

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

WHAT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING LOOKS LIKE AROUND THE WORLD

By Lois Brown Easton

You are thinking about teaching outside the United States, and you're wondering what kind of professional learning opportunities you will have. If you teach in Poland, you will likely have the assistance of a school-based *pedagog* who will help you and your colleagues with instructional strategies.

If you teach in Alberta, Canada, you have a wealth of support from both the Alberta Teachers' Association and Alberta Education (the ministry), which cooperated to devise teacher standards and worked collaboratively with other organizations to produce a bevy of support tools for professional learning (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2010).

In Brazil, you might be involved in individual or collaborative research — over half of Brazilian teachers have done so — and, since funding for professional learning is at the school level, you'll have the benefit of deciding with your colleagues what to do to enhance your learning. Feedback is important to improvement, and in Chile, you'll get feedback through a teacher evaluation system based on multiple sources of information: your self-evaluation, a portfolio, peer evaluation by an outside

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evaluator, and a third-party reference report, all leading to a professional learning plan that will guide your improvement strategy.

In Australia, you might join with others in a pub or school library at a TeachMeet (www.teachmeet.net). There, you might share in five to seven minutes your own instructional gems and then network with others regarding what they shared. This grassroots movement is spreading rapidly. You'll also have the benefit of a set of teacher standards developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (n.d.), including two powerful standards for professional learning.

In Korea, you will find yourself in a culture that has high respect for the teaching profession and working with the “best of the best” teachers who value their own learning. In Japan, you can expect to engage in school-based learning, such as lesson study, which is so common that it is not even designated professional learning. It is just what Japanese teachers do, and there's time and support for it built into the system. As a first-year teacher, you would have had extensive induction consisting of 60 days on-campus and 30 days off-campus, some in an off-site retreat location. As a 10-year teacher, you can expect additional training, with some prefectures also requiring training at the 5th and 15th year of teaching.

OVERVIEW

In a survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 89% of teachers in 24 countries reported that they engaged in professional learning during an 18-month period, according to OECD's 2009 report *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Results from TALIS*. (TALIS is the Teaching and Learning International Survey, an international study of teachers, teaching, and learning environments.) That's a good number, until you consider the 11% who reported no professional learning during that period.

That's comparable to the situation in the United States, according to a report produced for the National Staff Development Council (now Learning Forward), *Professional*

KEY CHARACTERISTICS IN: **Poland**

- Poland has made great progress in education since World War II and occupation.
- Overall reform in 1999, supported and monitored by the European Union, significantly changed education in Poland.
- Education is highly centralized through the Ministry of National Education, with regional administrations responsible for teacher training and professional learning.
- Nonpublic schools receive funding and are required to follow laws and regulations as if they were public schools.
- School communes or districts select head teachers, and schools are run by a pedagogical council employing at least three teachers.
- On average, students scored 501 in reading literacy, math, and science on PISA, higher than the OECD average of 497, third (behind Finland and Ireland) on literacy.
- The difference between high- and low-achieving students on international assessments is 97 points (OECD average is 99 points).
- Poland's evaluation system features inspectors at the national level and regional, school, and individual teacher appraisals.
- Student standards are expressed as grade-level aims, a core curriculum allowing local autonomy and responsibility, and student assessments carried out by institutions external to schools.
- 90.4% of teachers participated in professional learning in an 18-month period (compared to 89% OECD average) with an average of 26.1 days (compared to OECD average about 15 days).
- Highest participation is in reading professional literature, engaging in informal dialogue with colleagues, and courses and workshops.
- Individual appraisal is related to professional development for 87% of teachers (compared to 64.5% OECD average).
- 42.1% of teachers have a role in school reform (compared to 29.6% OECD average).
- 47.6% have a professional development plan related to appraisal (compared to 37.4% OECD average).
- First-year teachers experience a yearlong internship before being contracted; then they have another internship of two years and nine months before becoming appointed teachers.
- Most schools have a resident specialist in education.
- 43.6% want more professional development (compared to 54.8% OECD average), especially in special education.
- The biggest barrier to more professional learning is cost (51.2%, compared to 28.5% OECD average).



