focus more on the characteristics of teaching and the role of teachers in promoting student learning. This change brought results towards the end of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bobbitt, 1912) when head teachers started evaluating teacher performance based on the extent to which students were able to meet the goals of their respective levels.

The first half of the 1900s was also a time of war between two competing philosophies that dominated education (Marzano et al., 2011). On one side was John Dewey, who called for more democracy in educational settings, less competition between individuals, and a greater focus on self-improvement. On the other was Frederick Winslow Taylor, who believed that there was a need to design scientific measurement tools to assess staff performance accurately and improve production. What Marzano et al. (2011) described as “continued tension between the scientific approach to schooling, including a greater reliance on standardized tests, and the approach that focused on social development and democratic values” (p. 15) maintained its presence throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and still continues to influence many educational domains including teacher evaluation (Ralston, 2013).

The second half of the 1900s was a period of great-scale financial and administrative challenges for many countries. However, the need to evaluate teachers to improve their effectiveness was still visible, and the field of teacher evaluation kept on growing. One of the leading changes that marked this period was the gradual substitution of subjective teacher appraisal schemes by objective research supported by empirical data.

Although there was a clear attempt to improve the quality of teacher evaluation, Wolf (1971) argued that teachers were not willing to engage in evaluation due to the lack of “productive outcomes such as professional skill improvement, responsiveness to change, and accountability to constituencies that must be kept informed” (Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995, p. 14). Teachers were also dissatisfied with the little gain derived by engaging in

teacher evaluation processes. However, as Darling-Hammond (1997) maintained, not all teachers were reluctant to be evaluated. Both teachers' quality in a classroom environment and their willingness to attend professional development activities were strongly linked to the quality of their preparation as pre-service teachers (Darling-Hammond & Young, 2002). In addition, several studies revealed that the quality of teaching can be associated with teachers' individual qualities and skills to a certain degree (e.g. Brosh, 1996; Hamachek, 1999; Koustelios, 2001; McBer, 2001). However, as Hiebert and Morris (2012) stated, it is not possible to ensure that every teacher candidate will receive top-quality teacher education and every one of them will possess the personal characteristics that lead to good teaching. This led many countries to start defining "standards for teacher certification and licensure, alongside the problem of how to assess whether these standards for teachers have been met" (Gurl et al., 2016, p. 11). Furthermore, the increasing visibility of international tests comparing the success levels of students encouraged countries that were not pleased with their performance indicators on these tests to initiate reforms to enact change in education, develop standards for learners and teachers, and focus more on attempts to professionalize teaching (Gurl et al., 2016).

Our current understanding of teacher evaluation has been shaped by economic globalisation and neo-liberal economic ideology to a certain extent (Larsen, 2005). Like other fields of study, education has been influenced by market-driven global forces, and stakeholders with administrative powers started questioning whether their investment, financial or otherwise, was getting its worth. Larsen (2005), on the other hand, argues that accountability-based teacher evaluation models, despite their popularity nowadays, are more likely to "increase stress, anxiety, fear, and mistrust amongst teachers and limit growth, flexibility and creativity" (p. 292) and that teachers are oftentimes struggling with trying to meet the requirements defined by various stakeholders.

A review of the literature on teacher effectiveness and teacher evaluation reveals that they are both broad terms relating to distinct aspects of teaching. Therefore, different models shaped by different theoretical underpinnings and prioritising various aspects of teaching have been proposed to evaluate teacher effectiveness. This study focuses on the key characteristics of the teacher evaluation model in Finland, underscoring how it differs from the conventional accountability-based teacher evaluation models. Understanding the status of teachers and teaching in Finland is of paramount importance in comprehending the nature of the teacher evaluation system in the country.

### **Professional Development and Status of Teachers in Finland**

The way teachers in Finland act with the students of different grades and ages is defined according to the ethical principles by the Board of Ethics in Finland, which are in accordance with the principles of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Declaration of the Rights of the Children. These rules also form the basis for the curricula and laws for primary and secondary schools set by the Finnish Ministry of Education National Board of Education (Board of Ethics in Finland, 2010). The ethical principles and underlying values are dignity, truthfulness, fairness, and responsibility as well as freedom. The obligation to train and evaluate is also included in the ethical principles.

