

The Relationship Between Teacher Education and Teacher Effectiveness: Lessons from the Ontario Public School System

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Since 2000, Canada has held a place as a world leader in education.¹ Unlike the majority of PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) highest scoring countries, which are small and culturally homogeneous, Canada's system features significant diversity in both language and country origin.² With its notable diverse federated system, Canada has the potential to serve as a model of how to achieve success in education in a large, geographically disperse and heterogeneous country such as America.³ This essay will explore the success of the Canadian government in supporting educators in effectively teaching diverse student populations. Comparisons between the Canadian and American public education systems will be drawn to illustrate a potential increase of student success in America through the adoption of successful teaching policies used by the Canadian government. Major differences between the systems, including how teachers are viewed, trained, and compensated, will serve as the basis for this comparison. For the purposes of this essay, a focus will be placed on the public education system of Canada's largest province, Ontario.

First, a brief consideration of the structure of the Canadian education system. As the only country in the developed world with no federal office or department of education, education is the responsibility solely of Canada's provinces and territories.⁴ Responsibility to mandate education is divided between the central provincial government and locally-elected school boards.⁵ Teachers are self-governed through unions at both the local and provincial level, with teacher training occurring in universities according to the standards set by each province.⁶

¹ OECD, *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2010), p. 65.

² Ibid., p. 66.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Teachers in Ontario must complete a bachelor's degree program in a subject they wish to teach, followed by two years in professional teacher education.⁷ In Ontario, the Ontario College of Teachers mandates entry, discipline and professional development of teachers.⁸

There is an undeniable importance of individual teachers on student learning, as supported by the vast research conducted regarding the impact of teacher effectiveness on student achievement.⁹ Teachers provide children with the basic tools they need in order to become competent, contributing members of society.¹⁰ The preparation of teachers is therefore of utmost importance to society as a whole.¹¹ As demonstrated by the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAS), developed by American mathematician Bill Sanders, the single most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher. McKinsey's 2007 study on the world's best performing school systems further suggests that "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers."¹²

One of the defining factors of leaders of international education is the degree to which teacher education programs are able to draw students from the top of their cohort.¹³ Ben Levin, widely cited scholar on Canadian education, attributes part of Canada's success to the competitive teacher education program.¹⁴ In Canada, applicants to teacher's college are in the top thirty percent of their college class.¹⁵ With fewer universities per capita than in America, many

⁷ Marc S. Tucker, "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: An American Agenda for Education Reform," *The National Center on Education and the Economy* (May 2011), p. 45.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Donna M. Armstrong, "A Case Study of the Effectiveness of a Teacher Education Program," *SoTL Commons Conference, Paper 9*, (November 1, 2007), p. 1.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed, *How the World's Best-Performing Schools Come Out On Top* (New York: McKinsey & Company, 2007), p. 16.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Tucker, p. 45.

¹⁵ OECD, p. 69.

of these teacher educational institutions have a higher status than those in the United States.¹⁶ Additionally, with only fifty teacher education programs in Canada, it is easier for the provincial governments to regulate quality.¹⁷ Following initial teacher education, many provinces require further forms of assessment through either an examination or certification process.¹⁸ Due to the rigorous education program for teachers, the profession has historically been highly respected in Canada.¹⁹ McKinsey's 2007 study suggests that success in attracting talented people into teaching partially falls on variables such as the status of the teaching profession.²⁰

In America, a large percentage of teachers come from the bottom third of their college cohort.²¹ Students in the top of their college cohorts are not as willing to take a teaching job partly because teaching is generally not considered a high-status, well-respected job.²² American teachers are paid an average salary that the majority of top graduates can achieve via other professions.²³ William Schmidt, Director of the Education Policy Center at Michigan State University, suggests that in order to be comparable to high performing nations, America must draw its teachers from the highest performance quartile.²⁴ Schmidt stresses the need for states to “redefine” teacher certification policies and standards and for colleges and universities to

¹⁶ Tucker, p. 45.

¹⁷ Center on International Education Benchmarking. “Canada: Teacher and Principal Quality.” National Center on Education and the Economy. <http://www.ncee.org/programs-affiliates/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/canada-overview/canada-teacher-and-principal-quality/>. (accessed May 11th, 2016).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ OECD, p. 76.

²⁰ McKinsey, p. 16.

