

Honoring Teachers: A World of Perspectives

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Thirumurthy, V., Szecsi, T, Hardin, B. & Ramsey, D. Y. (2007). Honoring teachers: A world of perspectives. [Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education](#), 28, 181-198. DOI: [10.1080/10901020701366764](#)

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Abstract:

This cross-cultural study examines early childhood professionals' perceptions of their social status, working conditions, and public appreciation in seven countries/territories: Guatemala, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Mexico, Peru, and the United States of America. One hundred eighteen participants, consisting of preschool and elementary school educators, program directors, child psychologists, and professors of early childhood education, responded to six questions through electronic, printed, and face-to-face contacts. The cross-cultural data revealed a high degree of agreement on these professionals' perceptions of their social standing, income, work responsibilities, and public appreciation. Results indicate that participants felt discouraged and underappreciated in their current circumstances and aspired to additional financial and emotional support, as well as greater respect from their governments and society.

Article:

INTRODUCTION

History is replete with anecdotes of teachers who were the paragons of society. Tradition places them at the pinnacle of cultural groups. Teachers have been respected for their knowledge and wisdom, as well as for their ability to bring about changes that positively impacted the society. For instance, Plato (427-347 BC) and Aristotle (384-323 BC) stressed the importance of education in order for parents and children to reach their fullest potential (Fuller & Marxen, 2003). However, this education was primarily restricted to “boys born in wealthy families ... who would lead their cultures” (p. 15). Thus, preparing men (women were excluded) who would be intellectuals and scholars of tomorrow was the primary focus of teachers and education.

Asian cultures distinguished teachers as the prime architects of their societies. Chinese history considers Confucius, the great teacher-philosopher, the jewel of their society. As a teacher, his methods were informal and tailored to the individual. He did not use structured classes or examinations, instead suggesting to each student what he should study, and then discussing what he studied with him (McEnroe, 2001). Moreover, Confucius repeatedly urged his students to aspire to be *junzi* (or gentlemen) who pursue filial piety, justice, and duty, rather than mundane men who pursue material pleasure and personal gain (Ebrey, 2002).

In ancient and medieval India, the *gurus* were court-appointed teachers who advised kings on the laws of war and how to be benevolent rulers. These teachers also took the responsibility of educating the masses about Hindu philosophy. Gupta (2003) notes,

According to the literature available, even before colonial rule was established, school instruction in India was widespread. An extensive system of popular education existed in many parts of the country. As a result, teaching has been known in India to be a special form of social activity where teachers have been traditionally revered by all. (p. 164)

As evident in this passage, education was a part of the societal structure and teaching was awarded an important place in society. Teachers fulfilled the professed aims of Hindu philosophy.

Education in Central South America was caught in similar struggles. In Mexico, the Aztecs had thinker-teachers called *tlamatiniime* who were responsible for writing and maintaining codices (books) and living a moral lifestyle to set an example for others (Mann, 2005). Historians believe that the Aztecs may have implemented the “first large scale compulsory education program in history,” in which every male citizen was expected to attend school until age 16, regardless of social class (Mann, p. 121). Later, in colonial Mexico (1521-1821) the Catholic Church and the ruling elite controlled education. They emphasized religious and moral education with the purpose of eradicating all forms of native cultures and languages (Erickson, 2002). However, in 1857 the Mexican government, liberated from Spanish rule, adapted a new constitution that included the provision for free, compulsory, and secular education (Ginsburg et al., 2003). Between 1857 and 1921, Mexican officials established a philosophy of education separate from church, which formed the basis for the present-day educational structure (Wickremasinghe, 1991).

In Hungary, during the 19th century, teachers were considered “lights or lamps of society.” Teachers were valued for their ability to enlighten the masses. However, in the early 20th century, they were referred to as the “day laborers of society.” These metaphors illustrate the decreasing social status of teachers in European society.

When secularism and industrialization swept some parts of the world, the social, economic, and political needs of societies began to change. As a result, the purpose of education shifted from lessons in religion and morality to something that had tangible rewards. Education that once was a pursuit of the elite became a necessity for the masses. The marriage between education and occupation grew stronger as education and religion began to drift apart. Thus, the role of teachers came to be defined differently. Teachers had to be honed to prepare their students, and teacher preparation programs emerged.

In the colonial period in the Americas (particularly in North America), the only requirement for becoming a teacher in the lower grades was a modicum of learning and a willingness to work in what was then an ill-paid, low-prestige occupation. By the 1820s and 1830s, however, teacher preparation became common in the academies, the equivalent of today's secondary schools. Many women, excluded from men's preparatory schools, could obtain an education only in such academies (*The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 2001). One could argue that as long as education was for the elite, men were in charge, and monetary rewards and societal respect for the position were high. With the addition of responsibility for educating the masses and women taking on the role of teacher, the salaries for teachers also began to hit rock bottom.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Two distinct theoretical perspectives provide methodologies for examining how teachers are regarded across the seven countries examined in this study: systems theory and critical theory. In order for any profession to be healthy, it is important to assess the current direction of the profession and the morale of the professionals within it. Gaining a holistic understanding of the complexities of a given context or entity (Capra, 1996) can guide educators in making course corrections as deemed necessary. Systems theory helps researchers examine the complexities of the teaching profession as a whole, including the status, working conditions, respect, and honor teachers have received. On the other hand, critical theory focuses on examining our *ideas* and *values*, as they become the instruments of social change (Winch, 2004). Professionals need to exercise their critical rationality, by reflecting on how *insiders* view their own profession, and then evaluating their occupational stress and morale (Menlo & Poppleton, 1990). Gaining an understanding of these aspects of the teaching profession is the genesis of determining future elements that may prove important, such as job satisfaction, teacher recruitment, government policies and the role of professional organizations in supporting the field.