— Lois Brown Easton

Source: OECD, 2009.

Key characteristics in:

Australia and Brazil, p. 16

Canada (Alberta) and Chile, p. 18

Japan and Korea, p. 20

Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009, p. 5). Unfortunately, the duration of most of these professional learning opportunities is too short to make much difference in practice (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009, p. 34).

More teachers reported attending courses, workshops, conferences, and seminars than any other type of professional learning: 92% of teachers in the U.S. and 49% (for conferences and seminars) and 80% (for courses and workshops) in the 24 countries surveyed by OECD for TALIS (see tables at right). On TALIS, OECD reported moderate to high impact of these professional learning activities.

The highest degree of participation was in informal dialogue with colleagues about teaching with colleagues (91%) with relatively high impact (87%).

What’s particularly interesting about these results is how few people participate in degree programs — perhaps because of cost and commitment — but how strongly they report the impact of these programs. Also, while few are able to observe classrooms in other schools, those observations have considerable impact. The same is true of networks — both internal, as in professional learning communities, and external, as in professional organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Most telling is the difference between participation in individual and collaborative research (35%) and the impact of this activity (89%).

For the U.S., Darling-Hammond reported, “Teachers say that their top priorities for further professional development are learning more about the content they teach (23%), classroom management (18%), teaching students with special needs (15%), and using technology in the classroom (14%)” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 6). They elaborated on the need for pro-

TYPES OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND LEVEL OF ESTIMATED IMPACT

| Type of professional learning experience | OECD average participation | OECD average % reporting moderate to high impact | U.S. average participation |
|---|----------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Courses or workshops | 80% | 81% | 92% |
| Conferences or seminars | 49% | 74% | |
| Degree programs | 25% | 87% | 36% |
| Observations in other schools | 28% | 73% | 22% |
| Network of teachers formed for professional learning purposes | 40% | 80% | No data |
| Individual or collaborative research | 35% | 89% | No data |
| Induction (for teachers new to the school) | 45% | 78% | 45% |
| Mentoring (for teachers new to the school) | 70% | | 71% |
| Reading professional literature | 82% | 83% | No data |
| Informal dialogue about teaching | 91% | 87% | No data |

Sources: Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; OECD, 2009.

PARTICIPATION IN, DEGREE OF USEFULNESS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CONTENT

| Content of professional learning | % of U.S. teachers participating in professional learning on this topic in 2003-04 | % of U.S. teachers who rated training on this topic useful or very useful | % of teachers worldwide who reported a high level of need for professional learning in this content area |
|--|--|---|--|
| Content of the subject(s) they teach | 83% | 59% | 16% |
| Knowledge and understanding of instructional practices (knowledge mediation) in my main subject field(s) | | | 17% |
| Uses of computers for instruction | 64.9% | 42.7% | 25% |
| Reading instruction | 60% | 42.5% | No data |
| Student discipline and management in the classroom | 43.5% | 27.4% | 21% |
| Student assessment practices | No data | No data | 16% |
| Teaching students with special learning needs | No data | No data | 31% |
| Teaching in a multicultural setting | No data | No data | 14% |
| School management and administrator | No data | No data | 10% |
| Student counseling | No data | No data | 16% |

Sources: Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; OECD, 2009.

fessional learning related to teaching special needs students: “Teachers are not getting adequate training in teaching special education or limited English proficiency students. More than two-thirds of teachers nationally had not had even one day of training in supporting the learning of special education or LEP students during the previous three years, and only one-third agreed that they had been given the support they needed to teach students with special needs” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 6).