²¹ Christian Science Monitor's Editorial Board. “Next US Education Reform: Higher Teacher Quality.” The Christian Science Monitor. <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/the-monitors-view/2011/0317/Next-US-education-reform-Higher-teacher-quality>. (accessed May 10th, 2016).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Karen Mcknight Casey and Patricia L. Farrell, “TEDS-M and the Study of Teacher Preparation in Early Reading Instruction: Implications for Teacher Education Policy and Practice,” *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* (2012), p. 2.

examine how these new state policies are translated into “programmatic practices and requirements.”²⁵ In addition to state involvement, Schmidt recommends that the U.S. define a core set of standards for teacher preparation programs.²⁶

The creation and implementation of national and state level teaching standards are an essential tool in maintaining a higher level of teacher effectiveness, however the success of the Ontario education system illustrates that the “main player” best suited for enacting this change in America is the state government.²⁷ It was not until the early 2000s when Canada made the transition to a provincially funded system did it become a top performer in international education.²⁸ The closest America has come to developing a core set of standards that William Schmidt of MSU suggests is the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The Common Core is a set of college- and career-ready standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts/literacy and mathematics.²⁹ These standards, now adopted in forty-two states, were developed in 2009 by a group of state education chiefs and governors across forty-eight states.³⁰ Teachers were offered a chance to aid in the development of the Common Core by providing specific and constructive feedback on the standards.³¹ However, the implementation of the Common Core in schools has not been as successful as intended.³² In New York, for example, teachers complain of not

²⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Tucker, p. 2.

²⁸ Steven L. Paine and Andreas Schleicher, “What the U.S. Can Learn from the World’s Most Successful Education Reformation Efforts,” *McGraw-Hill Research Foundation Policy Paper: Lessons from PISA* (2011), p. 7.

²⁹ “Development Process.” Common Core State Standards Initiative. <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/development-process/>. (accessed May 13th, 2016).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Baker, Al. “Curriculum Now Has Critics on the Left.” *The New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/17/nyregion/new-york-early-champion-of-common-core-standards-joins-critics.html?_r=0. (accessed May 12th, 2016).

being fully trained in the new curriculum as well as not being provided with textbooks and teaching materials required to teach said curriculum.³³ As standardized tests have changed to comply with Common Core standards, less than a third of New York students passed, partly because their teachers were not adequately prepared to teach the material being tested.³⁴ While the Common Core is theoretically a step in the right direction, the program fails to adequately prepare teachers for implementation of the programming in the class room.

In Ontario, teachers are involved in many aspects of educational reform. With the rise of the Liberal government in Ontario in the early 2000s came a reform to the province's education system.³⁵ During this reformation period, Ontario premier Dalton McGuinty travelled to multiple nations prior to settling on his education policies for Ontario.³⁶ This allowed McGuinty to observe the systems of world leaders in education and implement their policies in Ontario.³⁷ Rather than replace the then-current teacher workforce, the government included Ontario teachers in their reformation process in order to best improve student performance.³⁸ The reform focused on building upon the capacity and professional skill of teachers.³⁹ By building the capacity of the teaching force, the Ontario government was able to move students at the bottom of their classes toward the middle of the curve, improving the overall performance of their students.⁴⁰

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Tucker, p. 43.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

The Ontario model demonstrates that while teacher certifications are an undeniably top contributing factor for teacher effectiveness, they alone are insufficient. As part of the education reform, in 2004 the McGuinty government implemented the “Building Futures” program in order to ease the transition process from teacher education to teaching.⁴¹ The program is centered around a series of workshops available to teacher candidates in their final year of study at public teacher education institutions.⁴² The workshops are organized around prominent issues faced by teachers, such as special education, education of Aboriginal students, and effective communication with parents.⁴³ Further support for teachers is available via “Survive and Thrive,” an online platform for teachers to share information and establishment mentorship relationships with one another.⁴⁴ Ontario has also placed great emphasis on leadership development for school principals.⁴⁵ Mentoring programs initiated by the Ontario government have reached over 4000 principals and vice-principals, aiming to spell out the skills, knowledge and attributes of effective leaders.⁴⁶

That is not to suggest that highly qualified teachers are automatically highly effective. While there is a strong correlation, American legislation such as The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has demonstrated that teacher effectiveness goes far beyond fulfilling the minimum teacher education requirements. The NCLB Act of 2001 introduced the concept of “highly qualified” teachers, based on teacher credentials.⁴⁷ The Act defined highly qualified teachers as “those who hold at least a bachelor’s degree, are fully licensed or certified by the state in the

⁴¹ “Canada: Teacher and Principal Quality.”

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ OECD, p. 69.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 76.

⁴⁷ Pamela D. Tucker and James H. Stronge, *Linking Teacher Evaluation and Student Learning* (Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005), p. 10.

subjects they teach, and can demonstrate competence in the subjects they teach.”⁴⁸ However, there has been much criticism regarding the Act as continuing to fail students who fall below average, who are in need of teacher attention. All students are held to the same standards regardless of their ability level, therefore those students in the lower cohorts of their classes have minor chance for success.⁴⁹ Teachers are increasingly teaching “to the test,” out of fear that their students will perform poorly, resulting in the teacher’s termination.⁵⁰ Schools have consequently turned into “data driven” environments rather than instructional environments based on individual student learning.⁵¹ In an attempt to remedy the issues faced by teachers in meeting the stringent standards set by NCLB, in 2015 the Obama administration enacted the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).⁵² The ESSA aims to fully prepare students for success in both college and careers.⁵³ While the ESSA is a positive step for the Obama administration in improving public education in America, there remains a need for teacher evaluation systems to ensure teachers are providing students with the resources they need in order to succeed.