Systems theory suggests that an organization (or profession) must be understood as a whole (McNeal & Christy, 2001). If we are to understand what goes into the teaching profession as a whole, then we must seek to understand the interrelatedness of every aspect of teaching and the profession. The meaningfulness of each of the puzzle pieces and the interactions among them determine the outcomes and ultimately form an image of the system as a whole (Rodin, Michaelson, & Britan, 1978). In order to recognize outcomes, we first needed to understand the *insiders'* (educators') perceptions of their own social status—the place society has assigned to their occupation amongst various professions—and the honor (or the lack of respect) they have received within the context of each country's sociocultural practices and sociopolitical policies (within whole countries). These viewpoints were then compared across countries to develop a cross-cultural picture of the roles and responsibilities of teachers. Thus, in the present study, individually collected puzzle pieces from each of the seven participating countries were put together to produce a broad view of the whole profession.

From the perspective of critical theory, inherent issues that affect the psychological health of the teaching profession were investigated (Winch, 2004). For example, socially determined indicators such as the roles and responsibilities of teachers, and whether or not there is a specific day in each of the seven countries dedicated to honoring teachers, were examined. By understanding the prestige, wealth, and status teachers experienced, one can assess the power relations and “the significance attached to education in each country” (Fwu & Wang, 2002, p. 211). The approach taken in this study was to view the teaching profession in its totality, contrasting the historical perspective with the contemporary perceptions of “insiders.”

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the social status and working conditions of teachers and the ways they are honored in various parts of the world (Koo & Thirumurthy, 2005). The respect teachers receive in a society, their social status and their working conditions have been a major concern of teacher education around the world. The term *status* refers to the standing or regard accorded teachers in society and the importance given to their function. Also included were the remuneration and other material benefits teachers receive as compensation. Although similar to *status*, the terms *honor* or *respect* are used to indicate the appreciation a society offers by dedicating a day each year to felicitate teachers. Finally, *working conditions* refer to the responsibilities and types of chores teachers were expected to perform at their workplace.

Since the intention of the researchers was to understand the place of teachers in the social structural hierarchy and the importance given to the teaching profession from a global perspective, many countries from different regions of the world were invited to participate in the study. Seven countries were ultimately chosen where the authors had established relationships with educators; therefore, this was a sample of convenience. The survey questions addressed the following: (a) the financial and social appreciation of teachers in comparison to that given to members of other professions; (b) duties in addition to teaching classes; and (c) stress in the workplace (see Appendix).

The researchers developed six questions in the English language and then translated them into the official language used in each country (Spanish, Putonghua, and Hungarian) so the participants could respond in their native language. Various modalities were used to distribute the questionnaire: contacts in Guatemala, Hungary, India, and Peru received it as an electronic document, while the Mexican contacts were mailed the questionnaire. The electronic version of the questionnaire was made available only to the countries selected for the study. The respondents from these countries returned the survey using the same modalities through which they had received it. In Hong Kong, a different format was used to gather information. Since the fourth author taught an in-service class in education there, a classroom face-to-face discussion was piloted based on the six questions.

PARTICIPANTS

The 118 participants from the seven countries consisted of 90 in-service and 15 preservice early childhood education/elementary school educators, eight administrators, four university professors, and one psychologist (Table 1). The participants represented different levels of educational preparation: preservice to practicing early childhood and elementary education teachers, professors of early education, administrators of early childhood education programs, and a psychologist who worked with young children. The number of participants was not consistent among countries. Countries with a low number of participants were included because they had taken extraordinary measures to make sure their responses were delivered back to the project staff. For example, some of the participants from South America drove many miles to an Internet cafe or public library to respond to the questionnaire, just so their voices would be heard. We did not want to disappoint them.

Table 1 Data Collection

Country	Guatemala	Hungary	Hong Kong	India	Mexico	Peru	USA
# Responded	11	32	30 participants	11	16	4	14
Contacts	Child Care Program Director	Szent Istvan University at Jaszbereny professor and the second author	30 teachers attending an in-service course in education	A counselor who works with several schools	Kindergarten Principal	University Professor	Community College instructor
# of Quest. sent.	20	75	30 students - Class discussion	20	20	On-line	40
Who were the respondents?	5 Directors/Administrators 6 Lead Teachers	15 preservice teachers 13 preschool, elementary school in-service teachers. 4 college professor	In-service teachers	In-service teachers: three from public and eight from private schools	3 Directors/Administrators 12 Lead Teachers 1 Psychologist	2 Directors/Administrators 2 Lead Teachers	3 Elementary school teachers and 11 preschool teachers/childcare providers
How was the questionnaire distributed?	Mailed to contact person who distributed and collected them and then mailed back to the third author	Via email with a cover letter explaining the nature of the "research"	Group discussion.	Emailed to contact person who distributed and collected and sent the responses as email attachments	Mailed to contact person who distributed and collected them and then mailed them back to the third author	Survey was posted on the Internet. An email was sent to contact person with web address.	In-service teachers/students in early childhood education & lifespan development class; students were encouraged to have their colleagues participate

