
[Blog](#)

Conditions of employment for teachers

As the Education Commission launches its latest report, [Transforming the Education Workforce](#), what new light can we shed on the workforce at the so called ‘middle tier’ of education systems – those working at district level or providing support across school clusters? One of the report’s authors, Charlotte Jones, shares her reflections.

Transformative potential of the middle tier

The [London Challenge](#), [Haryana’s reforms in India](#), and [Viet Nam’s PISA success story](#). These are all inspiring examples of education reform at scale. The policy choices behind such successful reforms are often well documented.

But who are the people that make rapid school improvement possible? The workforce is an education system’s biggest investment and one of its greatest levers for change. If we are to scale education reforms globally, we urgently need to understand the key roles and skills which make this possible.

The *Transforming the Education Workforce* report sheds a new light on this question, offering fresh thinking on the education workforce needed for the future.

One of the most compelling ideas in the report is the concept of Learning Teams. It calls for us to expand our idea of the professional team beyond the school, so that we tap into the potential of others, such as those working at district level. These ‘middle tier’ role-holders are often the missing link in scaling education reforms, but little attention until now has been paid to innovations in their roles.

Systems leaders as change agents

So, what kinds of workforce innovations offer promise at the middle tier and why? The report recommends that the highest performing teachers be promoted to ‘system leaders’ and it’s their job to share their practice with peers, for example as pedagogical or school improvement coaches. In this way, the best skills and expertise in the system can be rapidly shared across schools, through networks of professionals.

Education Development Trust has been trialling this kind of system leadership approach at scale in a range of international contexts over the last five years, based on insights from the National Leaders of Education model which led to gains in student outcomes in England.

In Rwanda we recently selected the best 480 school leaders nationally and trained them as ‘Leaders of Learning’ to coach their peers across over 2,000 schools. In Kenya, we’ve been working with 100 pedagogical coaches to provide powerful instructional feedback to peers across 500 schools in urban slum and rural contexts. After five years we saw gains of 0.53SD in the literacy outcomes of over 90,000 marginalised girls, compared to a control groupⁱ.

The secrets of workforce innovation at the middle tier

Our research for *Transforming the Education Workforce* offers three insights into why this model of workforce reform is so effective in building teacher professional capacity:

1. **System leaders ensure school-based change happens.** Brilliant policy design does not always translate into change in the classroom. Evidence from a range of sectors shows that practitioners are more likely to try an innovation if advised by a trusted peer, as opposed to traditional figures of authority such as expert trainersⁱⁱ. We know from our own programmes that when teachers are coached by peers, they are more likely to explore real problems of practice: in a climate of trust their focus is on ‘improving’ not ‘proving’.
2. **System leaders support deeper learning and change.** Teachers can face a major hurdle to implementing new pedagogical techniques: the so-called ‘theory-practice gap’. How to apply the learning from professional development opportunities? When working with credible peers who have ‘been there, done that’, advice is rapidly curated and tailored to teachers’ needs. Recent studiesⁱⁱⁱ suggest that peer learning is powerful precisely because of this: it helps teachers to interpret new techniques and close the gap between the theory and practice.
3. **System leaders make sure change sticks.** Getting new approaches to embed within school systems is a key challenge for sustainable impact. System leaders who build Learning Teams break through this challenge. By building a professional dialogue around inclusive teaching and learning – what works, what does not - they build collective knowledge across the school as an institution, and often across schools as well. It is this kind of team capacity – or social capital – which helps change to embed and sustain.

What if all roles in the education workforce were oriented around teaching and learning in this way? The new *Transforming the Education Workforce* report gives powerful insights into how this might be possible and gives me great hope that we can better bridge the gap between policy and at scale delivery on the ground.

Charlotte Jones is Global Head of R&D at Education Development Trust and a specialist in international education workforce reform. She is a contributing author to the Education Commission’s *Transforming the Education Workforce* report.

Education Development Trust and IIEP-UNESCO will be jointly launching further research in this area in 2020.

(i) Coffey (2017) Endline Evaluation Report Step Change Window. Final Report (December 2017) Evaluation Manager Girls’ Education Challenge (GEC) Fund.

(ii) Everett, R.M. (2003) Diffusion of Innovations. Free Press

(iii) Bruns, B., L. Costa and N. Cunha (2017). Through the Looking Glass Can Classroom Observation and Coaching Improve Teacher Performance in Brazil? Policy Research Working Paper 8156. World Bank, Education Global Practice Group July 2017.

[View PDF](#)

- [Log in](#) or [register](#) to post comments