Chapter 4

PROFESSIONAL TEACHERS, SUCCESSFUL REFORMS

This chapter summarises the key skills and attributes of 21st-century teachers, the most effective ways to develop teacher professionalism, and how best to design and implement education reform.
A generation ago, teachers could expect that what they taught would equip their students with the skills needed for the rest of their lives. Today, teachers need to prepare students for more rapid economic and social change than ever before, for jobs that have not yet been created, to use technologies that have not yet been invented, and to solve social problems that haven’t arisen before.

Chapter 1 describes some of the broader expectations for teachers. At the level of individual students, these include to be able to deal effectively with students from different backgrounds and with different mother tongues, to be sensitive to culture and gender issues, to promote tolerance and social cohesion, and to work with students who have learning or behavioural problems. Teachers also need to be “assessment literate” and know how to use both summative and formative assessments. They need to be familiar with standardised assessment tests, to be able to use test results for diagnoses, and to be able to adapt their curricula and teaching in response to student achievement.

At the classroom level, teachers increasingly need to be able to teach in multicultural classrooms. More school systems are offering integrated education for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and teachers are expected to be able to work with these students, use appropriate teaching and management processes, and co-operate with support personnel.

At the school level, teachers are expected to collaborate and work in teams with other teachers and staff members. They need social and management skills to co-operate, set common goals, and plan and monitor the attainment of goals set collaboratively. In many school systems, schools now use data gathered from self-evaluation or through testing and external evaluations to inform school-development processes. This calls for new skills in data gathering and analysis, and in communicating the results to parents. Teachers are expected to integrate ICTs into their professional practice and to keep up-to-date with ICT developments and applications. It is also becoming more common for schools to collaborate on joint projects and to develop links with schools in other countries. This means that teachers also need to cultivate their leadership and organisational skills, and their capacity to work and communicate effectively in a range of different settings. Last but not least, an increase in the number and range of decisions taken at the school level has led to new managerial tasks for teachers.

At the level of the wider community, school systems increasingly emphasise the importance of close co-operation between schools and parents. Consequently, teachers need to know how and when to communicate with parents. To gain additional support and offer broader learning experiences, schools are expected to build partnerships with community institutions and members, such as libraries, museums and employers. Teachers need to have the skills to make and maintain those connections.

Chapter 1 discusses the knowledge, skills and character qualities that teachers need to acquire to fulfil these demands. Subject-specific knowledge is generally seen as one of the main teacher-related determinants of improved learning outcomes. For example, while most international surveys of student performance do not find much of a relationship between the general level of education among teachers in an education system and student performance in that system, the share of teachers who have an advanced qualification in the subject they teach is often associated with better learning outcomes.

Pedagogical knowledge is important too. This knowledge of teaching and learning refers to the specialised body of knowledge concerned with creating effective teaching and learning environments for each and every student. It includes, for example, knowledge of how to structure learning objectives, how to plan a lesson, how to evaluate a lesson; knowledge of effective use of allocated time and strategies for differentiated instruction; and knowledge of how to design tasks for formative assessment. The knowledge also includes specialised areas of “learning”, such as knowing how to facilitate learning given certain student characteristics, such as their prior knowledge, motivation and ability levels.

In sum, teaching is a complex task that involves interactions with a great variety of learners in a wide range of circumstances. It is clear there is not a single set of teacher attributes and behaviours that is universally effective for all types of students and learning environments, especially when schooling varies in many ways across different countries. That said, one consistent finding is that effective teachers are intellectually capable people who are articulate and knowledgeable, and are able to think, communicate and plan systematically.

DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL TEACHERS

Rapid changes in the demand placed on teachers, whether it is developing new skills or dealing with new student groups, imply that teachers can rely less on their initial training and need more continual professional development.
A comprehensive system for selecting, training, compensating and developing teachers and principals is important for building the required capacity at the point of delivery. Professional development can be achieved through apprenticeship, mentoring and collaborative learning environments. Much professional development is now school-based, led by staff developers who identify teaching-based problems or introduce new practices. This accords the teaching profession greater autonomy over professional development and facilitates a teacher-led culture of professional excellence.

