

Chapter 18

A Comparative Analysis of American and Dutch Primary Public Education and Teacher Training: Essential Institutional Factors for Success

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a comparative analysis of the Dutch versus American primary public education systems within the framework of Donald Moore's Five Essential Supports. In addition, it analyzes and explores the importance of professional capacity/quality and its connection to standardized test scores on the TIMSS, PIRLS, and PISA. It starts with an overview of the state of the American public education system and moves into a comparative analysis in two separate parts: (1) within the macro, meso, and micro levels and (2) within the Five Essential Supports. Special focus is given to the professional capacity/quality of pre-service teacher training programs to better understand the interconnectedness of this support within the framework and its effects on test outcomes. By analyzing test score data, the authors explore if and how improved practicum teacher-training may improve standardized test scores and explore ways in which policy can change to improve teacher-training at the university level.

INTRODUCTION

Why Study Public Schools in America and The Netherlands?

The author is an adamant and enthusiastic supporter of progressive and innovative public education, but the United States of America's (America, or US) public education system continually leaves the greater public feeling somber and dismayed—a sentiment calculated by *Education Next* (Education Next,

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2016). In their 2016 poll, 53% of the public gave public schools nationally a C-grade. With the decrease in the arts and physical activity programs, the loss of child-centered environments, a growing funding disparity, and the pervasive overuse of standardized testing (add ref for standardized testing?), America's public education system continues to leave people seeking better opportunities for their children, teachers struggling to find joy in their profession, and school leadership being overworked and undertrained.

America's public education policies continually pressure minorities, special needs parents, teachers and educators, and scholars to develop an animosity towards American politicians, lobbyists, and policy makers who often do not understand the educational system or acknowledge its gross inequalities.¹ NPR's Cory Turner reported on a list of recommendations from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in which their 150-page report details the vast inequities plaguing the American system.

To this day, though, states are all over the map when it comes to how equitably they spend their own money in schools. The problem was baked into the system from the beginning, with local property taxes being an important driver of both school funding and of inequities in school funding. (Turner, 2018)

The lack of constitutional protection for equal education for all provides a foundation for confusion, varying and conflicting curriculum guidelines, and regulations which reduce teacher autonomy, satisfaction, and productivity. Instead, American public education tends to cultivate a competitive silo culture amongst teachers, which forces teachers to work alone thus discouraging teacher collaboration and innovation, reducing child-centered learning, and impeding teacher autonomy. Furthermore, schools continually fail to integrate with the communities they serve consequently straining trust between students, parents, and educators. The combination of these factors lead many parents to feel dissatisfied with their public school options and lead them to pursue alternatives in independent, private, or charter schools. Many parents seek schools where students can learn in a more progressive educational environment that fosters community, provides quality instruction, and presents a consistent curriculum.

While doing research on how to create progressive and pragmatic public schools, the author came across a 2013 study by UNICEF entitled *Child Well-being in Rich Countries: A comparative overview* (Adamson, 2013). Within this study, out of 29 countries studied, the United States of America ranked low at 26 and its education system at 27. To better understand this ranking, the author looked to the highest ranked country, the Netherlands (NL), to see what the American public schools could do differently. The study mentions, "The Netherlands retains its position as the clear leader and is the only country ranked among the top five countries in all dimensions of child well-being." To better understand the rankings, the author explored what factors were taken into account for these rankings, particularly in the education field.

These factors are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. UNICEF Child Well-being Analysis

Dimension 3 Education Figure 3.0	Participation	Participation rate: early childhood education	3.1a
		Participation rate: further education, age 15–19	3.1b
		NEET rate (% age 15–19 not in education, employment, or training)	3.1c
	Achievement	Average PISA scores in reading, maths, and science	3.2

Source: Adamson (2013).

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