



World Teachers' Day 2019

Young Teachers: The Future of the Profession

Concept Note

Introduction

Held annually on 5 October since 1994, World Teachers' Day (WTD) commemorates the anniversary of the adoption of the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers. This Recommendation sets forth the rights and responsibilities of teachers and standards for their initial preparation and further education, recruitment, employment, and teaching and learning conditions. To complement the 1966 Recommendation, the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel was adopted in 1997 to cover teaching and research personnel in higher education.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on quality education and lifelong learning for all, in particular the dedicated target (SDG 4.c), recognize teachers as key to the achievement of the 2030 Education Agenda. This acknowledgement was reaffirmed in the Final Declaration of the 11th Policy Dialogue Forum of the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, held in Montego Bay in November 2018, and the Final Outcome Statement of the Global Education Meeting held in Brussels in December 2018 (the Brussels Declaration).

This year, World Teachers' Day will celebrate teachers with the theme, "*Young Teachers: The future of the Profession.*" The day provides the occasion to celebrate the teaching profession worldwide, to take stock of achievements, and to address some of the issues central for attracting and keeping the brightest minds and young talents in the profession.

The official event will take place on Monday, 7 October at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in collaboration with the convening partners, including UNICEF, UNDP, the International Labour Organization and Education International and will be celebrated globally with various events.

Rationale for the choice of the theme

The early twenty-first century is not an easy time to be a teacher. While teachers were once highly respected professionals, valued, trusted and accepted as inspirational role models for young people, nowadays they too easily serve as scapegoats for the failures of education systems. Indeed, in societies that tend to glorify celebrities, we are more likely to see praise heaped on performing artists, sports personalities and social media influencers than on outstanding teachers.

There are, without doubt, considerable challenges to the occupational, social and legal status of the teaching profession worldwide.ⁱ Certain western countries also report a decline in public perception and respect for teachers more generally, suggesting that families no longer automatically support teacher's authority over their students in the classroom.ⁱⁱ Teachers and education staff can experience intimidation from their students and family members. In some countries, the public's negative perception of teachers is such that education staff regularly face the threat of violence.

If this weren't enough, prominent academics are urging us to rethink the very notion of 'expertise,' proposing that technology, artificial intelligence and automation will soon make redundant many human tasks that were once the historic preserve of 'professions'. While teaching and learning will always offer the greatest rewards as a form of social interaction, it is true that technology is significantly changing how we work and live, even as these technologies raise ethical questions about privacy and how humans connect with each other.

Taken together, all of this points to a profession under threat. With large percentages of teachers likely to retire from practice in the coming decade, a major concern is that not enough young candidates are coming in to the profession to replace them. Over 69 million teachers must be recruited by 2030 for primary and secondary education to meet the SDG 4 education targets. Of this number, 48.6 million new recruits will be needed to replace those who are to leave the profession either through retirement or voluntarily.ⁱⁱⁱ In South and West Asia, and in sub-Saharan Africa in particular, acute shortages exist.

These challenges and transformations in the 21st century are very real. As we commemorate World Teachers' Day 2019, we must take time to look at the future of the profession and the role of young teachers in it - taking onboard the changing climate of education and schooling, the need to draw in and retain a new generation of dedicated educators, and to prepare them for the 21st century challenges of 'teaching in diversity' and 'diversity in teaching.'

The challenge of attracting a new generation of bright minds to teaching

Attracting young candidates to the teaching profession is a major challenge around the world and this is not just a supply-side issue. For many potential young candidates under the age of 30, the world of work is now a much different place. In years past, young school leavers and graduates may not have doubted teaching as their first career choice. Now, they are less convinced as they witness friends and peers attracted to higher paid jobs in more lucrative sectors at home and abroad.

For those who do join the profession, the report on the 'Global Status of Teachers and the Teaching Profession'^{iv} highlights the serious problem of attrition in many countries. As many as 71% of teachers unions in the African region report high attrition rates, but industrialized countries are also affected. Complementary data from the United States for example, based on a representative sample of 50,000 teachers, indicates that over 41% of teachers (primary and secondary education levels combined) leave the profession within five years of entry.^v

While the factors cited for teacher dissatisfaction depend on context, common factors across countries include a mixture of poor work-life balance, scarce opportunities for professional development, low salaries, limited inputs to decision-making, feelings of being unsupported and unappreciated, attacks on teachers' employment terms and conditions and constant pressures created by out-of-phase curricular and exam reforms.