DATA ANALYSIS

The wealth of data collected needed to be winnowed in a disciplined manner to gain a holistic picture of the profession (Little, 2003). The perceptions of the participants from each of the countries reflected the views of professionals in that country. Menlo and Poppleton (1990) point out that “a major advantage of a cross-cultural over a unicultural one is that each culture acts as a testing ground for the universality of research findings” (p. 306). Whether the vibrancy of particular responses could be seen as universal could be determined only after the tapestry had been woven together. Initially, the authors met at a conference, shared data, then compared and contrasted the data to determine common themes, as well as differences. The themes and recommendations were refined and developed through e-mail communications and follow-up telephone conversations.

A “categorical aggregation” (Creswell, 1998) of voices from the data was identified and issue-relevant ideas were clustered. Since the data had been collected from four different continents, it was important to examine the interrelated parts that appeared in the analysis to gain a picture of the whole. Three categories emerged as themes for making comparisons and drawing conclusions: (a) the middle-class existence; (b) the unrealistic altruism of super-teachers; and (c) the conflicting honor message. A broad picture of teachers in Hong Kong, India, Hungary, three Central South American countries, and the United States of America was delineated with respect to the similarities and differences in social and economic status and working conditions. The findings are reported and discussed with reference to the same three themes noted above.

THE MIDDLE-CLASS EXISTENCE

Income of teachers can be an indicator of how a society regards and appreciates its teachers and the importance it places on their functions. It is therefore of value to gauge the attitudes and earnings of teachers. But any comparison of teachers' salaries in different countries must take into account the cost of living in those countries (Table 2). Therefore, educators were asked to state their income and compare it to their living expenses. With the exception of the South American participants, there was strong agreement in their responses. Most educators rated themselves as lower to middle class. Making this view more complex, most South American educators saw themselves as poor but honorable.

Table 2 Comparison of Gross Domestic Product Purchase Power Parity, Teacher Salary, and Buying Power			
	GDP per capita (purchasing power parity) 2005 Estimated	Average salary based on the data collected in 2003	Buying power as per respondents
*This information was obtained by researchers through personal communications rather than the survey.			
Guatemala /Peru	\$4,300	\$150 to \$250 per month	Provides for food and basic housing*.
Hong Kong	\$36,800	\$1,153-1,540	Apartment rent (not mortgage), meals, and transportation; probably be a little tight for someone who has to support a family with children
Hungary	\$15,900	\$300 per month after tax	Cheap apartment, a cheap car, but no vacation abroad or money to have a dinner at a restaurant; no books, journals or theater tickets.
India	\$3,400	\$150 to \$300 per month	Rent a cheap house, provide food for two and cover public transportation expenses
Mexico	\$10,000	\$870 or less per month	Provides for food, inexpensive housing, and basic necessities for Mexico.*

Hungarian teachers declared that the salary of a beginning teacher was approximately US\$ 300 (after tax) per month for 12 months. Some teachers reflected that their salary compares poorly with the minimal wages for people such as lawyers and medical doctors, while others seemed to be more satisfied. On a similar note, the salaries are dependent on several factors, including their location. Also, their level of education and the grade level they taught impacts their salaries. According to the Hungarian national salary schedule, teachers with a master's degree who usually teach higher grades earn more than those with a bachelor's degree who teach lower grades. Although there was some disagreement on the buying power, most agreed that teachers belong to the lower middle class. They can afford a "cheap apartment, a cheap car;" however, "they are unable to go on an vacation abroad or have a dinner at a restaurant." They expressed their disappointment in their inability to have intellectual pursuits such as buying books, journals or theater tickets on a regular basis. Their lifestyles improve only if their spouses have well-paying jobs, or if they receive additional financial support from their parents. As one of the respondents said, "The impact of parents' support on the beginner teacher's standard of living is as important as that of a spouse." To augment their income teachers tutor children, maintain commercial vegetable farms, or accept sales position in merchandise and private businesses. Preservice teachers seemed to worry about their future financial situation, while veteran teachers sounded disappointed and tired.

Teachers in Hong Kong expressed a more promising picture. Currently, the starting monthly salary for a primary school teacher is about HK\$ 12,000 (or US\$ 1,540), which is greater than the average monthly salary of HK\$ 9,000 (or US\$ 1,153) for most recent university graduates. An average teacher with over 7 years of teaching experience usually earns about HK\$ 20,000 (or US\$ 2,500). The buying power of that amount of teacher salary is sufficient for apartment rent (not mortgage), meals, and transportation, but would probably be a little tight for someone who has to support a family with children. Teachers usually receive 12 months of salary each year and enjoy a long summer vacation; nonetheless, the situation has changed in recent years for new teachers, due to the government's budget cut in education. On the other hand, early childhood education is not part of the 9-year compulsory education in Hong Kong. Early childhood educators have a much lower status compared to primary and secondary educators. Since the return of sovereignty in 1997, there has been some effort by the government to upgrade the qualifications of kindergarten teachers. Currently, all kindergarten schools are privately run and are funded by religious bodies (e.g., Christian, Buddhist, and Taoist) and

sponsored by social welfare organizations. The majority of kindergarten schools offer half-day or bi-session classes of around 3 or 4 hours each, while most child care centers provide whole-day programs. Since the teachers' pay scale is still not under the government's scheme and control, the average monthly salary of ECE teachers could range from HK\$ 6000 to HK\$ 12,000 (or US\$ 770 to US\$ 1,530).