According to the Ethical Principles for the Teaching Profession, Finnish teachers must follow the norms and ethics of their profession that require them to implement their duties responsibly and to aim at developing their work as well as skills needed to act successfully as a teacher (Board of Ethics in Finland, 2010). Additionally, they are expected to be constantly ready to reflect on their work and the quality of it. Teaching profession is

based on the principle that teachers are experts with a special mission in the community. Therefore, their training must be of high quality, and the citizens should feel confident that teachers possess a prominent level of competence. A teacher is responsible for constantly maintaining his/her professional skills (Lankinen, 2010).

Teachers are recruited by schools and local authorities, and they work as public servants linked to municipalities. Teachers' professional skills are developed and updated through continuous professional development activities. Teachers are not obliged to educate themselves, and their pedagogical and substantive expertise is not supervised after graduation. However, every teacher is expected to participate in three training days in accordance with the national collective bargaining agreement. Those days are meant for teachers' personal development and training and planning their work.

Despite the positives, Kansanen (2003) argues that in-service training of teachers in Finland is not systematic because it is usually offered by summer programs of universities, teachers' trade unions, and Open University. However, Kumpulainen (2008) and Piesanen, Kiviniemi, and Valkonen (2007) revealed that most teachers in Finland are willing to devote their own personal time to attend professional development activities or programs. Sahlberg (2007), in addition, indicated that support for teachers' professional development has increased over the last two decades although professional development is no longer offered in traditional ways. Instead, there are "school-or-municipality-based longer-term programs and professional development opportunities" (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 155).

### **Teacher Evaluation in Finland**

Finland has introduced teacher evaluation as a way of professional development and teacher empowerment rather than a systematic tool with a key role in decision-making (Webb et al., 2004). Finnish municipalities, which are responsible for running pre-schools, comprehensive (1-9) schools, and upper-secondary schools, are also in charge of creating a framework for the evaluation of teachers working within their borders in line with the requirements and guidelines put forward by the Finnish Ministry of Education (Webb, Vulliamy, Häkkinen, & Hämäläinen, 1998). Therefore, the country does not have "a nationally-regulated framework for teacher evaluation" (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013, p. 25).

At the beginning of the 1990s, some functions of the state administration were given to local authorities, allowing them a large autonomy. This meant abolishing the inspection of schools and textbooks and transferring full decision-making power of financial grants to municipalities as education providers, an autonomy to municipalities to organize the educational processes as well as schools, and a total reform of educational legislation in which goals, students' rights, duties, and evaluation were emphasized (Lankinen, 2010). According to Rinne, Kivirauma, and Simola (2002), the idea of achieving the goals of education by strict norm steering was replaced by setting national core goals and evaluating the achievements afterwards.

By the year 2000, all official inspection mechanisms on the work of teachers such as inspector visits, a state-mandated curriculum, compulsory use of certain materials, rigid schedules for teachers, and class journals where teachers noted what they taught for each contact hour had been ruled out. Additionally, there is no nation-wide standardized test in Finland except for the matriculation test at the end of high school. In 1999, the responsibility for carrying out evaluation was made official after the Finnish National Board of Education introduced a comprehensive control mechanism, the standard scale for marks on the comprehensive school graduation certificate. The changes of control meant an increasingly

busy schedule and pace for teachers since a good amount of workload from the national and local bureaucrats moved to the schools and teachers (Rinne, Kivirauma & Simola, 2002).

Instead of inspection, the accomplishment of national goals is evaluated by national and international sample-based assessments. The evaluation is conducted by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), which is responsible for the evaluation of national evaluation from early childhood to higher education as an independent government agency. The assessments in connection to research form the bases for the development of teacher education in cooperation with teacher educators, researchers and teachers' and principals' associations. There are no final examinations at the end of comprehensive school, but the Finnish National Board of Education has regularly evaluated learning results in mathematics and in Finnish. Other topics such as foreign languages, history, and religion are assessed according to a special program. Assessments are sample-based, and the results are reported without any ranking lists. The schools which have not been included in the evaluation have had the option to gain the same benefit by having their learning results assessed by the Finnish National Board of Education as a chargeable service (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006). Although Finland never had a tradition of publishing any public rankings of schools or teachers, there is a lot of discussion on publicly sharing the rankings (Rinne, Kivirauma & Simola, 2002).