To build teacher professionalism, policy makers and the profession itself must establish clearly and concisely what teachers are expected to know and be able to do. Such professional standards can guide initial teacher education, teacher certification, teachers’ ongoing professional development and career advancement, and can be used to assess the effectiveness of each. The standards should be evidence-based and built on the teaching profession’s definitions of teacher competencies and standards of performance.

Effective professional development is continuous. It includes training, practice and feedback, and provides adequate time and follow-up support. Successful programmes involve teachers in learning activities that are similar to those they will use with their students, and encourage the development of teachers’ learning communities. A key strategy involves finding ways for teachers to share their expertise and experience systematically. There is growing interest in ways to build cumulative knowledge across the profession, for example by strengthening connections between research and practice, and encouraging schools to develop as learning organisations.

Three broad strategies for professional development are evident among the countries that participated in the 2013 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS):

- entitlement-based, which generally results from collective bargaining agreements that stipulate that teachers are entitled to certain amounts of released time and/or financial support to undertake recognised professional development activities
- incentive-based, which links professional development to needs identified through a teacher-appraisal process, and/or recognises participation in professional development as a requirement for salary increases or assuming new roles
- school-based, which links individual teacher development with school-improvement needs.

The three strategies are not necessarily mutually exclusive, although the starting points of the entitlement- and incentive-based approaches tend to be the individual teacher rather than the whole school. A comprehensive approach to professional development encompasses all three strategies. Providing teachers with agreed levels of released time or financial support for professional development is an explicit recognition of the importance of professional development and a way of enabling teachers to participate. But it is also important for teachers to see the value of participating, to understand that it is an important part of their professional role, and to see the “entitlement” provision as the minimum extent of their participation rather than the maximum. This is most likely to occur when teachers can see a clear link between professional development activities, improvements in their own practice, student progress, and overall school improvement.

The most effective forms of professional development seem to be those that focus on clearly articulated priorities, provide ongoing school-based support to classroom teachers, deal with subject-matter content as well as instruction strategies and classroom-management techniques, and create opportunities for teachers to observe, experience and try new teaching methods. Effective professional development activities also forge a close connection between teachers’ own development, their teaching responsibilities and their school’s goals.

Encouraging schools to become learning organisations requires that teachers have: the motivation to create new professional knowledge; the opportunity to engage actively in innovation; the skills to test the validity of innovations; and the mechanisms for transferring the validated innovations rapidly within their school and into other schools. Targeted professional development activities can be an important source of ideas and techniques for building these features in schools. Equally important are skilled school leaders who are able to build a climate of collegiality and improvement within schools, and systems of teacher evaluation and career development that recognise and reward teachers who innovate, share their learning, and help achieve school goals.

One way to draw on the expertise in the classroom to build professional knowledge is to involve teachers themselves. Inviting teachers to participate is also a way of recognising their professionalism, the importance of their skills and experience, and the extent of their responsibilities. Teachers who reported in TALIS that they were provided with opportunities to participate in decision making at school reported greater job satisfaction (in all participating countries)
and a greater sense of self-efficacy (in most countries). The relationship between job satisfaction and teacher participation in school decision making is particularly strong in all countries. In addition, in almost all TALIS countries, the extent to which teachers can participate in decision making has a strong positive association with the likelihood of reporting that teaching is a valued profession in society.

Strengthening peer collaboration through induction programmes and mentoring is also important. The first years of a teacher’s career can make or break that career. Induction and support programmes for beginning teachers can improve the effectiveness and job satisfaction of new teachers – and thus make it less likely that those teachers will leave the profession at the first hurdle. In successful programmes, mentor teachers provide guidance and supervision to beginning teachers in close collaboration with the initial teacher-education institution. These mentors provide on-the-job support, and identify deficits in subject-matter knowledge, classroom management strategies and other pedagogical processes.

