A passion for teaching, or the brightest and the best?

Notions of quality in primary EFL teacher education

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Since publication of the first PISA results in 2001, where Finland topped the global hit parade of education success (or rather, top in those strands of education that best lend themselves to measurement), the world has flocked to Finland in the hope of learning how to replicate their success – often in very different educational and cultural contexts.

What can we learn from a system that selects those with a passion for teaching, in preference to the highest scoring applicants, then puts them through their paces in a five year, research-focused course as a preparation for a career as generalist primary teachers (including expertise in teaching English, Finnish, Swedish and possibly Sami)?

This paper adopts a historical view in reviewing patterns of pre- and in-service provision for teacher education across Europe, considering the merits of both concurrent and consecutive teacher education as frameworks for achieving quality in primary EFL provision. Recently published data, together with new data from a number of contexts is interrogated to identify contemporary practices and future trends in primary EFL teacher education in Europe.

The analysis reveals the need for further research to shed light on the range of delivery models currently existing in the field of primary ELT and clarify the nature of pre-service course content necessary to fully equip graduates with the expertise to understand the demands of particular models and to ensure appropriate learner outcomes.