The views expressed by the teachers in India were a combination of what was expressed by teachers in Hong Kong and Hungary. The Indian teachers' salaries vary depending on whether or not they work in private or public schools. Traditionally, some private schools pay a lower salary than the public schools. Their salaries vary anywhere from \$150 to \$300 per month for 12 months. A teacher earning a \$300 salary could rent a cheap house, provide food for two and cover public transportation expenses. They also articulated the importance of their spouses' having good jobs to support a better lifestyle. Long summer holidays and 12-month salaries were an attraction for the female-dominated profession.

In Guatemala and Peru, salary ranges were similar to those in India (from \$150 to \$250 per month for the majority of teachers). However, the buying power of these salaries differs significantly from other countries. In Peru, respondents stated that a salary of \$150 per month covers food costs at \$5 per day. For this reason, teachers typically need a second job. Peruvian public school teachers with 30 years of teaching experience can expect to earn a maximum of \$500 per month. In the private sector, depending on the socioeconomic level of the center/school, the average teacher's salary is approximately \$250 month. Most educators from Guatemala described teachers as poor. The 16 educators from Mexico reported salaries of \$870 or less per month and ranked their profession slightly higher than their South American counterparts. Public school salaries were reported as generally higher than private school salaries.

In a country that is considered to be the wealthiest of nations, one would assume that teachers there would enjoy a more affluent lifestyle. Contrary to such a belief, the teachers in the United States of America expressed a gloom that could be equated only with the stress low income can cause. The salaries of professionals in early childhood education range from \$900-\$1,100 a month for preschool/child care workers to \$2,800-\$3,167 a month for elementary school teachers. A few of the participants did not respond to the question concerning "buying power" for unknown reasons. However, those who did answer it presented an array of responses that included the following:

- *Living expenses + \$200 for spending.*
- *Not very much at all, bills alone.*
- *Luckily I am married, as this amount doesn't even cover our house payment.*
- *Just enough to survive.*
- *Not good for two people and not really enough for a family of four.*

But the elementary school teachers were a bit more positive when they stated, "a car, and mortgage payment (cheap)," and "basic needs and some clothes and personal needs." They concurred that their salary would fetch them no frills and a scanty subsistence with one person's income. One of the educators added that "teachers are given lip service" referring to the rhetoric that is often heard in the media. The educator perhaps referred to the politicians who often stress the burden educators have to bear on account of large numbers of students with minimum compensation.

The responses of the participants revealed uniformity in the economic standing of the teachers in all countries with the exception of the South American respondents. They all could afford similar lifestyles. In most countries, teachers had just enough for a lower-middle-class to middle-class living.

THE UNREALISTIC ALTRUISM OF SUPER-TEACHERS

After having examined the economic standing of teachers, the dismaying picture of an overworked teacher emerged. Teachers around the world work long hours at school and spend additional hours at home planning the

curriculum and grading assignments and exam papers (Kidane, 2004). As though this was not sufficient, individuals hired to teach are also burdened with the responsibilities of many additional chores that do not have any direct relation to teaching. Types of duties ranged from administrative responsibilities to grant writing/fundraising, to being a substitute parent in escorting the children on field trips, to raising children, to janitorial responsibilities. In a nutshell, educators' responsibilities were no longer limited to teaching, but rather a considerable amount of time was spent on doing unrelated and irrelevant chores.

The teachers in Indian schools stated that “teachers share the responsibility with parents; they mold character, impart values apart from educating children; educating children, correcting their behaviors, teaching them good values and equipping them to face life.” The respondents in Gupta's (2003) study voiced support for sharing the responsibility with parents to shape the character of their students:

The teacher as mother is a powerful notion that is taken very seriously and is recognized by the teacher herself and also by her students and the families [This may be an image that] is contradictory to the Western progressive idea of professionalizing the teacher. (p. 165)

But this view reveals the responsibility and accountability of teachers. They see themselves as equal to parents. In addition to teaching a large class and shouldering the responsibility of being equal to a parent substitute at school, they also have a wide variety of duties such as collecting tuition, organizing school and sports days, maintaining mind-boggling paperwork, exams, grading, and even participating in election-related activities and census in some government schools. A typical picture of a teacher that comes to mind is one lugging several bags filled with notebooks for grading.

