



Issue no

44

Dec 2014

Worlds of *Education*



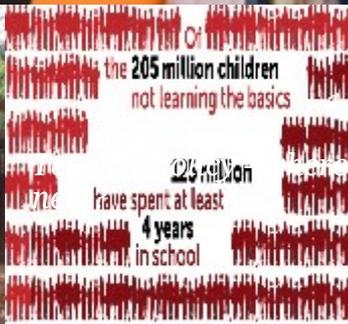
Listening to teachers



Reading teacher policy



Next steps in teacher policy



Teaching around the world

Next steps in teacher policy

Clarifying dangerous half truths

By: Michael Fullan

Theme: Mobilising for Quality Education



A day in a life: Ghana

A dangerous half-truth is a finding or statement that has some merit, but falls short because it fails to state under what conditions it is true. Such findings can be easily misinterpreted by eager or biased policy makers who rush to put policies in place that turn out to be superficial or harmful to the cause of student learning. Four examples are feedback, professional development, principal instructional leadership, and school autonomy.

All four of these have a role but are only effective under certain conditions. The TALIS 2013 survey and its findings conducted by OECD is a case in point (OECD, 2014). The report presents findings from their survey of teachers and principals in 34 countries. Its half-truths make it easy for policy makers to go down the wrong track. TALIS has done us a service for tabling the key issues, but we now must interpret the findings with some precision.

In this paper I present six ideas that in combination lead to greater performance of the teaching profession as a whole and thus, greater education achievement of students. We don't need a long list, but we do need a small number of factors that make a difference because of their *interactive effect*. In health for example you don't want to put a lot of emphasis on exercise unless you combine it with a good diet, and getting eight hours sleep.

The six factors, most of which receive half-truth endorsement in TALIS 2013 are:

1. High expectations for students.
2. Peer motivation.
3. Feedback
4. Leadership at the school level.
5. Connected autonomy.
6. Investment of resources and the re-positioning of accountability



To repeat, it is the *combination of the six* and their interactive effects that make the difference. Andy Hargreaves and I (2012) have made the basic case for the improvement of the teaching profession by showing that the *Professional capital of teachers* is the agenda -- defined as i) human capital (the quality of the individual), ii) social capital (the quality of the group), and iii) decisional capital (expertise in judgment and decision making). The six factors above generate greater professional capital and have greater impact on the performance of teachers and students.

1. High expectations for students and educators

Policies need to create the expectations and belief that all students can achieve regardless of background and postal code. These uplifting visions (to use Hargreaves et al's term, 2014) must be accompanied by policies and strategies that represent the means to accomplish the goals (the other five factors above). Above all it must be accompanied by the firm belief and expectation that principals and teachers are the heroes that will get us there. Standards for teachers and administrators should be established to reflect these expectations, and should be enforced through the other five factors.

2. Peer motivation

If there one factor that has the greatest impact on performance in any organization it is 'peer motivation'. For any task that is more than rudimentary collaborative cultures with a purpose win hands down over any other strategy (effective collaborative cultures are built on social and decisional capital). The TALIS report contains this finding but it is buried in half-truths. Every time the report refers to a half-truth finding—feedback is critical, professional development is important, autonomy can help etc— it fails to stress that it is only when these factors are combined with collaborative cultures that they have their desired impact. Even the relatively weak measure of "teachers who report using collaborative practices five times a year" is positively related to self-efficacy and job satisfaction". Imagine the impact if deep collaborative cultures were to be implemented. Moreover, it is not self-efficacy that is key, but rather *collective efficacy* (which encompasses self-efficacy). Collective efficacy includes teachers having more influence over school decisions which they do in collaborative cultures through formal and informal means, literally on a daily basis.

In any case, policy makers need to bite the bullet on this one: *invest in purposeful peer learning across the six factors*. The payoff will be multiplicative.

As we say, if you want to change the group use the group to change the group.

3. Feedback

In all walks of life constructive feedback is the key to growth. Equally it is the most difficult to get right. TALIS finds that 60% of teachers report that feedback leads to improvement, but also finds that 50% of teachers say that teacher appraisals are undertaken "simply to fulfill administrative requirements": another half-truth that cries out for clarity. The question is 'under what conditions will feedback thrive'. We know the answer: when the culture fosters development over dismissal, candor over superficiality, specificity over nothingness, transparency over opaqueness, evidence over whim, and helpful colleagues and school leaders over isolation. Feedback in short, requires evidence and quality data, and a culture committed to acting on what they find. Collaborative cultures contain more of these elements than any teacher appraisal tool. Purposeful day-to-day learning is the key (because it is full of natural and ubiquitous feedback)-- buttressed by, not driven by, appraisal, and professional learning.

