



OECD Informal Meeting of Ministers of Education /
17th OECD/Japan Seminar

How to Best Shape Teacher Policies?

Policy lessons from international comparisons and guidance for future education and schools

Chair's Summary

I have had the privilege of chairing this informal meeting of 17 Ministers from OECD and other countries which Japan is proud to have hosted.

More and more countries are looking beyond their own borders for evidence of the most successful and efficient policies and practices, in order to improve the lives of their citizens. In education, OECD's PISA results reveal what is possible for countries, by showing all of us what students in the highest-performing and most rapidly improving education systems are capable of. The OECD's new Survey of Adult Skills shows how the foundation skills that students acquire during their schooling can impact their future life chances and, in particular, how poor skills can severely limit people's access to better-paying and more-rewarding jobs. Without the right skills, people are kept on the margins of society, progress does not translate into economic growth and countries cannot compete in today's economies. Thus there is increasing pressure for governments to provide the right skills to all of their citizens, through equitable and high-quality education systems.

Teachers play a crucial role in education systems. When we look at the various factors that contribute to successful education systems, we know that beyond the influence of parents and other factors outside the school, teachers provide the most important influence on student learning. Policy makers, school leaders and teachers are therefore challenged to transform educational outcomes, often under difficult conditions.

This meeting has given us the opportunity to reflect on results from the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), and to explore effective policies and practices to strengthen the teaching profession in order to improve the learning experience for our students.

We spoke about the cycle of actions that are necessary in order to develop the teaching profession and encourage more high-quality candidates to join the profession. We have seen from the TALIS results that, in many countries, the majority of teachers do not feel that their societies value the teaching profession. However, in the countries with higher student results in PISA, there also tend to be higher percentages of teachers who feel their profession is valued by society. What does this tell

us? If teachers' views reflect those of their societies, it could mean that high-performing countries are doing something else right. These countries are able to demonstrate the value of teaching as a profession in a way that also allows them to recruit and retain the highest quality teachers and thus provide a better education for their students. In turn, where teachers demonstrate great teaching and students achieve strong learning outcomes, society is likely to reward this with respect for the profession.

In order to equip all teachers – and not just some – for effective 21st century learning, effective policies need to be put in place at system levels and actions need to be taken at school levels. Over the past two days, we have heard many examples of ways in which countries, schools and teachers can strengthen 21st teaching to foster 21st century learners and to make changes to improve the working conditions for teachers as well as the learning environment for students. We were touched listening to the students from the OECD Tohoku School who were developing and using 21st century skills to create a new future for the region devastated by the Great East Japan earthquake.

Deputy Minister Enver Surty (South Africa) discussed the need for education systems to better anticipate the rapid evolution of the demand for skills in modern societies and to respond to this with innovative learning environments. Both Minister Antorini (Denmark) and State Secretary Dekker (Netherlands) underlined how important it is that, in order to give 21st century skills the role in school curricula and instructional practice which they need to attain, we need to become better at recognising and measuring those skills and make them visible.

We learned from the Asian countries that effective differentiation and personalisation of learning is about teachers embracing a broad range of pedagogic strategies, but that it is too often misunderstood as setting different standards and aspirations for different students. As Minister Antorini noted, we need to reflect on the TALIS finding that teachers feel insufficiently prepared for the challenges of inclusion and that this needs to be addressed through innovating pedagogy and classroom management rather than being relegated solely to special needs education. Associate Minister Bhardwaj (Alberta, Canada) showed us how effective support systems for teachers can enable education systems to successfully integrate significant shares of students from diverse social contexts and with varying abilities. As State Secretary Gomendio Kindelan (Spain) reminded us, while it might be easier to address 21st century challenges with incoming teachers, the key to success will be transforming the teaching skills of the established teaching force through continued professionalization.

Innovation in teaching is our shared goal, but we need to accept that governments cannot instruct their teachers to be creative and that this is all about creating enabling conditions for innovation, which will include effective and meritocratic career structures.

We agreed that good teaching practice needs to become everybody's business. Vice Minister Yamanaka (Japan) spoke of Japan's efforts to better reflect the student voice in developing pedagogical practice, and State Secretary Haugstad (Norway) emphasised the need to engage both teachers and their organisations in the development of a shared understanding of good teaching practice – as well as the need for teachers to develop themselves.

Last but not least, we all agreed that 21st skills should not be seen as separate from subject matter knowledge, but as an integral aspect of school subjects that enables students to creatively use what they know.

We learned from TALIS that most teachers report that appraisal leads to positive changes in their teaching practices. Also, more than half of all teachers surveyed report that such feedback leads to positive changes in both their use of student assessments and their classroom management practices. Indeed, teacher job satisfaction seems also stronger when teachers believe that the appraisal and feedback systems in their schools go beyond an administrative exercise. Yet in many countries, teachers are still largely left alone, receiving little or no feedback on their teaching from anyone. Furthermore, as State Secretary Dekker noted, we need to do better to link feedback and appraisal with opportunities for professional development and to ensure that the most effective teachers receive the greatest recognition.

