

**Welcoming remarks by Mari Kiviniemi,
Deputy Secretary-General of OECD**

Dear President Bogedan, Minister Dorgerloh, Secretary General van Leeuwen, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished speakers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start off by welcoming you to the 6th International Summit on the Teaching Profession.

The OECD and Education International (EI) embarked on this journey five years ago in New York, under the captainship of Secretary Arne Duncan.

This was a first-of-its-kind endeavour, designed to engage education ministers, union leaders and other teacher leaders from high performing and rapidly improving educational systems.

We hoped to stimulate intensive discussions about how to create a stronger teaching profession.

Five years down the road, the Teacher Summits have taken us across the oceans to Amsterdam, Wellington, Banff and now Berlin.

They have become a landmark in international policy discussions about teachers and teaching.

I don't need to tell you about the importance of teaching – it is our future.

We have all travelled here today from all over the world because we share a common goal: to support the development of teachers and their profession.

Everyone who remembers their own education remembers, not methods and techniques, but their teachers. Across all countries, teachers are really at the heart of our educational systems.

The work of the OECD

At the OECD, we use evidence to drive “better policies for better lives”.

Evidence-based policy is important in all areas of government, and particularly in education.

Everyone here has been through an education system. For many of us, our children have as well. Doesn't that make us education experts?

Well... not quite. In fact many things that are widely supposed to be true in education simply aren't.

The good news is that the OECD can help.

The past 25 years have seen our work on education statistics grow significantly.

The “Education at a Glance” series born in the early 1990s no longer provides just ‘a glance’ on our education systems. The latest edition approached 600 pages – and this doesn’t even take into account all tables published online.

Moreover, these system-level indicators are now complemented by a series of international assessments and surveys such as PISA, our Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) – and of course TALIS.

TALIS has greatly enhanced policy discussions on teachers and teaching, in the same way as PISA has overhauled our preconceived beliefs on the quality of our education systems.

These OECD products enable more fine-grained insights into our systems and schools.

Myth 1: Culture is the reason countries do better

As I said, education is no exception to the existence of myths. Let me pick out just a couple.

One often hears that cultural differences are the reason why some countries do better than others in terms of education outcomes.

Obviously, culture has shaped the way education is organised and operates in our countries.

Yet, research is unpacking the impact of various factors on educational performance.

For instance, recent research by PIAAC has shown that 15% of the variance in educational performance between countries in PISA can be attributed to differences in the quality of teachers at the country level.

So maybe culture explains some of the variation. But unobserved differences in teacher quality are more likely to have a bigger impact.

Myth 2: The best education systems have the brightest teachers

In this respect, another common myth is that the best education systems recruit their teachers from the top third of their class.

Here again, our data debunk this myth.

With few exceptions, teachers’ numeracy skills as measured by the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) are on par with those of other tertiary graduates in their country.

Obviously, these “average” levels translate into noticeable differences between countries in actual proficiency levels of teachers.

However, this evidence highlights that excessive emphasis on recruiting the best and brightest may not be the way to go.

Empowering teachers to raise the quality of their teaching seems a more promising way forward.

Collaboration in teaching is important

Teaching used to be a profession where teachers retreated into their classrooms and worked in isolation.

Nowadays, the importance of teacher collaboration is generally recognised.

TALIS data shows that it has become an important feature of teachers’ work in some settings.

Most importantly, TALIS provides insights as to why collaboration matters.

Thematic Report on Supporting Teacher Professionalism

Three weeks ago, we launched a new TALIS thematic report on Supporting Teacher Professionalism.

An interesting finding is that teachers who score high on the peer networks index report higher levels of self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

The next question is then how to make collaboration work on the ground, so as to foster professional learning and growth.

Our data not only helps demystify preconceived ideas and support new approaches.

It also emphasizes that the quality of an education system is intrinsically tied to the quality of its teachers.

And in turn, the quality of teachers cannot exceed the quality of their support systems and the work organisations that are providing for them.

Support is needed to strengthen the OECD evidence base

It holds true that we cannot improve what we cannot measure. In this respect, TALIS has gone a long way in helping us improve teaching.

I can only encourage those countries around the table which are not yet part of the TALIS extended family to join the next cycle in 2018.

But we also need to recognise that TALIS, as we know it today, can only uncover the tip of the iceberg.

We know about student learning environments and teacher's working conditions, but we don't yet know what good teaching looks like in different national settings.

Therefore, we cannot be really sure what makes good teaching.

This is a long-term research agenda which we need to address in order to develop the next generation of evidence.

Eight countries have now signed up to our video study of teaching practices, which is a first step in that direction.

I understand that there is scope to add one more participant, should some of you be interested in joining this pioneering initiative.

Concluding Remarks

We the OECD have, for more than 50 years, provided a forum for like-minded governments to seek evidence-based solutions to common problems, share experiences and identify "best practices".

The Summit shares this spirit of constructive dialogue and learning from each other.

Our data provides the anchor of this work. Including in education and especially when it comes to teaching.

At the OECD, we have found that education is crucial for combatting inequality, promoting gender parity and fostering inclusive growth. And teachers are at the very core of education.

Thank you and I wish you all lively and fruitful discussions during your next two days in Berlin.