BARRIERS

It is clear from TALIS data and reports on professional learning in the U.S. that “the professional development needs of a significant proportion of teachers are not being met” (Scheerens, 2010, p. 82). According to OECD, TALIS data showed that, “on average across countries, more than half of the teachers surveyed reported having wanted more professional development than they had received. The extent of unsatisfied demand is sizeable in every country, ranging from 31% in Belgium (Fl.) to over 80% in Brazil, Malaysia, and Mexico” (OECD, 2009, p. 59). According to TALIS, barriers to more professional learning include not having prerequisites (7.2%), cost (28.5%), lack of employer support (15%), conflict with work schedule (46.8%), family responsibilities (30.1%), and no suitable professional development (42.3%) (OECD, 2009, p. 72).

Most troubling are the reports that employers don’t support professional learning, professional learning conflicts with teachers’

work schedules, and there’s no suitable professional development. In an optimum system, of course, professional learning would be embedded in a teacher’s workday. Educators know enough about how adults learn to provide effective professional learning experiences that make a difference in terms of practice and, ultimately, in student learning.

GLOBAL ISSUES

As countries work to improve the **quality** of teaching and learning in their systems, they need to keep in mind these considerations:

- Professional learning is requisite for 21st-century teaching and learning.
- In the next decade, most countries are facing teacher shortages (Asia Society, 2012, p. 12), but, more importantly, need to focus on having enough quality teachers in their systems.
- Self-efficacy — an important aspect of job satisfaction — is critical for attracting and keeping the best professionals

in schools. Professional learning contributes to feelings of self-efficacy.

- Innovation is crucial for schools and teachers, and professional learning helps individuals, schools, and systems innovate.
- What’s known about effective teaching can be learned.
- What’s known about what works in terms of high-quality professional learning can be implemented.
- What’s known about school- and system-level conditions that privilege high-quality professional learning can be achieved.
- Standards for professional learning are valuable, whether they’re embedded in teacher quality standards or stand alone.
- Every system needs an orientation towards results, both interim and, ultimately, related to student achievement.
- Evaluation systems — designed and used effectively — may be an important leverage for quality professional learning.
- Educators desperately need more professional learning, but they need high-quality and effective professional learning.

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What’s particularly interesting ... is how few people participate in degree programs — perhaps because of cost and commitment — but how strongly they report the impact of these programs.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS IN: **Australia**

- Governance of education is decentralized, with federal authority given to states and territories and reform supported through partnerships.
- Student achievement on international assessments is high but has decreased somewhat in the last few years.
- A first-time national curriculum in 2008 is the basis for comprehensive support for implementation provided through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership and other partnership agencies.
- Teacher standards are presented developmentally and include two standards for professional learning.
- More than 95% of teachers participated in professional learning of some kind but averaged only 8.7 days every 18 months (TALIS averages were 89% participation and 15.3 days), most frequently courses and workshops.
- Participation in networks (mostly subject-area) was also high.
- Australia has a strong grassroots system of professional learning called TeachMeet.
- 93.1% of new teachers go through induction; 70.4% have mentors.
- 93.7% participate in informal dialogue with colleagues on teaching.
- 55.2% reported wanting more professional learning; however, the need is lower, generally, than in other countries surveyed by TALIS.
- Highest professional learning needs reported on TALIS are technology and teaching students with special needs.
- Other needs include: teacher use of assessment data, linking teacher evaluation and professional learning, relating grades to the curriculum, aligning teaching standards to student learning objectives, building a coherent system of learning from teacher preparation to career development, keeping coherence among all of the reform initiatives, and implementation of policies at the school levels.
- Barriers to additional professional learning, according to TALIS, include conflict with work schedule and no suitable professional learning.
- Teamwork among students and teachers is common.
- The public largely supports policy, practices, schools, and educators.



