



## Sustainable Teacher Education and Professional Development

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers and their quality have significant impacts on practices and ultimately student learning (Alton-Lee, 2003; Desimone, 2009; Fauth et al., 2019; Garet et al., 2001; Lieberman & Mace, 2008; Parise & Spillane, 2010). The journey to becoming good educators often starts from initial teacher education and continues throughout their entire teaching careers in the form of professional development. Thus, efforts have been made to improve the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher training programs in various parts of the world. However, a question remains as to how to ensure that the former actually helps prepare educators to handle complex, dynamic classroom situations and enhance student learning, while the latter can empower teachers to cope with uncertainties in educational landscape and undergo real changes in daily practice. In other words, how can these programs forge a kind of teacher learning that works and sustains beyond their conclusion?

Initial teacher education can influence not only the professional knowledge of pre-service teachers but also their professional practice as they integrate knowledge, skills, and dispositions in daily lessons (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Effective teacher education, therefore, train well-prepared graduates by offering a rich curriculum with a combination of theoretical, disciplinary knowledge and professional experience through the practicum. Although numerous studies have been conducted to investigate effective teacher preparation, teacher education in various countries still faces critics of lacking effectiveness (Rowan et al., 2014). Questions remain such as what characterises high-quality teacher education and what mechanism can assure graduate teachers' capabilities to meet professional standards and create meaningful learning experiences for their students in diverse settings.

There exists a consensus among scholars that effective teacher professional development needs to be content-focused (Desimone, 2009; Garet et al., 2001), classroom-based, evidence-based, and holistic (Dudley, 2013; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Pedder & Opfer, 2013; Vescio et al., 2008), encourages reflection on practice (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Saito & Khong, 2017; van Es & Sherin, 2010), takes into account how adults learn, and promotes active teacher construction of knowledge in a collaborative manner (Garet et al., 2001; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Despite these common grounds, it is still observed that teachers may just change superficially in behaviour and revert to their usual teaching upon the conclusion of a change initiative (Wolf & Peele, 2019). Thus, we still need more research into how and why teachers can experience sustainable changes in practice. Factors at the teacher, school, program, province/district, and national levels all deserve close attention by policy makers, researchers, teacher educators, and practitioners as teacher learning is situated in particular socio-cultural contexts and organisational conditions (Lee & Louis, 2019; Webster-Wright, 2009).

This special issue, “*Sustainable Teacher Education and Professional Development*” of the Vietnam Journal of Education, originated from the “Teacher Education and Professional Development” track, Vietnam Education Symposium (VES) 2021. It examines the sustainability of pre-service and in-service teacher training practices from an international perspective, covering three research contexts of Vietnam, Australia, and the U.S across seven studies by both Vietnamese and international authors. What draws the studies together is the concerns about the quality of initial teacher education (three papers) and the issues and impacts of teacher professional development activities, including teacher leadership (four papers). While sharing the common threads, the studies are quite diverse in terms

of topics, ranging from policy to practice, and research design. Together, the studies offer insights into prominent issues in pre-service and in-service teacher education and raise important implications for policy makers, leaders, researchers, teacher educators, teachers, and student teachers.

It is noted that the special issue does not cover every aspect of sustainability in teacher education and professional development. For example, articles about teacher education only examine second-order change among teacher candidates and do not include issues such as their educational backgrounds, beliefs, pathways, and induction. Likewise, the papers about professional development mainly deal with the different practice of lesson study but not other forms of activities (e.g. informal, daily learning and formal course enrolment). Moreover, they focus on face-to-face interactions in funded projects but not teacher-initiated ones. In the following section of this editorial, we will elaborate on the contents of the featured articles.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

In order to develop a quality initial teacher education program, one important question that may be asked would be what a quality one looks like from the perspectives of those involved in that process. The first paper by Nguyen Thi Ha Ni investigated this issue at a initial Vietnamese teacher education department through the lens of key stakeholders. Employing a case study research design with in-depth interviews as the main method of data collection, it reveals multiple conceptions of quality pre-service teacher education, which can be grouped into ‘quality as fitness for purpose’ and ‘input-process-output quality’ models. Either way, the study highlights the need for initial teacher training institutes to redefine teacher professionalism and to prepare student teachers to meet the actual expectations of Vietnamese schools. A consensus between key stakeholders on this idea would, therefore, lay a strong foundation for nurturing work-ready graduates. In this sense, a sustainable program is supposed to respond to work demands in contexts where new teachers may find themselves.

Once key stakeholders reach an agreement on an ideal image of student teachers at the point of graduation, the next step is to design a corresponding curriculum. Course design comprises learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks that are aligned with each other (Biggs & Tang, 2011) and meet the requirements of the sector. The paper by Nguyen Thi Nhai provides a case study describing the process of integrating ePortfolios into curriculum mapping, program design, pedagogy and assessment in the ITE program at an Australian institute that offers a double degree program in education, particularly for international candidates. Based on the conceptual framework of integrative learning, a series of three courses were redesigned to enable student teachers to connect both academic and social life to broader meanings and develop their grand view of the complex, sophisticated real world. Using ePortfolios, teacher candidates can showcase their professional learning and identity via digital platforms of Google Sites and Mahara. The curriculum remapping was to respond to challenges in initial teacher education and the online/blended learning mode induced by the Covid-19 pandemic. We chose to introduce the paper in this special issue since it has vital implications for policy makers, teacher training institutes, and teacher educators in Australia and other educational contexts such as Vietnam.