### **Accountability-based Teacher Evaluation Models**

The increasing number of applications for teaching positions and the focus on teacher accountability have made the evaluation of teachers a need. In line with this, different models that highlight and prioritize distinct aspects of teaching have been proposed in different contexts. In this article, when discussing accountability-based teacher evaluation, we focus on one of the most popular of such models, Value-Added Model for Teacher Evaluation (VAM), (Hanushek, 2009). In brief, VAM is a results-based accountability system that has as its base the idea that "objective measurement of student performance is the best way to measure the performance of teachers and schools, and that associating consequences with student performance outcomes motivates better performance" (Murphy, 2012, p. 3). Even though VAM has not been used widely in Europe, hundreds of schools in the USA have started to use this model as an essential tool in evaluating teacher effectiveness. The shift towards VAM was mainly a response to the increasing demand by the federal administration to "develop more effective teacher-evaluation systems" (Mirra & Morrell, 2011, p. 408).

Value-added modelling is an umbrella term that encompasses several different approaches that serve the same purpose, estimating a teacher's contribution to students' progress in a certain period by implementing statistical analyses to control the effect of students' prior characteristics. However, each of the approaches developed in accordance with VAM prioritises distinct aspects of evaluation, which means it is possible for a teacher to get different – sometimes significantly different – scores based on the type of VAM approach used for evaluation (Wei, Hembry, Murphy, & McBride, 2012).

### **Method**

To explore the characteristics of teacher evaluation in Finland, we utilized a naturalistic research design relying on qualitative content analysis (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Our data sources were public records including reports and information briefs published by organizations, articles in magazines and peer-reviewed journals, and relevant documents



identified in media (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The records were collected through database searches conducted on Middle East Technical University Library Network in June 2017. In particular, for the analysis of the Finnish Teacher Evaluation Model, we utilized a conceptual framework proposed by OECD (2009). The framework was shaped by the outcomes of studies on teacher evaluation conducted by OECD (Isoré, 2009). The following is a list of the six interrelated elements proposed by OECD (2009). In the list and the analysis that follows, for each element, we used the original category labels.

- (1) “Unit Assessed: Who?” Investigates whether teachers are the only subject of evaluation or are they evaluated together with students, the school, and the system.
- (2) “Capabilities to assess and to use feedback: By Whom?” Investigates how the evaluators are chosen, the skills that are needed to be an evaluator, how the evaluators gain the skills to effectively use the results of an evaluation for feedback for stakeholders, and how the results of teacher evaluation are reviewed.
- (3) “Aspects assessed: What?” Investigates to what extent the evaluation considers aspects related to teaching, including but not limited to, planning, preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, teachers’ contribution to school development, link to surrounding community and professional development activities.
- (4) “Evaluation ‘technology’: How?” Investigates the type of data collection instruments, criteria and standards, purposes, knowledge, and skills used within the evaluation.
- (5) “Purposes: For what?” Investigates the purpose of teacher evaluation based on how evaluation results are used (with a view to holding agents accountable, to inform policy development, etc.).
- (6) “Agents involved: With whom?” Investigates the involvement of other agents (parents, students, teachers (colleagues), school leaders, teacher unions, educational administrators, policy makers) in the development and implementation of teacher evaluation. (OECD, 2009, pp. 3-4)

### **Analysis of the Finnish Model of Teacher Evaluation**

Accountability-based models and the Finnish Model of Teacher Evaluation stand as two opposite ways of assessing teacher effectiveness, possessing only few common characteristics. Whereas VAM, as a fully structured model, looks at student progress over time to understand the extent to which a teacher can be held accountable (Darling-Hammond, 2015), the latter decentralizes the whole process and focuses on increasing teacher empowerment by enabling more room for professional development (Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013). With a focus on teacher evaluation in Finland, below is a comparative analysis of the characteristics of these teacher evaluation systems based on the conceptual framework proposed by OECD (2009).

#### **Unit Assessed: Who?**

In Finland, teacher performance is evaluated separately from other aspects (students, schools, the educational system). Teachers are evaluated for their own progress during a period based on the individual development plan teachers prepare for themselves

(Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013), and in the case that the teacher is a subject teacher, s/he is also evaluated for the effectiveness of their field of teaching.

In other accountability based teacher evaluation models, the tendency is to evaluate teachers along with principals (Loeb & Grissom, 2013). Teachers are evaluated for their contribution to student growth considering the change in students' test scores during a certain period. Lomax and Kuenzi (2012) point out that some states use "prior student records to remove the influence of factors not attributable to teachers (e.g., socioeconomic status or prior achievement)" (p. 11).