— Lois Brown Easton
Source: OECD, 2009.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS IN: **Brazil**

- This formerly decentralized system is centralizing somewhat to enhance quality in municipal and state school systems.
- The most effective policies have been a national curriculum guideline, an assessment system, textbook approval, and data gathering leading to monitoring educational processes.
- Public funding for education is relatively small in terms of GDP (gross domestic product), but the increase in funding in 2008 was the highest for education in OECD countries.
- Secondary education is neither universal nor high quality, with high dropout and repetition rates, and a 41% graduation rate.
- Achievement on international tests is lower than OECD averages, and the gap between highest and lowest performers is wide.
- In some places, a belief that poor children cannot learn still dominates.
- School communities (parents, teachers, students) elect principals.
- Traditional teaching methods prevail, and student engagement is low; considerable time is spent on nonteaching routine items.
- 83% of Brazil's teachers engaged in professional learning in an 18-month period, an average of 17.3 days per teacher.
- Courses and workshops were the most frequent (80.3%); the least frequent activity was networking (21.9%).
- 73.3% of teachers do not have a formal induction process; 70.0% have not had mentoring.
- 84.4% reported wanting more professional learning (compared to 54.8% OECD average).
- Most want more professional learning on teaching special needs students (63.2%, compared to 31.3% OECD average) and teaching in a multicultural setting (33.2%, compared to 13.9% OECD average).
- The greatest barriers to more professional learning are cost (51%) and conflict with work schedule (57.8%).
- Generally, teachers have a less positive view of the impact of most professional learning than other OECD countries.
- There are no mandated, universal teacher standards or standards for professional learning.
- Teaching is a relatively low-status profession in Brazil.



— Lois Brown Easton
Source: OECD, 2009.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS IN: **Canada (Alberta)**

- The Canadian constitution delegates most of the authority for educational policy and practice to provincial ministries.
- Alberta Education has funding and regulatory functions but is also consultative, working with communities, jurisdictions, the Alberta Teachers' Association (to which almost all teachers belong, most required to do so), and seven learning consortia across the province.
- Schools follow the Program of Studies, which delineates curriculum, assessment, and achievement standards.
- On international and Canadian assessments, Alberta has scored significantly higher than the averages.
- Alberta has addressed equity actively. The difference between highest- and lowest-scoring students on international achievement tests is lower than the OECD average.
- Reform is strong in Alberta, although funding for one of the most successful reforms, the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, which sponsored school and district innovation, was cut in April 2013.
- The Teaching Quality Standard establishes quality for teacher preparation programs, beginning teacher programs, and professional learning.
- The Alberta Teachers' Association and the ministry worked to separate salary negotiations from a focus on student and professional learning.
- Teachers are required to complete a professional growth plan related to the quality standard, school goals, and their own expectations.
- In a limited survey, the Alberta Teachers' Association noted that teachers have high (44%) to some (49%) autonomy and choice in pursuing growth plan goals.
- According to the Alberta Teachers' Association, 89% indicated that it was often evident or consistently evident that professional development supports school improvement goals.
- There's a strong and supportive environment for professional learning, a culture of high expectations, and a norm of collaboration.



— Lois Brown Easton

Sources: Alberta Teachers' Association, 2010; OECD Better Life Index: Canada, www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/Canada; Education at a Glance: Canada, 2011, www.oecd.org/edu/eag2011.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS IN: **Chile**

- In the 1980s, Chile went from being centralized (in a military regime) to decentralized (with democracy). In 2003, it began recentralizing some reforms in order to equalize opportunity and achieve quality in the system.
- In an attempt to equalize the system, the government subsidized schools through vouchers, creating municipal (public) schools and subsidized private schools (in addition to nonsubsidized private schools, which depend entirely on tuition).
- Inequity resulted because subsidized private schools also charge tuition or fees, which public schools cannot do; also, public schools need to accept all applicants and cannot fire low-performing staff.
- 53% of students were being educated in public schools in 2002, 9% attended private (nonvoucher) schools, and the rest attended private (voucher) schools.
- The 2013 budget shows record-high spending for education, but student (and other) groups are seeking redress for the inequities described above as well as quality schooling.
- The average student score on PISA of 439 is lower than the OECD average of 497.
- The average difference between high and low scorers on international exams is 99 points (similar to the OECD average). Chile performed better than other Latin American countries in reading and was second to one in math.
- In 2003, the ministry and teachers union developed standards for teachers.
- It has been difficult for Chile to attract high-quality teachers.
- Educational reform includes a program to strengthen the teaching profession through initial teacher training and professional learning.
- Professional learning is traditionally subject-oriented, but it may involve scholarships for short-term internships abroad.
- A teacher evaluation system is based on self-evaluation, a portfolio, peer evaluation by an outside evaluator, and a third-party reference report.
- Teachers who do not perform well on the evaluations are offered training, which may not be adequate. Those who perform well are offered rewards, a common incentive.
- Professional development is not of consistent quality.