The third paper by Ha Van Thang continues with the topic of pre-service teacher education, focusing on student teachers’ competencies in the context of Vietnam. Initial teacher training institutes often develop their own programmes to train teachers; however, the enacted curriculum and actual learning outcomes may or may not match the intended curriculum. It is critical, therefore, to measure how student teachers and lecturers perceived the impact of the training programme on student teachers’ competencies and gauge factors influencing the outcomes to adjust the curriculum. Adopting a cross-sectional research design, the third paper surveyed 40 lecturers and 167 pre-service teachers at five initial teacher training programs/courses in Southern Vietnam to assess the competence level of geography pre-service teachers. The results show just above an average level, yet, there is a significant difference between the evaluation by teacher educators and student teachers, with the former being more positive. The study also investigated a number of factors that explained the outcomes, such as the quality of faculty members, student teachers themselves, curriculum, teaching, and assessment methods, as well as infrastructure.

While pre-service teacher education plays a critical role, teachers need to engage in continuous teacher professional development through formal and informal activities. The next three papers represent school-based professional development programs to support teacher learning in the U.S. and Vietnam. The fourth paper by Catherine Lewis and colleagues examined factors that help sustain school-based Lesson Study efforts in three American elementary schools beyond the funding period. These schools, which serve disadvantaged students,

managed to engage almost all the teachers in Lesson Study cycles two years after the end of the project and showed evidence of improvement in student mathematics achievement. The paper indicates four factors that rendered Lesson Study effective and sustainable: (1) teacher agency; (2) development of an instructional vision emphasising student thinking and making it visible through journaling and board work; (3) study of subject matters by teachers and access to mathematics experts; and (4) management structures established by the schools to support the process. The study addresses two key challenges faced by many professional development programs: how to enact changes in practice as evidenced in student outcomes and how to sustain teachers' commitment to continue project activities after funding ends.

If the paper by Catherine Lewis and colleagues examined collective teacher learning at the school level, the study by Atsushi Tsukui takes a micro perspective of each individual teacher learning through reflection on their own lessons. It investigated the characteristics of classroom observations by 10 Vietnamese teachers who belonged to two groups, namely, the Lesson Study for Learning Community (LSLC) group and non-LSLC group. The LSLC group participated in weekly sessions of lesson observation and joint reflection, focusing on student learning with the aid of videos and photos of classroom situations. Each studied teacher was observed once while conducting a live lesson and later asked to comment on what they noticed while watching the video of that lesson. The paper highlights two key findings: (1) the LSLC group paid more attention to students' learning than the non-LSLC one, and (2) the LSLC group neither commented on students as in the plan nor those who met the teacher's expectations but took a more reflexive position. In other words, they were more open to lesson events as they unfolded. The study discussed interesting concepts of active-passiveness and middle voice in relation to the LSLC group, offering a possible extension of the literature which mainly relies on teachers' active cognitive processes. The paper offers insights into teachers' minds as revealed in their classroom observations.

Although dealing with the topic of LSLC, Eisuke Saito is concerned more with the issue of sustainability. LSLC, a school-reform approach originated from Japan which was introduced in Vietnam 15 years ago, has become a national policy. However, the speed of practice change still remains slow, except in some pilot schools in Bac Giang province. The paper discusses three persisting conceptions among policymakers, school leaders and teachers that may hold back the progress of LSLC in the country: (a) LSLC is equivalent to changes in teaching techniques; (b) LSLC is for demonstration purposes; and (c) LSLC is a single-day event without efforts made in daily lessons. The paper argues that there should be a long-term and holistic perspective toward this school reform approach and that its principles be upheld. It raises the need to create a network among practitioners, researchers and policymakers to gain a deep knowledge of the model by sharing experiences, and being informed about both theories and practice of LSLC. This even includes learning from international cases. The study highlights how stakeholders' understanding of a reform can impact its implementation and implies that local adaption of a foreign model may go against its original premises, leading to few practice changes.

Last but certainly not least, the paper by Nga Ngo and colleagues covers an overarching topic of teacher leadership from a policy perspective. Teacher leadership has been considered critical as it lays a strong foundation for teacher professional development efforts and ultimately, improvement in student outcomes. Although the scholarship of teacher leadership has been developed internationally, it remains relatively new in Vietnam, where leadership is often associated with school leaders or heads of subject departments. There is also a dearth of research into how to prepare teachers in terms of knowledge and skills so that they can enact their leadership capacity both formally and informally. Adopting the Teacher Leader Model Standards (TLMS) developed by Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011), the study analyses how teacher leadership is manifested in 61 in-effect national policy documents related to teaching professional standards and teacher professional development in Vietnam. The findings show that despite attempts to cover many aspects of teacher leadership, these policy documents still neglect some areas, thus presenting a fragmented view of it. The study calls for teacher leadership to be recognised as a core teacher competence in national policies and recommends that a systematic framework of teacher leadership be constructed, and teacher leadership be part of initial teacher education and teacher professional development programs. The paper can serve to initiate a national discussion on teacher leadership and empirical research into this topic in the country.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Taken together, the articles of this special issue illustrate the complex nature of effective, sustainable teacher education and professional development. To train high-quality teacher candidates and to support them to change daily

practice requires long-term, concerted efforts at the individual, school, program, provincial/district, and national levels. It starts with having clear visions, foundational philosophies, and supportive policies, moving through the development of a strong curriculum or meaningful activities for active, collaborative knowledge construction. Overall, student teachers and practising teachers need a sense of empowerment to take leadership in their own and colleagues' learning.

We hope this special issue brings to the fore the importance and complexity of sustainable teacher education and subsequently professional development. In addition, we hope that the articles in this issue will inspire current and future researchers in the field to continue the quest to unpack what is still less known about the sustainability of teacher education and professional development. We actively call for studies that investigate how teacher preparation can affect professional development, and studies that explicitly explain the mechanism of change among both teacher candidates and practitioners. A comparison between the two groups in how they learn and change would be an interesting topic. All these endeavours would add to the international body of literature about teacher education and professional development.

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