Teacher evaluation systems are a tangible solution to remedy the lack of consistency of teaching methods within schools. Since its inception in 2005, the “Working Table on Teacher Development” has instituted a number of programs in Ontario to ensure quality and consistency in teacher development.⁵⁴ The program includes the new Teacher Induction program which requires additional training for teachers in their first year of teaching as well as meeting

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Lisa Guisbond, Monty Neill and Bob Schaeffer, “NCLB’s Lost Decade for Educational Progress: What Can We Learn from this Policy Failure?,” *Fair Test National Center for Fair & Open Testing* (January 2012), p. 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵² U.S. Department of Education. “Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).” U.S. Department of Education. <http://www.ed.gov/esea>. (accessed May 13th, 2016).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ “Canada: Teacher and Principal Quality.”

particular standards for that year.⁵⁵ The development of a performance appraisal program is of particular significance to the success of the Working Table.⁵⁶ The program is aimed to develop both content knowledge as well as important issues such as early literacy and bullying prevention.⁵⁷ Ontario has also instituted the Teacher Appraisal Program (TPA) which provides teachers with meaningful appraisals that encourage professional learning and growth.⁵⁸ Under the TPA, teachers are evaluated every five years by his/her school principal based on standards set by the Ontario College of Teachers.⁵⁹ As part of this process, teachers must complete an annual learning plan, which outlines their plan for professional growth.⁶⁰ This provides teachers and principals the opportunity to collaborate and discuss teacher's performance, growth strategies, and professional learning specific to the teacher's needs.⁶¹

Another successful pillar of the Ontario model is teacher recognition and reward. By offering additional qualification programs every year, teachers are provided the opportunity to enhance their practice and move between salary categories.⁶² Teachers are also provided with the opportunity to receive additional remuneration by taking on additional duties and increasing their involvement outside of the classroom.⁶³ Without offering rewards and development once teachers are in the classroom, American public school systems will continue to struggle to attract and retain high quality teachers.⁶⁴ The rigid "last hired, first fired" procedure present in teacher's

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Linda Darling-Hammond and Robert Rothman, eds., *Teacher and Leader Effectiveness in High-Performing Education Systems* (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education and Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, 2011), p. 26.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 27.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "Next US Education Reform: Higher Teacher Quality."

unions is a deterrent to enthusiastic younger teachers.⁶⁵ While experience is important, the Ontario model evidences the importance of teacher performance and reward.⁶⁶ To maximize success, unions need to recognize the importance of teacher performance and student success rather than mere years of experience.⁶⁷

Strategies utilized by the Canadian government to best serve their students through teacher engagement include attracting top talent, organizing schools to support the continuous learning and development of teachers, and leadership development.⁶⁸ A more selective and rigorous teaching education program coupled with further “hands-on time” in the classroom produce more effective teachers and subsequently top performing students.⁶⁹ Leadership framework and strategy in Canadian provinces are closely linked to better instruction and school improvement.⁷⁰ Encouraging teachers to become leaders of educational reform, as seen through the work of the McGuinty government in Ontario, will aid in “raising the tone” of the profession.⁷¹ Rather than simply recruiting the best teachers, the Ontario government ensures there are proper resources in place which increase the retention rates of their teachers. The Ontario experience suggests that by treating teachers as professionals, and including them in the decision making process, long-term and sustainable change is much more tangible.⁷² Collaboration between state governments and educators will both improve teacher quality and elevate the teacher profession to one of high status and respect.⁷³

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Jeanne H. Ballantine and Joan Z. Spade, *Schools and Society: A Sociological Approach to Education* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2008), p. 449.

⁶⁹ Steven L. Paine and Andreas Schleicher, p. 11.

⁷⁰ Ballantine and Spade, p. 449.

⁷¹ Pain and Schleicher, p. 11.

⁷² OECD, p. 77.

⁷³ “Next US Education Reform: Higher Teacher Quality.

Excellence in education is an attainable goal at a reasonable cost.⁷⁴ In a 2008 speech in Flint, Michigan, then presidential-candidate Barack Obama spoke about the need for great teachers in America and the promise to support them.⁷⁵ Obama’s goal was to “build an army of new teachers.”⁷⁶ He pledged to recruit new teachers and deploy them to under-staffed school districts in inner cities and rural America: “We’ll expand mentoring programs that pair experienced teachers with new recruits. And when our teachers succeed, I won’t just talk about how great they are – I’ll reward their greatness with better pay and more support.”⁷⁷ By adopting reform measures successfully utilized by Canada and other leaders of world education, America has the opportunity to make Obama’s 2008 pledge a reality.

⁷⁴ Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Steven L. Paine and Andreas Schleicher, p. 14.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.