The responses of the Hong Kong participants portrayed overworked and anxious teachers. The government's current education reform encourages teachers to perform peer-class observation and evaluation. They are also expected to apply for grants to conduct local or cross-border field trips, exchange programs, extracurricular projects, and action research to boost the image of their schools. The teachers reported that the workload was heavy (e.g., over 30 periods per week for elementary school teachers) and that the administrative duties placed on them added to their stress. Governmental school budgets and resources have been cut significantly due to the economic downturn in Asia. Education reform by the government has put many teachers into a state of anxiety. For example, many teachers of English in Asia have failed the English language benchmark exam and there is now a preferred use of Putonghua (the national language, known in English as “Mandarin”) in lieu of Cantonese vernacular dialect to teach Chinese subjects after the 1997 handover. Apart from the requirements of teacher competencies and continuing professional development as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (*Towards a Learning Profession*, November 2003), the school self-evaluation scheme has also had a great impact on teacher stress. It evaluates the school as a whole in terms of a variety of indicators as well as teacher competence in different areas such as teaching, administration, extracurricular activities, parent-teacher collaboration, application of web-based learning, and peer evaluation.

The situation in Hungary is similar to what has been described thus far. Apart from their teaching responsibilities, and arranging excursions and field trips, the teachers become class decorators and members of hallway patrols. A teacher from Hungary added that teachers there needed to “take children for medical check-ups, to [the] dentist and provide extra assistance in homework after school.” One of the teachers stated,

[Teachers] are expected to organize the school chorus, establish and maintain international exchange programs among students, prepare students for extra-curricular academic competitions, and escort students at sport events, talent shows and academic contests. I believe [these are] unrealistic expectations, considering the fact that they volunteer their time and expertise.

The ever-growing list endorses the picture of a teacher who has to work beyond his/her capacity. Teachers are expected to work extra time with no additional support or monetary rewards.

South American teachers described similar responsibilities beyond their teaching activities. These include fundraising, cleaning chores, and paperwork. Many of them expressed deep feelings of stress at home as well as at school, saying such things as “It is very difficult for teachers to forget their work at home because there is always something to do like planning or paperwork.” Some educators expressed lack of support from lawmakers and government officials. A respondent from Peru added, “... we must have a real policy of education belonging to our country, where the task of educating is the task of everybody,” endorsing the belief that it takes a village to raise a child. Teachers in rural areas described other challenges. For example, in Peru, rural area teachers often walk several hours or ride donkeys over rough terrain to get to school. Once there, in addition to meeting the educational needs of the children, they must clean the premises, struggle to understand unfamiliar dialects, and adapt the few resources they have for multiple grade levels.

Yet another issue raised by the Asian teachers is the strong emphasis on academic achievement, as opposed to a more balanced development of children. Tests and exams exhaust students, leaving them with very little time for extra-curricular activities. All respondents from India and Hong Kong raised this concern. Participants also discussed the daunting task of grading. In short, in all of the countries, the society and government expect teachers to go well beyond what their teaching responsibilities are and to often carry work home. Teachers are indeed stretched thin. These unrealistic expectations appear to be wearing teachers down.

How similar were the responses of the teachers from the United States of America to those of their counterparts around the world? Although the teachers from the United States echoed the sentiments of teachers from other countries, a few additional issues troubled them. An elementary school teacher stated,

The community and the federal government place all responsibilities of raising children on the school system. Low and non-achieving students are considered the fault of the school system ... Teachers and directors who are failing “too many” students will be replaced by federally appointed staff.

One could sense a threat in what this teacher shared. A similar concern also resonated in another elementary school teacher's reflections: “Many parents expect teachers to do it all—educate morally, socially emotionally and cognitively.” Child care professionals expressed a feeling that they were raising some of the children because of the amount of time the children spend in day care. Their statements fit the description of “unpleasant emotional state” (Menlo & Poppleton, 1990). Caring for children and educating them seemed to have unfairly tipped toward the teachers.

The issue of school accountability that has swept federal policies has added stress to the lives of professionals in the USA. As though the pressure of teaching and caring for the children in their care were not sufficient, teachers have had to deal with all the additional paperwork that they are expected to do. Teachers also described increasing levels of behavioral challenges in their classrooms. One teacher stated yet another “alarming trend ... lots of cameras watching—two in every classroom, restrooms and hallways.” She raised the issue of trust (or the absence of trust) in her response to the level of stress in her work. Several teachers cited mandated professional training as adding stress; but two had a more positive view, stating that all of the additional training resulted not only in their gaining skills and knowledge, but also their receiving monetary benefits.

An elementary school teacher reported “huge stress with the constantly changing curriculum.” The constantly changing and rigid curriculum robbed the teachers of their creative ability to come up with innovative approaches to meeting the needs of their students. The teacher stated, “Prescribed curriculum limits my ability to perform.” Similar to the participants from other countries, respondents from the USA also produced a laundry list of chores such as cleaning, storing things, checking, and not having enough time or supplies to complete all of the work. Communicating with the parents was an added pressure for some teachers.

CONFLICTING-HONOR MESSAGES

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis was the damaged psyche of educators. How are they appreciated? What is their social status? These questions have a great impact on the morale of teachers. All the participating countries except Hungary and the United States have special dates designated for celebrating teachers.

