

#ISTP2013 Travel Log

A blog series written by Barnett Berry during the 2013 International Summit on the Teaching Profession in Amsterdam

#ISTP13 travel log: Pre-summit notes

Monday, March 11, 2013

I've just landed in Amsterdam and am making my way downtown for the third annual International Summit on the Teaching Profession. This year's summit will focus on who sets standards for the profession—as well as how teachers are evaluated and the extent to which the process leads to educators' self-efficacy.

I don't want to miss a beat at this small invitation-only conference, where I'm certain the ministers and union chiefs of many of the 20 nations represented will put some U.S. policymakers on edge. [Marc Tucker noted of late](#) that when it comes to teacher quality, nations (and school systems) generally take one of three approaches:

- Fire bad teachers;
- Recruit better ones; or
- Invest in the teachers already in place.

For the most part, our nation's recent teaching quality policies have focused on numbers one and two at the expense of number three.

Granted, there are some powerful examples of how to do evaluation right in the United States. Hillsborough County (Florida), for example, has seen progress under terrific leadership from Superintendent MaryEllen Elia and union leader Jean Clements.

But even in locales where thoughtful leaders transcend the typical politics of teacher accountability, our evaluation systems are light years behind other nations. As I read through the background report, prepared by OECD for the summit, several powerful teacher evaluation strategies stood out:

- Denmark teachers are evaluated in teams;
- The Dutch expect practitioners, as part of their evaluation process, to visit other schools;
- The Finnish system requires teachers to assess themselves and develop individual development plans based on national standards and local goals; and

- Singapore focuses on “current estimated potential” of teachers.

The bottom line is that top-performing nations use their evaluation systems to help all teachers get better. I’m looking forward to learning and sharing more in the week ahead. In the meantime, you can keep up with the summit in real time by following the hashtag [#ISTP13](#) on Twitter.

#ISTP2013 travel log: Teaching at a crossroads

Wednesday, March 13, 2013

As today’s International Summit on the Teaching Profession begins, this week’s Education Week commentary, [“The Political Future of the Teaching Profession”](#) (March 12, 2013), is a relevant and timely must-read. The piece, written by Michael Usdan and Art Wise—the chairman of CTQ’s board of directors—poses ask a hard but fundamental question: Does our country want a teaching profession?

Or, to put it another way: Do we want a deregulated occupation of teaching, its ranks filled with haphazardly trained itinerant teachers expected to teach to a standardized curriculum (designed in the 20th century)? Or do we want one filled with legions of expert practitioners who have the preparation and autonomy to teach “mathematics for analyzing and problem-solving, history for interpreting and citizenship, science for knowledge and experimentation?”

You would think, given the global economy and the complexities of teaching, as well as new demands on public education in the U.S., that the Obama Administration would be advancing the latter. But it is not.

Messieurs Wise and Usdan do not address the politics of the choices being made by today’s leading U.S. policymakers, but they do make the poignant case that the teaching unions could readily take matters into their own hands by coming together and embracing professional accountability. To this point, policymakers have taken, at best, half-measures.

Wise and Usdan point out that policymakers have “created the mechanisms for professional accountability and quality control, but have failed to advocate for and secure their universal application.” The unions, and their national leaders, say the right things, but in the maelstrom of local politics, much is sacrificed in order to hold the line on traditional bread and butter issues.

This is complicated stuff of history, sociology, and politics.

Wise and Usdan make it clear that a merged union could turn the corner—if they could uniformly focus on investing in teaching and learning and take seriously the need for more rigorous preparation and credentialing. These increased standards would then “engender public confidence in the capacity and quality” of teachers as as a collective. Other top-performing nations—from Finland to Singapore—have figured it out, and their unions have been instrumental in teacher quality control.

Let’s see if these lessons make their way back across the pond—I sure hope so.

#ISTP2013 travel log: Evaluating teachers in teams

Thursday, March 14, 2013

It did not take long for the conversations during Wednesday's deliberations at the International Summit on the Teaching Profession to pick up. The topic was the quality of teaching standards across the globe—and who decides how to apply them. Everyone seemed to have something nice to say about teachers. But then the focus turned to who entered teaching (or did not) and how teachers should be deemed effective.

The minister from Belgium asked whether the standards for entry to teaching should be changed to encourage more people who hadn't always wanted to work with children to become teachers. And then the false dichotomies of the teaching profession—that beset us much in the States—began to surface. Some of the more notable deceptive divides that were discussed included focusing on student results versus examining teaching practices, as well as peer review versus administrators conducting evaluations.