#### **Capabilities to Assess and to Use Feedback: By Whom?**

The municipality and principals of schools carry out teacher evaluation in Finland. The national government does not get involved in any part of the evaluation process (Finnish National Board of Education, 2012). The local municipality oversees the selection of principals among a group of successful teachers. Principals are responsible for arranging the school budget funded by the municipality (Sahlberg, 2010). The national government expects each municipality to fund the schools with enough resources so that staff can attend compulsory professional development activities for at least three days a year. The principals are responsible for assisting each teacher in deciding on the type of professional development activity s/he needs to attend based on the principal's evaluation of teacher performance and recent developments in his/her area of teaching (Williams & Engel, 2013).

In accountability-based models, national or local authorities have the liberty of defining their own evaluation system and drawing up the guidelines that govern this system. Measuring teacher effectiveness through VAM is a challenging task that requires various computational tools and analysts (mostly statisticians and psychometricians) with sufficient experience and competence (Lomax & Kuenzi, 2012).

#### **Aspects Assessed: What?**

Teacher evaluation in Finland is more group-based, reflective, and participatory, with the aim of creating professional learning communities among teachers and administrators (Sahlberg, 2011a). Principals and teachers may hold "individual development dialogues" that focus on teachers' work, working conditions and training (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013, p. 25).

The key idea behind accountability-based teacher evaluation models is to measure teacher performance by calculating average student performance in each classroom. Therefore, measuring the effect of the teacher on students' progress constitutes a very important part of VAM. "The teacher effect is an estimate of the teacher's unique contribution to student achievement as measured by student performance on assessments. It is isolated from other factors that may influence achievement, such as socioeconomic status, disability status, English language learner status, and prior achievement" (Lomax & Kuenzi, 2012, p. 4).

#### **Evaluation Technology: How?**

Teacher evaluation in Finland is ultimately a consultative and formative process that usually takes place during face-to-face conversations between a teacher and the principal or

within a group of colleagues who teach the same subject or at the same grade (Williams & Engel, 2013). “The majority of schools have implemented annual discussions between school leaders and teachers to evaluate the fulfilment of the personal objectives set up during the previous year and to establish further personal objectives that correspond both to the analysis of the teacher and the needs of the school” (Isoré, 2009, p. 34). As Finnish students take no standardized tests until they take the university matriculation test, teachers are not evaluated based on their students’ academic achievement (Sahlberg, 2011b; Walker, 2013). However, it is possible that a teacher might be indirectly evaluated based on students’ performance on tests because the main objective of testing students in Finland is to understand if they need additional support and, if so, detect the areas in which additional support is required. A teacher in Finland is required to observe his/her students’ progress closely and get together with the principal to either arrange a teaching assistant who will closely monitor the student in need during classes (Takala, 2007) or arrange private tutoring sessions for which the teacher receives supplementary payment (Saloviita, 2009).

The main tool for data collection in accountability-based teacher evaluation models is by using “statistical indicators related to changes in their students’ test-based performance” (American Educational Research Association, 2015, p. 448). Since these models entail rigorous use of statistical analysis tools (i.e. percent passing change, average score change, multiple regression, hierarchical linear regression, layered mixed effect; see Wei et al. (2012) for a detailed investigation of tools), each step must be taken very carefully for accurate and reliable results. Although there are discrepancies between states, around half of the VAM scores are typically derived from student achievement whereas the rest is dedicated to the assessment of teaching by the evaluators (Goldhaber, 2015).

#### **Purposes: For What?**

The main objective of teacher evaluation in Finland is teacher empowerment, and evaluation is regarded as a tool for professional development (Webb et al., 2004). The results of the evaluation are not used for accountability purposes and have little influence on a teacher’s contractual status (Snider, 2011), but teachers still take up professional accountability towards students, the school, parents, and their colleagues (Sahlberg, 2011c). However, in the rare instance that the teacher repeatedly fails to fulfil his/her commitments and responsibilities adequately, s/he might be dismissed from the school. Nevertheless, dismissal is only possible provided that the employer (the municipality) is not able to offer a teacher another job due to economic or productive reasons (Finnish National Board of Education, 2012).