Hong Kong, as well as Mainland China, marks Teachers Day each year on September 10. Perhaps this would explain why educators from Hong Kong rank teachers differently. These educators placed teachers in the middle, above businessmen and nurses. A high social status was assigned to teachers, as was expressed in a study that was done in Taiwan, where “Taiwanese teachers are in general regarded as role models and learned scholars” (Fwu & Wang, 2002, p. 214). In Hong Kong, high school teachers seem to enjoy higher prestige than grade school teachers, due to a difference in their academic qualifications, and perhaps their income too. Statistics show that in 2002, only one third of primary school teachers had university degrees, compared to 82% for high school teachers, who also earned better salaries according to the government pay scale.

Traditional regard and appreciation for teachers seems to be high in India, although a teacher rephrased her acknowledgement by adding, “Excellent teachers who are role models are very much respected. But teachers who are not committed to the profession are not treated with respect by students or the parents.” Only one teacher placed teachers next to doctors (in ordering the different professions), while the rest of the 10 teachers placed teachers either in the middle or just above nursing. Teachers acknowledged that India has a special day dedicated to teachers. In India, September 5 (the birthday of the second president of India, Dr. Radhakrishnan, an acclaimed teacher and philosopher) is celebrated as Teacher's Day. “Outstanding teachers are awarded and nationally recognized by the government of India on this day,” remarked a teacher. The application forms to nominate teachers are available in various places, such as schools and post offices. Gupta (2003), in her study of teachers in New Delhi, India, found that the role of a teacher is culturally preserved. The image of teacher is equated to the image of mother:

[A] teacher has the authority to reprimand her students just as she has the authority to love them. The concept of scolding a child comes with a lot of authority and privilege It is generally believed that reprimanding is perceived as a way of helping a child to be and do his best, not as a way of punishing. (p. 166)

She declares that the “culture-bound parameters” still dictate the images and role of teachers, an aspect that has not changed with the times. She defines “culture-bound parameters” as “the image of a teacher in India [as] rooted in the philosophical and cultural understandings of who a teacher is, as opposed to more modern Western and technical notions, such as being a *reflective practitioner* and *action researcher*” (A. Gupta, personal e-mail communication, April 6, 2004). The teacher's role here is often equated with that of a disciplinarian—the one who teaches moral values and disciplines children (Gupta, 2003, p. 165). Thus, the society still gives teachers the same authority and privilege that has been given to them traditionally. But Balachandran (2005), a journalist, draws a stark contrast to this image: “The Guru of the ancient times was venerated because he was the conduit for preserving and passing on the accumulated wisdom of the race to the next generation” (Balachandran, p. 1). Teachers in modern times are responsible for teaching the 3-Rs. The journalist also makes a distinction about the government teachers, whom many now openly call shirkers and cheats.

Most Hungarian teachers regret the loss of the privilege and honor they had received during the communist era. The first Sunday of June used to be Teacher's Day when the government and parents recognized and honored them. Teachers even had received monetary rewards for their annual services on that day. A veteran teacher reflected with much nostalgia:

When I was a beginner teacher, a long time ago, the village school had a huge celebration for teachers, where children prepared some programs such as reciting poetry, singing songs about teachers. In the afternoon and evening we had great dinners with music. That was a community event because parents also showed up with roast chicken, a bottle of wine or dessert. But you can not find this kind of celebration of teachers any more.

Although children and parents still bring gifts and flowers to teachers on the last day of school, there is a sense of loss amidst teachers. They feel that the society does not look up to them with the same reverence that they once enjoyed.

In Mexico, May 15th is National Teacher's Day. Typically, teachers receive special gifts and celebratory activities including small parties, dancing, and singing that take place to honor teachers. In recent years, some Mexican teachers have taken this opportunity to express their concern over the serious decline in the real purchasing power of teacher salaries. One respondent from Mexico expressed her mixed feelings about the status of teachers in Mexico, "Yes [teachers are recognized], but they do not get the honor they really deserve." Teachers are honored on June 25th in Guatemala and in Peru on July 6th. In Peru, students typically bring gifts to teachers, and there are school celebrations such as folk dances. Similar to their Mexican counterparts, participants from both countries, while appreciative of a day of national recognition, mostly ranked themselves at the bottom of the professional ladder. The mixed responses from teachers from all these countries perhaps reveal the varying social standings of teachers in their societies.

In the United States, in ranking the different professions, four teachers placed the teaching profession second to doctors and four placed it in the middle, below doctors and engineers. All the rest placed teachers at the bottom. With regard to teacher appreciation day, many teachers did not know or were "not sure" if and when the teachers were honored. An elementary school teacher reported that National Teacher Appreciation Week in May is recognized by the public schools, but did not recall any special appreciation. A child care professional proclaimed, "We receive a lot of negative attention in the media—positive attention would do us good." Yet another teacher stated, "No. There should be one. We deserve it. We work hard to educate children and make sure that we meet their needs and the family's." All of their responses alluded to the fact that the attention and publicity given to the "week of the teacher" is scarce and inadequate. One of the teachers from the federally funded programs stated that teachers are "underpaid and undervalued." In short, they do not feel that their society or the government of the United States of America values their contribution to educating children.

