

Good morning. My name is Dennis Van Roekel and I'm a math teacher, President of the 3 million member National Education Association, Vice President of Education International and concerned citizen (which I guess makes me a World Bank shareholder?). I'm here to raise some important issues about the Bank's approach to education sector reform, how that approach impacts teachers, misses important opportunities for educational improvement and equity ... and where the approach is out of step with much of the serious global research and evidence.

My point of departure for this intervention is the Bank's education policy benchmarking tool, SABER Teachers, which states that "there is little basis for a constructive, well-grounded dialogue about the role of teachers unions in education today." I contend that quite the contrary, in fact there is a real and substantive basis, that dialogue is actually happening everywhere else in the world but that for some reason the World Bank would rather play it down or caution its clients against it..

Not that we haven't tried. For the past three years Education International and the OECD has partnered with the US Government and this year the Dutch government to convene the International Summits of the Teaching Profession where 25 to 30 national delegations of education ministers and union leaders come from high performing countries and discuss major policy issues. The Bank has been at each of these by the way. In Latin America the IDB and the OAS have both followed suit with reform dialogues between ministries and teachers' unions. Even the Global Partnership for Education, an entity hosted here has created a board seat for teachers despite resistance from within the Bank.

Therefore, one of the most obvious areas for *improvement* in the area of Sector reform (remember, I'm a teacher) is the advice to governments regarding whether they should even engage in social dialogue with teachers' unions and that somehow weaker unions are more desirable.

The Bank warns governments that "Understanding collective bargaining in education and its impact on the day-to-day life of schools is critical to designing and implementing reforms that will successfully raise student achievement".

See, the OECD, whose research supposedly informs SABER Teachers thinking doesn't equivocate: *The better a country's education system performs, the more likely that country is working constructively with its unions and treating its teachers as trusted professional partners.*

One of the leading experts on education reform who led the government efforts in Ontario, Professor Ben Levin of the University of Toronto says 'A lot of education rhetoric these days includes mention of the supposedly negative impact of teacher unions on reform. For a few commentators, eliminating union opposition is one of the most essential, or even the single most important component in creating improvement, while for many others it is part of the package. But here's an interesting observation. **Virtually all the top performing countries on international education measures have strong teacher unions**, including Finland, Korea, Japan, Canada, Australia and others. Of course, such a relationship does not imply causation but it does suggest that there is no necessary conflict between strong teacher unions and good outcomes. Moreover, some countries or sub national units that took steps to weaken the

influence of their unions did not demonstrate any subsequent improvements and, in some cases, such as England, later had to take many measures to improve the situation of teachers to get an adequate supply and thus, improve student results.'

Bank guidance on teacher policy also says *While there is no evidence linking teacher organizations and student achievement, there is evidence that suggests that the strength of teacher organizations may affect the capacity of an education system to make sure that the best teachers are in those schools that need them the most but are less desirable to work in.* That's code for saying since there are places where inequality and historic underfunding and underdevelopment have made it nearly impossible to grow their own teachers and create conditions where people want to work, it's easier and cheaper to assign them and their families to these areas than improving those conditions or creating incentives. And, yes unions typically do ask hard questions about such short term thinking and resist being thought of as interchangeable widgets. By the way, there will be a panel here at the Bank before your Learning for All Ministerial in April that EI is organizing with the Secretary General's special envoy for global education to bring together major players across sectors to address the trained teacher gap and particularly the deployment to rural areas issues. **Together with the Global Campaign for Education we released a report Closing the Trained Teacher Gap.**

Here are a few more quotes from SABER worth decoding and putting on the table.

Several factors may affect what is required of teachers, including concerns about the quality of teaching and the political influence of organized teachers who seek to limit competition.

Just for the record, competition among teachers for bonuses, among schools, among states for scarce resources HAVE NOT BEEN SHOWN TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES, REDUCE INEQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY OR CREATE THE KINDS OF CONDITIONS THAT SUPPORT TEAMWORK, PROBLEM SOLVING, CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES WHERE CURIOUS AND DEDICATED PEOPLE WANT TO WORK AND STUDY.

Lets go back to the divide between your guidance to ministries in developing countries and what the oecd is saying to its member states.

the Bank says - While we know that having *at least a minimum level of supported classroom experience* is important to ensure that novice teachers can perform well in their job, there is less conclusive evidence on the relationship between unionization and education quality.

The OECD says "teachers need to be active agents, not just in the implementation of reforms, but also in their design. Reform must be underpinned by solid research and analysis. **Conflict between unions and reform has best been avoided not where unions are weak but where they are strong and co-operate with reform.**"

Ad Professor Nina Bascia, who has studied the relationship of teacher unions to governments for many years, concludes that: 'teacher unions are nearly the only organisations that have paid

substantive attention to the actual conditions of teachers' work... [but]... because they are rarely invited to the table to discuss substantive policy issues with education decision makers, teachers' organisations can only react after the fact to decisions that have already been made.'

But instead of collaborating with unions SABER offers ways to reduce unions being nationally organized. "the level at which teacher salaries are determined can affect the level at which teacher unions are organized and their ability to affect the teacher workforce". Sweden. Finland. Norway. Strong unions in contexts where salaries are negotiated at the school level.

SABER contends that it is "important to understand the sanctions against teacher absenteeism, identify the sanctions that are most effective in reducing it". In Gambia the GTU mapped out the problem of late payment and has reached an agreement with the government. The GTU's Credit Union now pays the salaries for teachers, as it is present in areas where regular commercial banks are not interested in. Teachers in remote areas no longer have to travel days to get paid. This shows that unions are not causing absenteeism, but are helping tackle it. It is not sanctions that will solve the problem, but identifying the root causes of absenteeism that will make a difference. For the anecdote, the last WB project for Gambia included paying for some 10 donkey carts to take children to school in remote areas. The evaluation revealed the bank underestimated the costs of the carts, and consequently, less children were taken to school. If the bank can't get the cost of a donkey right, can they improve quality of education on their own?

According to the new Learning Strategy of the World Bank: improving quality of education is at the centre its agenda: "this is our raison d'être. We cannot succeed alone."

Yet for the last twenty years the message has been to reduce teacher training, hire unqualified teachers on short term contracts, advise governments how to remove the teacher union obstacle.

Stromquist, Klees and Samoff have just recently published a book ([The World Bank and Education - Critiques and Alternatives](#)) that chronicles part of the Banks education strategy and its main message is that this organization could benefit from a little less self referential research.

Currently there is a great push in the Bank to develop and incubate private provision of education. But there is nothing special about the word private that makes education any better. Andreas Schleicher at OECD said there is nothing that can be done at a charter or private schools cannot be done at a public school. His directorate did however look at the effects of vouchers, and choice policies with low fee for profit private schools that are now again the rage because teachers are cheaper and parents choose which student goes to school or whether limited funds go to education or other basic needs like food and health. Unlike the Bank, they do not recommend this approach.

Two years before the 2015 EFA deadline, the GMR shows that progress is stalling.

Inequality is growing, growth is stalling.

The bank's jobs report says that unions and labor policies do not negatively effect growth but they do mitigate rising inequality. The

OECD says strong teacher unions are good partners for serious reform. And I'm here on behalf of the education sector asking for a reset on your benchmarks. They also undermine the Banks commitment to core labor standards.

Join the bold risk takers that have thrown in with dialogue and not obstruction. We'll meet you halfway.