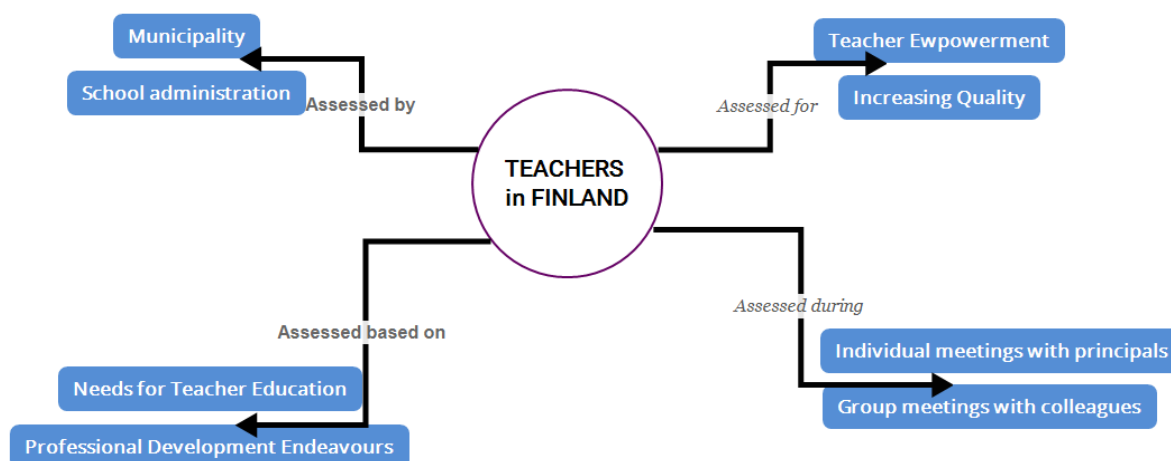
VAM has been designed “in an effort to increase teacher and principal quality” by collecting objective data and through statistical methods (American Educational Research Association, 2015a, p. 448). Lomax and Kuenzi (2012, p. 15) argue that some states use or are considering using VAM scores while making decisions that involve “teacher compensation, promotion, tenure, and dismissal”. Hannaway (2009), Hanushek (2009), and Thomas, Wingert, Conant, and Register (2010) argue that VAM scores are being used to fire teachers with unsatisfactory scores and replace them with those with better scores or who are more likely to get better scores.

**Agents Involved: With Whom?**

There are no state-mandated guidelines for teacher evaluation in Finland, but trade unions play an active role in drawing up the appraisal framework in the contract between the teacher and the municipality (The Centre for Development and Enterprise, 2015; Walker, 2013). All decisions concerning teachers (including how they are evaluated) are made within the schools, typically by school boards led by the principal.

Since VAM is a system developed based on the idea that teachers should be held accountable to greater public, it is considered customary for many states to share the results of teacher evaluation with several stakeholders including school boards, parents, community representatives, and business representative who may also take part in forming the evaluation scheme (Lomax & Kuenzi, 2012).

Overall, teacher evaluation in Finland operates as a way of promoting teachers’ professional development and empowering them as practitioners rather than a way of making critical decisions regarding their careers. Based on our analysis, Figure 1 presents a concept map of the teacher evaluation patterns in Finland.



**Figure 1: A concept map of teacher evaluation patterns in Finland**

The teacher evaluation practices in Finland differ considerably from accountability-based teacher evaluation practices in that the latter prioritizes students’ academic achievement levels to make judgements on teacher effectiveness. Results in accountability-based systems like VAM are oftentimes used to make critical decisions regarding teachers’ professional status at schools. Whereas Finnish teachers are generally content with the evaluation practices and actively contribute to these processes, teachers in schools where accountability-based teacher evaluation systems are in use report continuous anxiety and fear because their contracts may be terminated due to their students’ low academic performance.

**Conclusion**

The investigation of the teacher evaluation model in Finland and its comparison to accountability-based teacher evaluation models revealed they represent two opposing edges of assessing teacher effectiveness. It is important to understand the underlying philosophies that frame these two models. The structure and means used for education and teacher

evaluation are dependent on the social policy of the state, which means that the pedagogical practices of teachers relate to the social policy and the ideas of fairness in society (Anttonen & Sipilä, 2000; Kettunen, 2001).