CONCLUSION

In examining the role of teachers from a systems-wide perspective, the trepidation and uneasiness of the professionals emerged. The participants in this study shared their concerns and fears. Despite the fact that the sociopolitical, cultural, and economic conditions of the countries were distinctly varied, teachers' voices were united in how they perceived their profession. Inagaki (1993) argues that even though the fundamental foundations of education remain the same, there is a shifting trend in the roles and responsibilities of teachers and their changing social conditions. Teachers in this study echoed that their responsibilities do not end with teaching. They are burdened with many extraneous chores, for which no compensation is provided. Their salaries, working conditions, and prestige are considered quite unfavorably. The responsibilities of teachers are no longer limited to teaching or preparing their students to be contributing members of the society. The increased workload has not mandated any increment in salary. A picture of a tired and frustrated teacher emerges. Teachers' morale is crumbling, and some teachers even fear that lowered morale has already affected the quality of teaching. The workload and relatively low salaries impact the caliber of teachers that enter the profession. A few Indian teachers stated that some of their colleagues did not willingly choose the teaching profession, and, as a result, they work with teachers who have no passion for the profession and who want only to augment their family income.

In the cross-cultural analysis, the similarities in the views teachers expressed seem to indicate an agreement on their income level, workload, and the responsibilities they share. Teachers are discouraged with the way things are and aspire to additional financial support and recognition for all their service to society. The strong emphasis on academics and examinations seem to be issues that frustrate teachers. They desire a more balanced curriculum to develop the whole person.

Social, economic, and political circumstances have contributed to shaping or maintaining teaching as a low-prestige career. Stagnant salary and poor working conditions discourage graduates from choosing teaching as a career. Even those countries that honor teachers do not reward them with handsome remunerations and benefits. “Many countries are plagued with problems of teacher shortage and difficulty in attracting academically able students into the teaching profession” (Fwu & Wang, 2002, p. 211). It is therefore imperative that the working conditions of teachers be improved so we can attract talented individuals to the profession.

It can be expected that “as the political and cultural contexts of a society transform over time, the policies and the public perceptions may change accordingly, resulting in a change in teachers' status” (Fwu & Wang, 2002, p. 222). But when there is a gap or mismatch between sociocultural changes and public policies, the system as a whole can be affected drastically.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no easy solution for the challenges teachers face. World peace is at stake and many societies are in turmoil. As educators, we acknowledge our responsibility to shape the future citizens of the world so that they will be able to tackle tomorrow's problems and push all frontiers of development. Though many people question the quality of education, unless we address the issues of better working conditions and higher wages for teachers, educational reforms geared toward improving the quality of education may simply remain on paper.

Recommendations for changes in social, economic, and political policies that impact the content and implementation of teacher education programs are described below in response to these findings, including changes in government policies concerning teacher salaries and benefits, recruitment of teacher education candidates, content of teacher education programs, national standards, and early childhood teacher education policies.

Salaries and Benefits

If governments employed all teachers as civil servants with lifelong job security, as has been done in countries like Japan and Germany (Fwu and Wang, 2002), and if teachers' benefits and monetary compensation became more competitive with those of other professions, the changes could increase job satisfaction and positively impact the social status of teachers. In addition, salary levels that support a higher standard of living could result in several positive outcomes. First, higher salaries and benefits would attract academically strong and motivated candidates to teacher education programs, and consequently improve the quality of education. Second, teachers with satisfactory pay and good working conditions would remain in their teaching positions, minimizing the teacher turnover rates that jeopardize children's learning (Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005). In addition, a tenure system for qualified teachers and administrators could be established based on performance and merit, rather than on seniority and/or supervisory recommendations. The concept of tenure and promotion also follows the pattern of civil services.

Recruitment and Teacher Education Programs

The International Labor Organization report estimates that 35 million new primary teachers need to be recruited and prepared in developing countries to ensure all children have a teacher by 2015 (EFA, 2004). To accomplish this goal, governments and universities must recruit teacher education candidates who are highly motivated and talented. For example, governments and higher institutions should enhance the budgets that finance teacher education and provide more assistance including counseling programs, competitive scholarships and stipends, and work-study programs to attract qualified entrants to the teaching profession. Recruiting teacher candidates from an academically strong population could make teacher education programs academically equal to other fields of study (Fwu & Wang, 2002). If academically strong candidates enter the field, then graduates who accept teaching positions just to augment their family income—as described by teachers in India and Peru—will be reduced.

Decentralization

Governments should reexamine teacher education programs provided by different policy makers, divisions, or representatives to ensure better coordination between deployment of manpower and teacher education resources. At the same time, early childhood programs and schools should be allowed to seek private sector sponsorship for school-based teacher education according to the programs' and schools' own needs and objectives. Participants in such training programs could bear part of the cost and receive continuing education credits and tax deduction through non-governmentally funded programs.

Promote Research in Teacher Education

Implementing the elements of educational research across all teacher education programs and utilizing continuing research in teacher education as a basis for innovation and change in education could positively impact policy reform and decision-making processes. A greater emphasis on research could solidify research-based practices in various countries grounded in cultural practices.

Passion and Enjoyment

Karakaya (2004) posits, "A professional teacher needs to enjoy professional freedom and responsibility, together and at the same time, quite apart from [his/her] professional knowledge, skills and attitudes" (p. 212). According to the findings of this study, the focus on high-stakes testing in India and Hong Kong force teachers to emphasize academics over the development of the whole child. Jones and Egley (2006) argue that high-stakes testing negatively impacts the partnerships between teachers and other stakeholders and the perception of teacher's responsibilities. Teachers should not be the only ones to be held accountable for children's educational success. Only in collaboration with parents, families, community and all members of the society can high standards of education and social prestige of educators can be achieved. Therefore, governmental expectations regarding education should be based on sound pedagogical theories, educational research, and best educational practices. Providing such an environment will accentuate the passion teachers bring to the profession.

