

Exploring Difference: International Perspectives on Teacher Training
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Executive Summary

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Strengths and Challenges in Teacher Training Across Countries

- **Australia's** teacher training programs boast a diverse student core, as well as an emphasis on community engagement and developing teachers to be social agents of change. On challenges, some feel that the government prescribes practices and does not provide the space or encouragement to engage students in international practicums.
- Many of **Finland's** strengths derive from a cultural respect for teachers: education has historically been the key to social mobility in Finland, and this appreciation has attracted many qualified applicants and made teacher training one of most competitive fields to enter. Teacher training also boasts a strong dialogue between theory and practice, with an emphasis on theory. Some weaknesses or challenges in Finland include developing new teaching methods for an increasingly diverse immigrant population; the emergence of marginalized families with the economic crisis; and more variation in school performance in urban areas.
- Strengths in **Canada's** teacher training include professional development throughout the career and an emphasis on diversity education. Some challenges mentioned include a lack of support for new teachers, accelerating classroom diversity and struggles to encourage minorities to enter teaching. Barriers to generating interest among diverse applicants sometimes include prejudice experienced in the classroom, as well as teaching's low reputation and low pay.
- **England** counts an ethnically and linguistically diverse student population as one of its key strengths. At the same time, it is a challenge for teachers to harness the potential of that diverse student population. Other challenges include the increasing politicization of education and, as the field becomes more of a marketplace, education being considered a commodity rather than a common good.
- The **United States** counts early fieldwork as a strength in its teaching programs. The flexibility training programs have to experiment and try different teaching methods is also a plus. Challenges in American teacher training programs include a rampant testing culture that often only measures how students take tests. Similar to Canada, American teacher programs struggle to attract teachers, especially teachers of color, because of low pay and low respect for the profession.

Qualities of a Good Teacher

- The panelists often mentioned **enthusiasm and passion** for teaching as a quality of a good teacher. This passion will yield a commitment to teaching and **a desire to make an impact** on students. In this sense a good teacher will see him or herself as **an agent of change**, as someone who can help achieve social justice and equity.
- Many panelists touched on the topic of **content knowledge vs. pedagogy**, noting that a good teacher is not only well-versed in the content of what he or she teaches, but also possesses an ability to make students feel safe and valued, and encourages students to take risks. They foster strong connections to students by making an effort to know their names, family backgrounds, how they learn, etc. With regards to pedagogy, a good teacher employs a variety of teaching techniques and knows how to organize a classroom.
- In thinking through productive pedagogy, the ability to **question prevailing orthodoxies** is considered a highly valuable trait among teachers. Connected to this is the **ability to take risks** and a **willingness to face challenges** head-on.
- Some panelists suggested that, rather than thinking only about good teachers, we should **think more about effective teaching**. A good teacher **motivates students to assess themselves**, thereby creating a student-centered rather than teacher-centered learning environment.
- Finally, a rich life experience informed by travel and social awareness is essential. The panelists agreed that teachers should endeavor to change the world for the better by **understanding social and global issues**.

Are Good Teachers Born, or Can They Be Taught?

- Panelists shied away from the idea of a born teacher, emphasizing instead that teacher students should at minimum possess **intellectual curiosity** and **respect for learning**.
- The U.S. faces **a widespread belief among non-teachers that anyone can teach**, and that this belief is often reinforced by the proliferation of alternative paths to a career in teaching. Teachers are not widgets that meet a set list of criteria, and **we should want teachers to be as individual as we want students to be**.
- The panelists agreed that **without the proper support, the risk of losing young teachers is very high**. Rather than giving new teachers the hardest teaching assignments and then leaving them without support, the panelists advocated for mentorship programs within the first years of teaching.
- The panelists agreed that there is **“a failure to prepare [teachers] for the diversity of students they experience”** and that more should be done to expose students to diverse situations during their fieldwork.

Striking the Right Balance Between Theory and Practice

- With the exception of Finland, most countries struck a **balance between theory and field-work** in teacher training, with some leaning more heavily toward the practical classroom experience. Finland, in contrast, emphasizes a research-based approach in its teaching programs.
- The **relationship between teacher training programs and schools** is an extremely important one, and that relationship doesn't just stop with an occasional visit to the school. Some of this connection includes "quality assurance visits", having conversations about the practice and jointly observing the student teachers.
- Research in Canada has shown discrepancies between teacher training and what teachers actually experience in the classroom. **"Some of the techniques we encourage them to use are met with a great deal of resistance from older teachers,"** he said.

On Diversity and Attracting the Right Applicants

- The **underrepresentation of minorities in the teaching profession** continues to be a problem: faculties of education are primarily European and white, which doesn't encourage more minority students to apply. It is **crucial to support existing diversity in the field, especially among teacher educators.**
- The high interest and respect for teaching in Finland has led to high numbers of applicants, but other countries still **struggle to attract qualified candidates, especially those from lower-income or multi-cultural backgrounds.** In stressing the need for a more diverse pool of teacher student applicants, several panelists emphasized the need for great teacher educators.
- By inviting community leaders to speak to graduating high school seniors about the advantages of a teaching career, a recruiting program in Canada was able to increase interest in the profession. The panelist noted, **"A lot of students simply hadn't considered teaching as a potential route, but when the right people spoke to them, we had quite the jump in applicants."**
- One panelist observed that **recruitment efforts for teachers in STEM areas** —science, technology, engineering and mathematics— **may discourage non-STEM applicants.**
- One successful strategy in England to increase applications has been to **diversify the avenues and routes into teaching**, especially for those looking to make a change mid-career. This has led to an increase in the average age of teacher students, who make the deliberate choice to become a teacher and enter training with a higher degree of maturity.

Pedagogy vs. Content

Students with strong subject knowledge don't always succeed in teaching training; they must also have strong pedagogy. **Subject knowledge can get in the way** of seeing a problem from a learner's perspective. Being able to appreciate misconceptions in one's subject area is just as important, and a teacher's ability to intervene in a student's misconception is key. A teacher who continues to learn a variety of topics will develop **an appreciation for how to attain knowledge.** This will facilitate **a better dialogue and stronger connection** between the teacher and student.