Several Dutch teachers spoke up during the Q&A period, the short time allowed for observers to make their thoughts known. One young teacher reminded everyone that teacher evaluation must not make teaching more difficult. Instead, it must fuel improvement. These comments made it clear once more to me that these summits need more wisdom from the classroom, not just from the highest levels of education decision-making.

Yesterday's deliberations did not surface the [latest evidence from Kirabo Jackson](#) on using value-added measures (VAM) to assess teacher effectiveness, pointing out that “most effective teachers will not be identified based on test score–based measures.” His research shows that many teachers are better at improving students' non-cognitive skills than cognitive ones (and vice versa), and that the lockstep application of VAM in teaching appraisals is fraught with error. For a teacher's reaction to Jackson's findings, read [this excellent post from CTQ teacher-blogger Bill Ferriter](#).

In the end, Linda Darling-Hammond, the excellent rapporteur, made it clear—bridging many divides—that we can measure quality of teaching practice, the context in which educators teach, and student learning. But it's complicated, and requires far more trained educators as evaluators, to make nuanced judgments about the complexities of teaching.

And perhaps even more importantly, after listening to Pasi Sahlberg (maestro of Finnish Lessons), Paul Anderson (Montana teacher of the year), Rebecca Mieliwocki (U.S. National Teacher of the Year), and Mathijs ter Bork (Netherlands teacher leader), I am ready for U.S. education policymakers to get real about teaching as a team sport, pushing teachers to be evaluated more as teams, and less as individuals. Pasi tweeted it best:

[@pasi_sahlberg](#): Can quality of a football team exceed the quality of its players? With good strategy and coaching/leadership, yes! [#istp2013](#)

#ISTP2013 travel log: Transcending teacher evaluation

Friday, March 15, 2013

The third annual International Summit on the Teaching Profession concluded yesterday on an interesting note. The parties in attendance still had conflicting thoughts on the purpose of evaluation: control or "liberation" of teachers. And the tensions between OECD, with its emphasis on measurement, and Education International, and its focus on support, remained.

But as the Dutch minister concluded, "evaluation must be much less about teacher quality and much more about teaching quality." While the theme of the summit was teacher appraisal, the final session revealed that the vast majority of action steps, proposed by the 20 delegations, had little to do with evaluating teachers. Most of the focus was on supporting those who teach, and making sure they have the tools and resources they need to be effective.

Tony Mackay, the venerable emcee of the two-day teaching-policy fest, facilitated the crisp, 90-second presentations from each nation:

- Hong Kong commits to different school-based supports and a focus on teacher professionalism;
- Switzerland will focus first on improving the national dialogue between education and economy sectors and then evaluate without "naming and shaming";
- Belgium commits to "muster all new technology" to support teachers;
- Sweden also calls for more teacher networking developed by and for teachers;
- Poland will enhance teacher networks and make sure any teacher evaluation system is transparent to all;
- Norway calls for more coherent teacher policy and wants to implement different forms of teacher appraisal systems;
- New Zealand wants to raise status of teaching as the key strategy of teacher appraisal;
- Japan seeks to use its teaching evaluation system to enhance, not undermine, teacher motivation;
- Indonesia commits to deeper and continuous professional development as its primary driver of teaching quality;
- Iceland commits to no "one size fits all" teacher evaluation, and will make sure their system respects each school context and uses diverse methods to increase reliability;
- China calls for quality, "regular registration" for teachers;
- Canada will identify needs of teachers and increase collaboration and trust;
- Germany will invest more (not less) in teacher education at the university level before focusing on teacher evaluation;
- The Netherlands commits to more support for young teachers and a focus on teacher quality in the context of professional communities;
- Estonia will foster teacher leadership in schools and teaching communities (it sounds like this fine country is ready for teacherpreneurs); and
- The United States commits to multiple indicators of student learning as well as time for more collaboration on teacher evaluation and implementing Common Core standards.

Fernando Reimers of Harvard University gave the closing remarks and made sure the delegates remembered an old-school reform lesson: bad implementation can undermine good ideas. Now is the time for teachers—who are the “street-level experts”—to make it much more clear how to turn these broad policy proclamations into action for their results-oriented profession.

Unlike what some U.S. reformers suggest, the summit deliberations confirm that teacher appraisal can have consequences and consider context. But it will take those who actually teach—like Margit Timakov (Estonia), Paul Anderson (Montana, U.S.), Rebecca Mieliwoki (California, U.S.), as well as Rogier Hilbrandie and Mathijs ter Bork (Netherlands)—to figure out how to make it work.