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BOOK REVIEW

More and Better Teachers for Quality Education for All: Identity and Motivation, Systems and Support

By Jackie Kirk, Martial Dembélé, and Sandra Baxter (Eds.). <http://moreandbetterteachers.wordpress.com>: Collaborative Works, 2013. 227 pp. pdf

Avivit Cherrington

The subject of access to Universal Primary Education (UPE) has been high on the global education agenda for more than two decades. Although remarkable progress has been made in terms of increased access, questions around whether quality learning and teaching is actually taking place have prompted much concern and re-evaluation of policies, goals, and guidelines. Indeed, in the last 10 years there has been increased focus on teacher issues, especially the concern over teacher shortages, poor school infrastructure, and gender inequality. This book tackles these issues and also looks beyond them to underscore the relevance of achieving quality in education through increasing teacher motivation, building competence, and connecting teachers' private and public identities.

The preface by Sandra Baxter sets the purpose and direction of the book with a dedication to Jackie Kirk – a passionate academic and activist tragically killed in Afghanistan in 2008 by the Taliban while providing humanitarian aid – who was instrumental in conceptualising this book and worked tirelessly to champion a reality of improved circumstances for teachers and learners around the world. "Education is a human right, and the quality of that education determines the opportunities that we have to grow and learn throughout our lives" (p. xxi).

Throughout its 10 chapters (each a stand-alone article), *More and Better Teachers for Quality Education for All* is testament to the value of conducting in-depth investigations of the lived experiences of teachers to gain a better grasp of the complexities and challenges in education. By not only examining the individuals involved – their identities, perspectives, and priorities – every chapter highlights the importance of promoting a holistic approach to teacher policy development, taking into consideration the intersections of relationships, public identities, and systems.

Anyone who has done research in schools has likely come to the realisation that teaching is so much more than just a profession, and that teachers are required to do a lot more than just teach. I found it interesting that, with each chapter, I was taken more deeply into the circumstances and distresses of teachers and schools: facing real threats and assassinations; juggling personal responsibilities and care for learners in communities ravaged by HIV and AIDS; tackling ongoing gender discrimination, poor societal status, or lack of appreciation.

As someone who is entering the education field from the associated profession of educational psychologist, I found the first two chapters especially informative. Kirk and Dembélé introduce the foundations of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Chapter 1 with global statistics and a brief overview of the issues, challenges, and policies that have surrounded the drive for quality education discussions and research.

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Faculty of Education: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

They also introduce the significance of the chapters that follow by asserting that current research and policy studies have tended to separate systems from individuals, yet “teachers’ professional and personal roles and relations are also shaped by broader contextual factors, related to the social, political and economic milieu in which they live and work” (p. 11). Systems-level strategies to manage and motivate teachers and schools must be informed by attention to teachers’ lived experiences, and this argument has been strongly carried through the chapters that follow.

A foremost concern in sub-Saharan Africa has been that a significantly higher number of teachers are needed than are available. Short-term responses to increasing teacher numbers have often resulted in negative consequences such as increased workload, drops in entry requirements and skills development, as well as reducing the attractiveness of the profession, which in turn make it more difficult to recruit and retain teachers in the long term. Conducting my research in rural communities in South Africa, I have seen first-hand the impact of such short-term emergency programmes on the quality of teaching and learning. With this in mind, Potefract, Bonnet, and Vivekanandan, in the second chapter, explore UNESCO’s Teacher Training Initiative for sub-Saharan Africa (TTISSA) as a holistic response to the teacher challenge. This initiative was designed to confront the challenge of achieving an adequate number of teachers as well as ensuring they receive the skills and qualities to fulfil the expectations placed on them. According to the authors, the TTISSA has thus far been successful in enhancing knowledge and understanding of these complex issues and “played a strategic role in emphasising the importance of teachers to achieving quality education for all and served as a catalyst for innovation through sharing of lessons learned” (p. 33).

It is difficult to pick from the chapters that follow because each provided unique perspective and insight. In Chapter 4, economists Rogers and Vegas present an interesting argument about the benefits of performance incentives for teachers. They maintain that policy-makers in developing countries can successfully tackle the problem of teacher absence by increasing accountability and improving teachers’ performance. The discussion pulls from various cross-country studies in both primary and secondary schools. The reviewed studies highlight the importance of measuring teacher absence accurately, and the authors caution that regular administrative records may not be sufficient to gauge attendance problems. Inherent in their argument is that a teacher’s presence in the classroom does not necessarily signify that learning is indeed taking place, and certainly not quality learning. This aspect of education, however, is properly addressed in other chapters that look at the significance of teachers’ input in educational materials and learner motivation.

Undoubtedly, teachers can have an immensely positive impact on children’s lives, and never more so than in times of emergency or crisis. In Chapter 7, Kirk and Winthrop explore the different dimensions of teacher experience in Afghan schools and refugee camps in Ethiopia; according to them, “quality education is especially important for children affected by emergencies and to those who are living in contexts of fragility” (p. 122). They review the Healing Classroom initiative developed by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) focused on the protection, well-being, and development of children and youth affected by conflict. The initiative is an alternative approach that recognises and builds on the different experiences of teachers and focuses on teacher support and development.

As reported by Novelli in Chapter 6, political violence against teachers in Columbia is an ongoing challenge as education gains ground as a tool for social change. The chapter is a fascinating read that outlines a history of violence and resistance and the coping strategies educators have evolved to protect their human rights while remaining in the forefront of national liberation movements and educational reform. Similarly, schools in South Africa have become battlegrounds in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

In Chapter 5, Pithouse-Morgan and her colleagues investigate the issue of enhancing teacher development with the use of creative and participatory strategies, with particular reference to HIV-and AIDS-related issues. Making use of participatory video, metaphor drawing, photo-voice, and autobiography allows for an

intimate look at how teachers struggle with the complexities of teaching in a context where HIV and AIDS affects the entire community. Teachers are constantly torn between the burden of caring emotionally for the learners in their charge, and devoting attention to their own health and that of their own family members. This chapter emphasises how teachers' life experiences, perceptions, attitudes and understanding of the disease can significantly influence "their delivery of even the most carefully designed materials and shape their responses and classroom pedagogy in the local context in which they teach" (p. 81).

The book ends on a positive note with a summary by Dembélé and Rogers on making the slogan "More and better teachers" a reality. They effectively sum up the lessons learned from preceding chapters and offer valuable contributions to guide policy, planning, and action surrounding global teacher issues. They also neatly wrap up and re-emphasise the central theme that runs through the book: there is much to be gained in terms of educational quality from listening to teachers' voices.

In conclusion, *More and Better Teachers for Quality Education for All* is a collection of articles that collectively shed light on the complexity of truly achieving quality education for all amidst global social, economic, and political contexts. It accommodates broad perspectives, presents expansive studies and personal experiences, and proposes evidence-based recommendations for education policy. I am an action researcher and like to read books that not only open my mind to different experiences and perspectives, but also pack a punch when it comes to stories of positive action and social change. In my opinion, this book makes a loud contribution to current debates about quality education and ticks all those boxes. For a graduate student, it is also truly a treat to be able to freely download so valuable a book, compiled by respected authors, on a topic of such great significance.