



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
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QUALITY TEACHERS FOR QUALITY EDUCATION



5 OCTOBER 2004 WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Wanted: Quality Teachers to be Recruited and Retained

"When the untapped potential of a student meets the liberating art of a teacher, a miracle unfolds"

– Mary Futrell, President of Education International

The miracle of learning should be opened up to every child, every young person. To provide education for all in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, to meet the growing demand for the education of migrant children, and especially to educate girls, the world needs many millions of new teachers.

Those teachers should be qualified. They should complete a minimum level of higher education, including basic courses in pedagogy – the science and the art of teaching. Like other professionals, they should undertake a stage of practical work under the guidance of experienced practitioners. Anything less than their full preparation for the vocation of teaching will have a negative effect on the quality of education.

In the industrialized countries, many teachers are nearing retirement age. Young people must be attracted to the profession – this in an age when new technologies have opened up many other career opportunities that did not exist in the past. The teaching profession has to be attractive.

Being attractive means offering adequate salaries and conditions of work. But it is more than that. Future teachers are motivated by a sense of vocation, and it is vitally important for them to feel the worth attached by the community to their work. But teachers' sense of vocation is unfortunately too often misused to ignore their most fundamental rights and to worsen their working conditions. That is why many potential recruits to the profession, observing the obstacles and frustrations experienced by today's teachers, decide to look elsewhere. Too many young beginning teachers change to other jobs after a few short years of service and those same obstacles and frustrations cause too many experienced teachers to take early retirement or to look for other employment. Teacher 'burn-out' is widely prevalent.

The teacher shortage will continue and will be aggravated – in developing and industrialized countries alike - unless serious steps are taken to make the profession attractive and worthwhile – to retain and recruit quality teachers.

Short term measures, such as the recruitment of unqualified 'volunteer' or contract teachers, deny children their right to quality education. Recruitment of teachers from abroad does nothing to address the overall problem of shortage, and encourages a 'brain drain' from the developing to the industrialized countries. So-called 'reforms' that are really aimed at cost-cutting also aggravate the problem.

The way forward is to work for a consensus in each country on the measures to be taken to retain qualified and experienced teachers and to attract motivated new recruits. That consensus should be reached through partnership with the organized teaching profession and in consultation with key stakeholders, including parents and community representatives.



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The latest report of the UNESCO and ILO experts on the Status of Teachers (CEART) points out that social dialogue in education is fragile.¹ Yet the involvement of teacher organizations is a key factor in the successful planning, implementation and monitoring of genuine reforms. Those reforms will work when the professionals on the front line – the teachers – are committed to them. Reforms cannot be imposed successfully from above.

The most important reform is to change the approaches of governments in most countries. Political leaders must show by their actions that they mean what they say when they speak of the vital importance of education in the knowledge society of the 21st century. They must be prepared to break out of the paradigm of budget cuts, to respond positively to the need for proper resource allocations for education. And they must be ready to work constructively with the teachers – the most precious resource of all.

World Teachers' Day should be the occasion for governments to make new and serious commitments to support and strengthen the essential actors of education – qualified and dedicated teachers. Such commitments are urgently needed for all schools, and especially for the public schools, serving the children of each national community, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic origin, religious belief or gender. Every child should experience the miracle of learning. Qualified teachers can make miracles happen, if they are given the chance!

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¹ Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendation on the Status of Teachers (CEART) Report for 2003, ILO/UNESCO, Geneva/Paris 2004.