Asking the questions that matter most to young candidates

Given the challenges for attracting, recruiting and keeping young people in the teaching profession, it is crucial that countries consult with, and take into account the opinions of their youth, recent graduates and teacher training academy students on how to plan more dynamic recruitment and training strategies, and how to make the teaching profession more attractive overall.

The dialogue might begin with: What kind of incentives might help to attract the most qualified and committed young talents into teaching? What kinds of contractual relationships, remuneration and rewards are qualified candidates looking for, and how do existing policies line up with their ambitions and expectations for career progression? What could be envisaged to generate more flexibility in recruitment, teacher education and deployment policies to work with young people in meeting the teacher gap?

Although teaching is no longer a first-choice career for many, we are also in a time where career changes are more and more common. The future of teaching must envisage entry points for young and mid-career professionals with sought-after academic backgrounds who can add value to education systems in under-staffed subject areas. For these potential recruits, who may be second or even third-career changers, what kinds of flexible re-training and professional support strategies may tempt them towards a more fulfilling career in the education sector?

Last but not least, and given the known impacts of female instruction on girls' enrolment and learning outcomes at primary and secondary levels, how can we attract suitably qualified young women into the profession to teach at education levels, and in subject areas, where education systems are struggling to recruit and hold on to female teachers in the classroom? Conversely, how can we attract men into female-dominated fields such as early childhood education?

All of these questions and issues require closer investigation. If we do not take time to dialogue with young people themselves on possible solutions to closing the teacher gap, we may miss out on yet another generation of talented recruits and creative minds choosing to become educators in countries where they are needed most.

Governments also need to understand the types of incentives and rewards that motivate young teachers in their work and keep driving them forward to make a difference in the classroom

Many young teachers have so much more pressure and demands on them than before, especially in high-income countries. National education reforms increasingly focus on standards and learning outcomes and teachers are expected to keep up, sometimes at lightning speed. Meanwhile in low-income countries, pupil/trained teacher ratios can be very high.^{vi} Young teachers are often insufficiently prepared for the pedagogical challenges of teaching large class sizes with limited teaching-learning resources and facilities.

In rural, remote and crisis-affected areas, the goal of keeping teachers in the classroom has its own challenges. Displacements and migration caused by emergencies, as well as HIV/AIDS and other acute health concerns, impact heavily on teachers' day-to-day practice, their presence in the classroom, their effectiveness and motivation levels. Young newly qualified teachers are often faced with students and communities who may have experienced trauma, are vulnerable migrants or displaced persons. Novice teachers, especially women, who are already facing considerable problems related to their housing, safety and work conditions, may worry about their isolation, lack of family connections, social ties and support frameworks. Not surprisingly, these are often

the hardest posts to fill, with new teachers (both male and female) resisting deployment or leaving their post after a short time.

So what keeps teaching professionally rewarding, aside from the light bulb moment when a teacher witnesses his/her student grasping a new concept or achieving a new level of awareness? Symbols and gestures matter. Job satisfaction may simply come from recognition by the school principal, the community and society-at-large of effort or exceptional results in the classroom, even in a low-key way. It also means school leaders checking in with teachers from time to time to understand how they are doing, and whether motivation and stress are at healthy levels.

And what mechanisms are there to provide support and encouragement to novice and young teachers in a more systematic way? The protection of decent employment and work conditions are the basis for any mechanisms in place. To this end, engaging teacher unions and governments in social dialogue is important to protect young teachers' working conditions and rights, and to communicate to government what young teachers need and how they can be supported. Perhaps most importantly, regular opportunities for young teachers themselves to be involved in decision-making, both at school level and beyond, can help them to feel that their inputs are valuable.

Research further indicates that solid teacher education and induction practices are important for teacher motivation and satisfaction. In rural and hard-to-reach areas, alternative models may be needed to accompany young teachers, generate a sense of support from the teaching community and advance career progression. Here, education systems must explore the power of 'learning communities' and networked 'peer support and motivation frameworks' to assist novice and less experienced teachers in facing the daily challenges of teaching. Where education systems are filling the teacher gap with para-professionals and community volunteers, an extra effort is needed to ensure that learning environments in all settings, and at all education levels, are staffed with qualified, competent and properly remunerated teachers who are able to empower all learners towards their full human potential.