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Sources: OECD Better Life Index: Chile, www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/chile; Education at a Glance: Chile 2012, www.oecd.org/edu/eag2012.htm.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS IN: **Japan**

- Japan's centralized system is administered by the Ministry of Education, Sports, Culture and Technology through prefectural and municipal boards.
- 33.6% of total expenditure for education comes from private sources, largely through tuition to private schools.
- High school attendance is optional, but 98% of all students enter high school and more than 90% graduate.
- In 1998, the system changed its focus from rote learning and extensive testing to creativity, independence, and social skills.
- Shortly afterward, student achievement on international tests declined, and the system instituted longer class hours and a demanding curriculum.
- Japanese students routinely score high on international assessments.
- The average middle school class size is 33 (compared to OECD average of 23.7 students).
- At high schools, teaching time with students is about 23% less than the average in other OECD countries.
- Teaching methods focus on collaboration among students and adults.
- Teaching is a highly respected career with more openings than applicants.
- School evaluation is prized over individual teacher appraisal and helps to promote collaboration and shared practice.
- Professional learning such as lesson study is embedded in the school day, continuous, focused on classroom practice, and often pairs senior with learning teachers.
- Schools have a high level of autonomy in professional learning.
- Professional development usually refers to courses taken outside the school (also called training or inservice).
- Extensive induction training features 60 days on campus and 30 days off.
- After 10 years, teachers engage in additional, required training. Some prefectures also require training at the 5th and 15th years of teaching.
- 30 hours (some mandated) are also required every 10 years but can include professional learning within schools.
- There are no standards for professional development.



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Sources: OECD Better Life Index: Japan, www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/japan; Education at a Glance: Japan 2011, www.oecd.org/edu/eag2011.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS IN: **Korea**

- Korea has a centralized system, with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology providing funding, policy direction, programs, and support to provincial educational agencies that oversee schools.
- 42.6% of funding for education comes from private sources (compared to 81.3% OECD average).
- Teaching is a high-status, secure career, with many more adults applying for openings than there are positions.
- Average student scores on PISA are higher than the OECD average and one of the highest in the OECD.
- The average difference between low-achieving and high-achieving students is 82 points, lower than OECD's average of 99 points.
- A comprehensive evaluation system includes system, school, and teacher appraisal tied to student assessments and other measures.
- 92% of middle school teachers participated in some form of professional learning during an 18-month period (compared to 89% OECD average) for an average number of 30 days per person (compared to OECD average of 18 days).
- 85% participated in courses or workshops and 90% in informal dialogue with colleagues. Participation in observations was high at 66.8% (compared to 28% OECD average).
- Only 24.3% had scheduled time for professional learning (compared to 62.8% OECD average).
- 58.2% wanted more professional learning (compared to 54.8% OECD average). The highest need was in student counseling (41.5%, compared to 16.7% OECD average).
- The lowest need was wanting help with multicultural teaching (10.4%, compared to 13.9% OECD average).
- The chief barrier to more professional learning was conflict with work schedule (73.3%, compared to 46.8% OECD average).
- There are no public standards for professional learning; the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology accredits programs that are offered through municipalities.
- School-based professional learning opportunities appear to be limited.



— Lois Brown Easton

Source: OECD, 2009.