Burnout

Teachers in this study expressed burnout as a consequence of all of the additional chores and the emphasis on academics and testing. First, relieving teachers from noneducational activities such as cleaning, food preparation, and paperwork must be addressed so teachers can concentrate their efforts on interactions with children. Second, teachers and administrators should be encouraged to become actively involved in professional organizations, academic societies, and political and social activities concerning education reform and welfare of the teaching profession. Professional activities provide opportunities for teachers to share their successes and learn new and different ways to cope with job-related stress. Local authorities should assist teachers, administrators, social workers, and educators to establish various forms of organizations and unions as well as multilevel, cross-national networks of communications, so that their genuine needs and concerns can be reflected more efficiently and effectively.

National Standards and Teacher Education Policies

The majority of the teacher educators in the survey indicated that academic qualifications of teachers in their countries needed to be improved, particularly in the early childhood sector. To help eliminate this discrepancy, governments should develop/streamline the national requirements for teacher education. Some countries such as Peru and Guatemala have national requirements in place, while other nations in this study have national policies on teacher requirements that are not succinct and uniform across the country. In addition, governments should initiate a continuing education requirement and regulations for the long-term development of teachers and administrators. Continuing education could enable teachers and administrators to keep pace with new skills, knowledge, values, and trends in education and society. Although most countries encourage continuing education for teachers and administrators, no continuing education requirement has been strictly enforced in many of the countries.

World Teachers' Day

The dream of achieving higher quality of education and raising the status of teachers is achievable only if we are united, support each other and fight for a common cause. Local education authorities should help schools

promote both local and international teacher recognition days and provide awards for excellence to outstanding teachers and administrators.

We propose that the professional organizations all over the world and the United Nations unite together and celebrate October 5th as the World Teachers Day, when teachers' voices in each of the continents will be heard. They could arrange “teacher walks,” in which teachers in different parts of the world could walk together to create public awareness of teacher issues. Masschelein (2004) reminds us that “power is not only suppressive or oppressive, but productive” (p. 358). Power can create the political space for bringing about change.

Teacher Education and Technology

Improvements in teacher education programs can mean higher quality education for children. Many of the courses offered in preservice and in-service programs in teacher education are not aligned with each other and bear little relationship between practical experience and theoretical orientation, nor do they integrate the curriculum sufficiently with information technology and multimedia presentation. Also, there needs to be better coordination between teacher education and global trends in education development. Such an approach is likely to intensify academic rigor. Moreover, there is a need for close coordination between preservice and in-service teacher education that supports self-evaluation and the development of varied and effective teaching and learning approaches, curriculum planning and implementation, and research and publication.

Advocacy

Educational institutions should require teacher candidates to join and actively participate in national and/or international professional organizations. Through these experiences, future teachers could develop knowledge and competencies that ensure a better understanding of professional potential. These professional organizations can provide numerous opportunities for members to advocate for teachers' societal and professional change (e.g., NAEYC Advocacy Toolkit, 2004). Furthermore, national and international professional collaboration could strengthen and unify the concerns of teachers globally.

Future Research

The study reported here was limited by time and place. There were disparities in the sample size. To understand the effect of teacher morale we need more studies where the participants are not only from many countries, but also constitute a wider sample from within each of the countries. The participants need to reflect a wider cross-section of society. Separate samples need to be formed with experienced teachers, preservice teachers, and members from the community not working in an education-related profession. Finally, it will also be worthwhile to map how teacher education programs are empowering their preservice teachers who can become catalysts for change.

Finally, it is expected that teacher education around the world seek to be an agent of educational change and self-enrichment, rather than simply a reactor in reference to changes that have already occurred in schools and society. In this regard, it is particularly important that future research examine not only the social status and living conditions of teachers, but also the ways in which teacher education programs prepare teachers to overcome their circumstances. Concerned educators from around the world must make a concerted effort to provide a strong political and social voice to launch a movement to address the status and working conditions of teachers.

APPENDIX: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is an average income of teachers in your country? (Please state the amount in US\$.) What is the buying power of that amount?
2. What is the social standing of teachers in your country? (I am a poor teacher ... or I am an honorable teacher, etc.)
3. Please order the following professions in the order of societal respect/importance placed on the position by the society: Teacher, doctor, engineer, nurse, accountant, and businessman. This will give us an idea of the respect given to teachers in your society. Please feel free to add any additional information if you desire.
4. What responsibilities are placed on teachers? (Teachers are solely responsible for educating the nation's children; teacher shares the responsibility with the parents and other community members in educating children, etc.)
5. What is the level of stress for teachers? Apart from teaching responsibilities, are there additional responsibilities placed on the teachers? Examples: paperwork, fundraisers, and/or cleaning the school premises; can teachers forget about work when they go home?
6. Is there a specific day in a year that is allocated nationally to honoring teachers in your society?

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