Minister Truss (United Kingdom) explained England's success to attract top talent into the teaching profession, including through programmes such as Teach First, but also the challenge to develop the careers of candidates reaching the profession through alternative career paths and to retain talent in the school system.

State Secretary Gomendio Kindelan (Spain) asked how we can reduce the mismatch between teachers' perceptions and performance outcomes, among others, through more sophisticated approaches to evaluation that give teachers a realistic perception of their strengths and areas for improvement. As State Secretary Haugstad underlined, we need to frame education as a knowledge-intensive profession, and to frame teaching as being able to learn from other professions. Deputy Minister Enver Surty explained South Africa's efforts to develop a comprehensive approach to quality assurance that seeks to relate the work of teachers to student learning outcomes in intelligent ways and Education Secretary Luistro (Philippines) underlined that we also need to further develop internationally comparative instruments like TALIS to reflect a broader range of teaching and learning practices that are more difficult to measure.

The TALIS data that we were presented also illustrate the importance of collaboration between teachers as a way to increase teachers' confidence in their own abilities as well as their job satisfaction. Teachers' relationships with their students, other teachers and school leaders are also important in terms of the associations they have with teachers' feelings about their jobs and their own abilities. We now know what we have long suspected: the days of teachers working in isolation, behind closed classroom doors need to end, and we agree that collaboration and competition in school systems can be mutually reinforcing and should not be seen as policy alternatives. We learned from Japan's longstanding experience with lesson studies that provide an encouraging example for how to make effective professional collaboration happen at scale. However, this will not happen on its own and Minister Ossinovski (Estonia) underlined how school and system leadership need to provide structure and frame teacher collaboration to become systemic and effective. Last but not least, Minister Antorini (Denmark) reminded us that teacher collaboration is not an end but a means, and that we need to find ways to focus teacher collaboration on professional issues and ways to improve pedagogical practice rather than just on day-to-day practical issues.

State Secretary Dekker (Netherlands) underlined the importance of transforming schools into learning organisations where teachers come together to collaborate and integrate their experiences

to improve pedagogical practice, and where we establish effective incentive structures combined with balanced approaches to teacher evaluation to engage teachers in this work. We listened to Minister María Fernanda Campo (Colombia) explaining how Colombia was able to identify talented teachers through a rigorous evaluation process to serve as mentors and tutors for their fellow teachers and to mobilise teachers, school leaders and communities to build trust in the profession.

Ensuring that millions of teachers have the essential competencies they require to be effective in the classroom is one of the keys to raising levels of student achievement. Over the last two days we have heard about the experiences that our teachers have reported from both their induction and their continuing professional development. We have heard about the areas in which teachers did or did not feel prepared by their teacher education for their work in the classroom – as well as the areas in which they still feel deficient. The TALIS data has also provided us with information on some of the barriers that teachers experience to getting the development they need.

Of course, this is not an easy agenda and Minister Antorini (Denmark) reminded us how difficulties in labour relations can make teacher engagement with substantive reform very challenging.

And much of what needs to be done will command significant resources. We need to think harder about how we mobilise the additional resources for education that are required to deliver on our commitment to ensure that every student benefits from excellent teaching and also how we invest limited resources to obtain the best results.

Minister Shimomura explained how rapidly changing demographics, combined with below-average productivity, pose severe challenges to maintaining high quality social services in Japan, making high quality education the key counterbalance these trends. We know that the significant investments that are needed to deliver high quality education will bear high returns, by raising economic and social outcomes and containing social costs in the longer term.

Minister Livanov showed us how the Russian Federation was able to significantly raise teacher salaries while, at the same time, develop the professional standards that are needed to challenge traditional approaches to teacher professionalisation. But to succeed in the competition for tight public resources, we will need, as many of you underlined, to provide better evidence on the value that education provides for individuals and societies and also improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our school systems. We encourage the OECD to pursue further data development and analysis in this area and to communicate the benefits of education widely.

Not least, we will need to find fair ways to share the financial burden between individuals and the economy and mobilise additional public and private resources. To this end, Minister Truss showed us promising examples for strengthening synergies between education and the private sector.

Throughout the last two days, we have been able to share experiences of policies and practices that have proven successful in our countries or that are promising, and we have learned a great deal from each other's journeys. We have greatly benefitted from the discussions both around this table and in between sessions. We thank the OECD for providing the evidence base and analysis that underpinned our discussions and we are committed to further develop the TALIS instruments and related OECD studies. We also encourage the OECD to benchmark the education sector with other

public and private sectors of our societies to see where education can learn from policies and practices elsewhere.

We thank Minister Shimomura for guiding our deliberations so skilfully and for hosting this event so generously.