

LINDA DARLING-HAMMOND & ROBERT ROTHMAN. *Teaching in the Flat World: Learning from High-Performing Systems*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. (2015). 107 pp. \$ 24.95 (paperback). (ISBN 978-0-8077-5647-8).

The theme of this issue of the *McGill Journal of Education* is “What is learning in a professional teacher education program?” This is a question that can be thought of using multiple levels of analysis. Is it about one teacher? Cohorts or schools of teachers? Boards and districts of teachers? Provinces and states? How is learning measured? What constitutes good learning? And, perhaps most importantly, how does that learning impact student achievement? In *Teaching in the Flat World: Learning from High-Performing Systems*, Linda Darling-Hammond and Robert Rothman make the case for systems thinking as a way to approach professional learning and development of teaching. This accessible read for policy makers and educational leaders suggests that in order to improve student achievement, the professional education of teachers needs to work in synchronization to raise the level of education communities. Specifically, they argue that attention needs to be paid to five elements of teacher education: how teachers are recruited, prepared, supported in-service, evaluated, and how school leadership is cultivated. This framework is applied to three regions that have implemented systems approaches: Finland, Ontario, and Singapore. Through this work, they highlight how a systems approach considers the entire life cycle of professionals in education communities, showcasing the dynamic and reflective way that this can be sustained.

Thinking about educational systems in a global comparative context is not new. Researchers have explored these problems for many years, through educational country comparatives (Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Carnoy, Gove, & Marshall, 2007; Sahlberg, 2013; Stewart, 2012), through examinations of student achievement (Ripley, 2013; Wagner & Compton, 2012; Zhao, 2012), and through the perspective of teachers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Marzano, 2010). What makes this book unique is how it combines all of these elements together, using a more holistic and systemic approach to thinking about teaching.

This book is written in six chapters. The authors' intended audiences are American policy makers and educational leaders, but their voice and the structure of the book allows it to be read more broadly. For Canadian readers, the book not only showcases Ontario, but also helps compare and contrast Canada to other systems. Chapter 1 begins by justifying the study of international systems as a way to improve teacher performance. New types of thinking and solutions to improve teacher performance are introduced. Chapter 2 is an overview of the teaching climate in the United States through the five lenses of quality teaching outlined above. In this chapter, Connecticut and North Carolina's earlier attempts and successes to improve teacher performance through systemic approaches are highlighted. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are case studies of Finland, Ontario, and Singapore respectively. Each chapter provides a portrait of the educational climate in each region, profiling how the five aspects of the framework for teacher performance are addressed in each location. An emphasis on how each region looks at teacher performance from a systemic approach is illustrated, and lessons learned conclude each chapter. The final chapter pulls together six lessons and applies them to the five part framework proposed at the beginning of the book, making an argument for systemic thinking about teacher preparation and development for policy makers and educational leaders from states (and provinces).

One of the most compelling ideas that comes from the book is thinking about the interconnection between various phases in a single teachers' professional life and what that means from a systems perspective. While it is easy to play out the professional lifespan of one teacher in a linear way, contemplating how a system is created such that it creates a sustainable support model for teachers at different phases in their careers that is simultaneously dynamic, progressive, and stable is far more complex. Yet, if an education system is thought of as its own ecosystem, the sustainability of the entire community depends on all parts being able to revive and thrive together.

Grounding systems thinking in three different case studies is a useful approach to begin practically conceptualizing how this theory could be applied. Because each chapter follows the same structure, it is easy to see similarities and differences across systems, showing how this work can be simultaneously consistent, dynamic, and relevant to the region. This is exemplified in how each country emphasizes certain aspects of the system depending on the context of the countries' education system. The authors note that Finland has invested intensely in the initial preparation of teachers, Ontario has emphasized building the capacity of the teaching workforce, and that Singapore has highly developed performance management systems that shift expectations over the course of a teacher's career, providing different career tracks based on skills (pp. 77-78). For skeptics who worry that systemic approaches cannot also be culturally relevant or localized, these examples provided entry points to think about how autonomy can be preserved through systemic change.

The importance of creating space for change within a system is also discussed as being important for progress. The authors argue that this approach requires being in a constant state of refinement, noting that in each of the case studies, “[a]s success was achieved in one area, new goals were set” (p. 90). For instance, Finland is now concerned that in-service teachers need more support, Ontario is focusing on gaps they have found in initial teacher preparation, and Singapore is looking to strengthen instruction in skills such as problem solving and critical thinking. However, while the strength of the argument is that the dynamic, reflective, and progressive elements of a systems approach give educational communities the capacity to sustain and change, there are also unanswered thoughts. For instance, how do these systems emerge in a way that addresses all aspects of the community? How do you find the balance between maintaining a system and having specific goals for one aspect of it? How do you measure the sustainability of a systems approach? These questions go beyond the scope of the book, but are important to consider as lines of further inquiry and as practical considerations for implementation and improvement.

As a whole, this book is a very accessible read for audiences who are new to thinking about systemic school reform. It is also insightful for policymakers and educational leaders who are in search of a way to conceptualize and frame their thinking about change. Ultimately, it is hard to disagree with the authors’ position that “[a]n education system can only be as strong as its teachers” (p. 27); this book provides a relevant entry point for thinking about the cultivation of a systemic approach for professional learning.

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