4. Leadership at the school level

I recently wrote a book on, *The principal: Three keys for maximizing impact*. I did this because there was a growing confusion about the principal as instructional leader. Many jurisdictions were loading up the principal with formal appraisal requirements (the kind that led TALIS teachers to say that the experience was perfunctory). Effective practice on the contrary is quite clear. Principals 'who participate as lead learners' alongside teachers make the difference. These leaders basically orchestrate the other five factors on our six-factor list. Principals thus become indirect, but *all the more explicit* in their impact on the school. (The other two keys incidentally are 'change agent', and 'system player'—the latter is wrapped up in factor 5).

In addition to clarifying the role of the principal there are several other aspects of school leadership pertaining to teachers as leaders.

5. Connected autonomy



Basically TALIS finds (although they wouldn't say it this way) that atomistic autonomy is the enemy of system performance. Autonomy over what and under what conditions is the question. Many jurisdictions are granting new degrees of autonomy for schools and districts, and my policy advice is that they better be careful. Schools and districts do need freedom from current top-down compliant driven bureaucracies, but once again it needs to be framed around certain conditions. The following two sets of conditions should be officially established by policy. One, with autonomy comes three 'connected requirements': i) develop intra-school collaborative cultures, ii) work in purposeful networks of schools, and iii) engage proactively in implementing state priorities (assuming the latter are consistent with the six factors in this article). These three forms constitute connected autonomy. The second set of conditions is that autonomy be framed within obligations relative to factors one and six.

6. Invest resources and reposition accountability

All economic analyses conclude that it is not the amount of expenditure that matters but how it is spent. The major emphasis should be on implementing the high expectations agenda contained in factor one. Teachers should be paid enough to take money off the table as an issue; performance pay is a disaster; differential pay for leadership responsibilities and related competency based development is desirable, and investing in conditions and practices that support factors two through five is essential. Investing in collaborative cultures and networks for example should be a priority. Other investments in teacher development and professional learning will be important but only in the context of change policies that aim to change culture.

With respect to accountability policy makers should base the approach on the following: i) In situations of very low teacher capacity more scripted approaches may be essential, and well as the use of direct accountability actions (in situations, for example, when teachers frequently don't show up for work); ii) the major investment and accountability stance should be based on development--investing in the professional capital of teachers as we have defined it. The approach to accountability should be to place primary emphasis on developing 'internal accountability' which sets the conditions for the group to be transparently accountability within itself, and externally to authorities and the public (see Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo, and Hargreaves, in press), and iv) under these conditions external accountability should be employed to remove teachers who should not be in the profession, and to act in cases of persistently ineffective schools and districts. Peer reviews or other mechanisms can be effective in these cases.

External accountability requires further explanation. In my view we first had to criticize punitive-based forms of accountability such as school inspections, and certain teacher evaluation schemes because they so obviously undercut the development of the profession as a whole. Now that we are able to establish the developmental agenda, as I have in this paper we need to re-introduce accountability more explicitly, including its more hard nosed forms. High expectations, investing in development and being committed to both internal and external accountability are an essential and powerful combination.

Conclusion

Less than one-third of TALIS teachers believe that teaching is a valued profession in their society. This low level of respect is a function of the limited presence of the forces associated with the six factors that I have described in this article. Change these factors and you get better performance, greater self-and collective efficacy, and ultimately a more self and other respected profession.

I haven't commented on the different roles of government, unions and school systems. The agenda I have described is a unifying one. Talented schools help weak teachers, and attract strong ones. Talented teachers leave weak schools and weak professions. Good collaboration reduces bad variation (defined as ineffective teaching) because it generates consistent effective practices. Good interrelated policies well implemented produce effective, sustainable self-generating professions. It is time to take the next steps in teacher policy that I have outlined in this paper.

References

Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal: Three keys for maximizing impact*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M., Rincon-Gallardo, S., and Hargreaves, A. (in press). Professional capital as accountability. (Stanford: EPPA)

series).

Hargreaves, A. and Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital*. New York: Teachers Collage Press.

Hargreaves, A., Boyle, A., And Harris, A. (2014). *Uplifting leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley brand.

OECD (2014). *TALIS 2013: An international perspective on teaching and learning*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

About the Author



Michael Fullan

He is a worldwide authority educational reforms with a mandate of helping to achieve the moral purpose of all children learning. www.michaelfullan.ca