Building a collaborative school culture is key. Chapter 2 provides many examples of how a collaborative culture can be created and nurtured. Evidence shows that collaboration among teachers enhances teacher efficacy, which, in turn, may improve student achievement and sustain positive teacher behaviours. Teachers in many countries are looking for more leadership opportunities – to lead change and not just manage what is demanded of them. By initiating improvement and innovation in schools, teacher leadership helps to develop teachers’ competence and confidence as educators, advances their professional learning, promotes change and improvement in schools, encourages professional collaboration and collegiality, and boosts professional status and recognition. In doing so, teacher leadership helps to maintain and improve teachers’ commitment, self-efficacy and morale.

It is also important to strengthen links between teacher appraisal and professional development. Teacher appraisal, part and parcel of effective teacher policies, will deliver best results if it is linked to professional development. In order for a vibrant programme of professional development to be established and sustained, it must be based on a culture of professional inquiry and on the professional obligation of every teacher to be engaged in a career-long quest to improve practice. A key objective of teacher appraisal is to identify areas for professional development for individual teachers. Ideally, this will lead to the preparation of individual improvement plans that take into account the school’s development plan. Pedagogical leadership at the school level plays a key role in ensuring the effectiveness of this link. Identifying individual teachers’ strengths and weaknesses is crucial for choosing from among a wide range of possible professional development activities those that meet individual teachers’ own needs against each of the priorities in the school-improvement plan. It is important that teachers regard appraisal as the first step towards improved practice, regardless of their current level of performance.

**MAKING REFORM HAPPEN**

Implementing education reform is difficult. Virtually everyone has participated in education and has an opinion about it; virtually every community has a school it can call its own. As a result, there are a lot of stakeholders in education who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Even small reforms can involve massive reallocations of resources, and touch the lives of millions on both the client and provider sides. There is uncertainty about the size and distribution of benefits; and the issue of loss of advantages or privileges is of particular importance in education reform, simply because the vast structure of established (usually public) providers implies extensive vested interests. Not least, there is a substantial gap between the time at which the initial cost of reform is incurred, and the time when it is evident whether the intended benefits of reforms actually materialise. And while timing complicates the politics of reform in many domains, it seems to have a greater impact on education reform, where the lags involved are far longer than is typical of, for example, labour- or product-market reforms. As a result, the political cycle may have a direct impact on the timing, scope and content of education reform. Promoting education reform becomes a thankless task when elections take place before the benefits are realised.

But despite these challenges, education systems can and should be doing better. Both the lack of coherence in reform efforts across successive governments, and the fact that just one in ten reforms is subjected to an evaluation that makes any serious attempt to gauge impact are inexcusable and signs of a lack of respect for both taxpayers and educators at the frontline.

There are some basic features of education reforms that students, parents and educators should be able to take for granted. These include clarity of purpose and intended outcomes of reforms at every level of the system. They also include clarity about methods and delivery. Reforms should also include built-in means of public accountability – transparency in when and how judgements will be made as to whether implementation is on track and what the contingency plans are...
when the intended results do not materialise. Last but not least, there needs to be clarity about the actors involved in implementation and their relationships. In other words, starting from the policy and ending with the changes in frontline behaviours and practices that this policy is designed to achieve, how – and through whom – does reform actually happen?

Beyond these basic features of reform design, Chapter 3 also examines some features for successful reform delivery. They include:

- **a shared vision**, clear and consistent priorities (across governments and across time), ambition and urgency, and the capacity to learn rapidly
- **performance management**, which includes appropriate targets, good real-time data, regular monitoring, incentives to reward success aligned to targets, intelligent accountability, and the capacity to intervene where necessary
- **frontline capacity**, which includes building professional capabilities, transferring and sharing best practice and innovation, flexible human-resource management, and frontline ethos aligned with whole system objectives
- **a good delivery architecture**, which includes strong leadership, effective interaction between links in chain, an evidence-based strategy, adequate process design and consistency of focus and prioritisation across agencies.