In the 1970s, Finland chose to comply with the ideology of welfare state, where the main objective of the state's existence was to provide all citizens with an opportunity of a prosperous life. It was based on income distribution, which, on the other hand, equalled the wealth gap between social classes, but also raised funds for the maintenance of expensive services (Kuusi, 1961; Lehtisalo & Raivola, 1992). The Finnish educational system is subordinated to this social policy agenda, which builds on well-being and is, therefore, focused on promoting and enhancing the well-being to all its citizens— not on prioritizing achievement ratings and diplomas (Anttonen & Sipilä, 2000; Kettunen, 2001; Kuusi, 1961).

Sahlberg (2011a) argues that the key to change in Finnish Educational System was a result of the need for change in many areas of the country in the 1970s and education was one of the areas that made the greatest amount of progress. The most important change in education was in the way teachers were educated, which completely changed the status of teachers in Finland. Prior to this change, teaching was not considered as a prestigious occupation in Finland, and Finnish teachers had not always been regarded as highly trusted professionals (Niemi, Toom, & Kallioniemi, 2012; Ripley, 2012; Simola, 2005). State inspectors played a very active role within the education system as they made sure that schools were following the strict national curriculum because principals and teachers were not allowed to make decisions of their own (Ripley, 2012).

Whereas many have appraised the Finnish Model, comments and interpretations on the use of VAM usually consist to a great extent of question marks and cautions (American Educational Research Association, 2015; Baker et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2015; Goldhaber, 2015). Recently, some researchers have drawn attention to the variation that emerges in teacher VAM rankings in relation to within and across different school districts (Blazar, Litke, & Barmore, 2016).

Unlike their Finnish counterparts who are pleased with both the way they are educated and evaluated (Johannesson, Lindblad, & Simola, 2002; Sherman, 2012), teachers in the U.S. are often extensively critical towards the method through which their effectiveness is evaluated. Johnson (2015) points out that when *The Los Angeles Times* published individual VAM scores of teachers in 2010, teachers understood that VAM was likely to have a negative impact on them both personally and professionally. She also argues that teachers grew much more sceptical towards its use, and many have been protesting it ever since.

Using VAM to make high-stakes decisions about teachers also may have the unintended effect of driving skilful and committed teachers away from the schools that need them most and, in the extreme, causing them to leave the profession (Johnson, 2015, p. 121). In response to calls for maximizing VAM, educators also refer to teachers' professional identity in different countries and oppose a "toxic use of accountability for schools" (Strauss, 2013, par. 21).

In the public discourse of policy-makers, the increasing use of VAM is associated with ever-increasing pressure on teachers to prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century economy and equip students with skills necessary to excel in a globally competitive development sphere. While it is important to acknowledge that teachers do play a key role in preparing citizens for the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is also necessary to respect professional autonomy and explore successful methods of teacher evaluation in different contexts. Such policy initiatives also require a thorough inquiry into the kind of conditions that gave the rise to these different evaluation paradigms in various contexts.

Although the Finnish educational system is commonly considered positively by its teachers and citizens, there are some recent concerns in Finnish education. In Finland, the gaps between schools are growing. For example, students' academic performance varies a lot across schools and student grades in mathematics and other subjects may vary from outstanding to satisfactory. This may pose risks with regard to the equality of students (Ouakrim-Soivio, 2013). In addition, international learning assessments highlight a growing gap between boys and girls (Sulkunen & Nissinen, 2012). Partly due to the economic recession, there is hardly any investment in further training for teachers and no supplementary training is required for teachers. Given the requirements of the new Finnish curriculum, this creates a highly problematic equation, especially for class teachers. This, in addition to the fact that no bonus salary is paid for professional qualifications, influences teachers' willingness and motivation to participate in professional development sessions. Further research is needed to shed light on the influence of such changes over the country's education policy.

This article investigated the teacher evaluation model in Finland, a country that has received international attention with its educational policies and practices. The study also highlighted how the Finnish model differs from accountability-based teacher evaluation models. Our inquiry also revealed that teachers in Finland go through a rather dynamic and flexible evaluation process usually during meetings with principals or colleagues. Unlike accountability-based evaluation models, the Finnish model aims to understand the professional needs of teachers, enhance teacher empowerment, and underscore and encourage professional development endeavours. These findings may particularly help educational leaders to understand the key considerations related to teacher evaluation in Finland and interpret possible links to the successful educational endeavours reported in this context.

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