

Why so **little** about teachers?

Laurence Wright



Many must have noticed that in all the fervent, anxious discussion about our education crisis, in the print media, on air, and online, hardly anyone mentions teachers.

The debate is all about textbook delivery, mud schools, overcrowded classrooms, corruption, recalcitrant unions, the digital divide, getting parents involved, inadequate subject advisors or principals, and generally poor management, organisation and oversight.

These issues are undoubtedly there, and very important. But even if everything else were put right, we would still be wholly reliant on the calibre of our teachers to ensure good educational performance.

Consider the needs of your own child. You can try for a good school, in a good area, but when that child walks into a classroom what matters more than anything else is the education, training and motivation of the teacher he or she finds there. Most children do not have the luxury of choice – they must attend the local school – where everything depends on the teacher.

Yet apart from moves towards ‘inspecting’ teachers, or assessing their suitability as exam markers, or incentivising them through prizes and awards, who is considering the in-service education and training of teachers? We take it for granted that our teachers have been properly educated and trained so that they can realise their ambition of becoming inspiring, knowledgeable, and successful teachers. However, although we have many very fine teachers, we also have many who struggle to teach the curriculum because they themselves did not receive an adequate education.

This is not about ‘beating up on’ teachers, criticising them, or adding to their burdens. It is asking a serious question about their initial education, and the quality, depth and consistency of the educational support and enrichment offered to them during their years of service. What they need is no short, random pull-out seminars (often of doubtful quality), but genuine, discipline specific, ongoing educational enrichment and support. If uneven professionalism among teachers is at the heart of our educational problems, then we are better off admitting this, being open about it, than pretending that attending to all the other issues will fix our ailing education system.

What we need to see is thorough re-education and training of our teachers becoming a lead project in every province. Universities, not just Education Faculties, throughout the country must come to the party. Seriously.

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