The chapter also identifies some challenges to implementation that are far more difficult to manage. In these cases, lessons learned from successful policy experiences across countries are particularly valuable.

First, there are few examples of successful and sustainable reform where policy makers have not been able to build consensus about the aims of the reform and engaged stakeholders, especially teachers, in formulating and implementing policy responses. The experience of OECD countries suggests that mechanisms of regular and institutionalised consultation – which are inherent in consensual policy making – help to develop trust among stakeholders, and help stakeholders reach consensus. And yet, there will always be tensions between the drive for ownership and consensus, on the one hand, and leadership and innovation on the other to achieve necessary improvements and transformations. When new policies are introduced, a combination of top-down and bottom-up initiatives is often needed. This combination can also foster consensus. Placing the teaching profession at the heart of education reform requires a fruitful dialogue between governments and unions.

It is also important that all political players and stakeholders develop realistic expectations about the trajectory of reform implementation, and the pace and nature of reforms. Teachers need reassurance that they will be given the tools to change, and recognition of their professional motivation to improve their students’ outcomes.

Resistance to reform can be due to imperfect information, either on the nature of the proposed policy changes, their impact, or whether or not the stakeholders involved – including the general public – will be better or worse off at the individual or group level. All this makes it essential to clearly communicate a long-term vision of what is to be accomplished for student learning. Individuals and groups are more likely to accept changes that are not necessarily in their own best interests if they and society at large understand the reasons for these changes and can see the role they should play within the broad national strategy. The evidence base of the underlying policy diagnosis, research findings on alternative policy options and their likely impact, and information on the costs of reform versus inaction should all be disseminated widely, not just to the stakeholders with a direct interest.

The need to engage the teaching profession extends beyond reasons of politics and pragmatism. One of the main challenges for policy makers in a knowledge-based society is how to sustain teacher quality and ensure that all teachers continue to engage in ongoing professional learning. Research on the characteristics of effective professional development indicates that teachers must be active agents in analysing their own practice against professional standards, and their students’ progress against standards for student learning. Policy can encourage the formation of collaborative cultures in schools through:

- leadership-development strategies that describe how to create and sustain learning communities
- building indicators of professional learning communities into processes of school inspection and accreditation
- linking evidence of commitment to professional learning communities to performance-related pay and measures of teacher competence used in recertification
- providing seed money for self-learning in schools and among schools
- professional self-regulation through processes and organisations that include all teachers.
Policy experimentation and the use of pilot projects can also help build consensus on implementing reforms, especially as they allow for evaluations of the effectiveness of the proposed policies before they are fully implemented. Policy experimentation and the recourse to pilot schemes can prove valuable in testing policy initiatives and – by virtue of their temporary nature and limited scope – overcoming fears and resistance among specific groups of stakeholders.

Equally important is to periodically review and evaluate processes after full implementation. Teachers and school leaders are more likely to accept a policy initiative today if they know that they will be able to express their concerns and provide advice on the necessary adjustments as the initiative evolves.

It is also essential to develop capacity among stakeholders to implement policies, reduce bureaucratic demands on schools, and provide sufficient resources. Training is essential to ensure that all stakeholders are equipped and prepared to assume the new roles and responsibilities that are required of them. Time is needed to learn about and understand the reform measures, build trust and develop the necessary capacity to move onto the next stage of policy development.

Together these challenges may seem large but this report provides plenty of examples of successful reform implementation and rapid improvement in the quality of student learning outcomes, which is the ultimate measure of success. These days, success accrues to those individuals, institutions and countries that are swift to adapt, slow to complain and open to change. The task for governments is to help their citizens rise to these challenges.