From the perspective of pedagogy, young teachers today need to know so much more than their subject areas. They are expected to be early adapters of new technologies and constantly innovating ways for their students to grasp information. Teacher surveys underline the importance of regular meetings with a teacher mentor or peer collaborator for educators to reflect on their practice. Access to relevant continuous professional development is another central pillar of pedagogical support. Since 'diversity in teaching' and blended learning are at the centre of next generation instructional models, education systems must also embrace low-cost technologies and

the apps that young people already use to enable them to curate, manage and update their experience and teaching practice as they go along.

Finally, policy-makers need to give young teachers a louder voice in shaping education policy and classroom practice. Engaging in constructive dialogue with teacher organizations can ensure that reform initiatives are supported by the very people who have to implement them. It allows governments to draw on the knowledge and experience of thousands of teachers serving in every corner of a country, and devise smart policies that can motivate young achievers to join the profession.

Without a new generation of motivated teachers wanting to make a difference, the global commitment to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” is clearly under threat

Education analysis highlights the difficulty of policy systems in grasping the complex interplay of factors impacting on the structure and health of the teaching profession and teacher motivation.^{vii} But a better systemic response is now only one factor at play in response to the teacher gap and crisis in teaching. The world has rapidly changed over the past 30 years and qualified young people have more choice in their career pathways than ever before, diverse career interests and professional expectations.

It is for this reason that conversations around attracting and supporting young teachers must go beyond education ministries and international meeting halls to the staff room and social media and involve the next generation of graduates and potential teacher recruits. Teacher unions, Civil Society Organizations, Schools Principals, Parent/Teacher Associations, School Management Committees, Inspectors and teacher trainers will also be at the center of discussions to share their experiences in supporting young teachers and promoting the emergence of a vibrant teaching force.

What ultimately matters is the on-going validity of the teaching “mission” for young people and the flexibility to cope with changing socio-political and economic landscapes around the world in a way that restores the prestige of teaching to young and qualified recruits. In this endeavor, the media and the latest technologies with which young people identify, rather than making the role of the teacher redundant, must be leveraged to elevate and make the job of teaching a more enticing, interactive, connected and fun professional experience.

What to expect from WTD 2019?

As in the past, WTD 2019 will celebrate teachers of all ages and at all levels of their career, with this year, a particular focus on “Young Teachers: The future of the profession”. The celebration at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris will gather many voices together to examine the responsiveness of national strategies for sustainably staffing schools and educational institutions with adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported teachers and educators within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems. Of paramount importance this year is the voice of the youth and young professionals who may be aspiring to become teachers or taking their first steps into classroom practice.

The WTD 2019 event will be marked by testimonies of classroom teachers and trainee teachers, panel discussions with guest speakers, a discussion around the launch of a book focusing on the life of a teacher, and a performance by a young artist celebrating teachers.

A detailed programme will be disseminated in due course.

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ⁱ The recent report by Education International: ‘The Global Status of Teachers and the Teaching Profession’ September 2018 dedicates a chapter to ‘The Status and Working Conditions of Teachers’ in which it describes some of most pressing challenges in relation to Legal status, Social status, Safety conditions affecting teaching, Occupational satisfaction, Teacher pay conditions, Social discrimination and Immigrant teachers.

ⁱⁱ See article in the Guardian: Teacher knows best? Not any longer as parents muscle in on the classroom. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/apr/29/schools-parents-pupils-education-teachers>

ⁱⁱⁱ UIS Fact Sheet OCTOBER 2016, No.39: The World needs almost 69 million new teachers to reach the 2030 Education goals <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246124>

^{iv} Education International: ‘The Global Status of Teachers and the Teaching Profession’ September 2018

^v Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L, Stuckey, D. 2014. Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force. CPRE Research Reports.

^{vi} Definition: Average number of pupils per trained teacher at a given level of education. A trained teacher is one who has received at least the minimum organized pedagogical teacher training pre-service and in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country. <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/pupil-trained-teacher-ratio>

^{vii} Teacher support and motivation framework for Africa: emerging patterns. UNESCO 2017. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259935>