“We cannot just let teachers make sacrifices”: Implementing a teacher rotation program in China and its implications for preparing teachers for hard-to-staff schools

Teacher Rotation Program (TRP) is a recent teacher policy developed in the context of China. TRP is aimed to close China’s teacher quality disparities through rotating “high-quality” urban schoolteachers to teach in hard-to-staff rural schools for a certain period. Recent studies have consistently reported urban schoolteachers’ significant resistance to participate in TRP, but few empirical studies have examined why and how this phenomenon is emerging, and even fewer studies have considered the perspectives of the ground-level policy implementing actors who play a vital role in translating policy ideas into realities. To begin to fill this research gap, this exploratory case study examined how five policy actors carried out TRP in one rural county in China’s Shanxi Province from 2012 to 2015. The participants’ experiences indicated that China’s emerging social discourses which advocated the pursuit of individual interests and mobility and TRP’s emphasis on having teachers to “sacrifice” jointly contributed to the partial realization of TRP’s intended goals. The findings suggest that teacher education programs should nurture educators’ intrinsic and long-term commitment to educational equality.

Keywords: teacher rotation; policy implementation; educational equality; teacher education; case study

Subject classification codes: educational policy; teacher education; qualitative research methods