Some Comments on the TALIS 2013 Results

The TALIS surveys provide valuable insights into the learning environments and working conditions of teachers in schools across a wide range of countries. Part of the power of these surveys arises from the ability to track changes over successive time points. However England has participated for the first time in 2013, so it is not possible to say if there have been any shifts in teachers’ job satisfaction or ways of working since the last TALIS survey in 2008. This is an important caveat, particularly given the massive educational policy changes made since 2010 in England.

Because the TALIS is survey is cross sectional it can only tell us about patterns in different countries and between countries. We should be cautious about any attempts at causal claims. For example there is an association between teachers’ job satisfaction and confidence and their involvement in collaborative learning. But we cannot claim involvement in collaborative learning necessarily boosts job satisfaction or confidence, it may be the other way round, that those who are more confident and more satisfied with their jobs are attracted to engage in collaborative learning. Most likely the three are mutually reinforcing.

Again the survey notes a stronger association between class behaviour and teachers’ job satisfaction, than that between job satisfaction and class size. But we cannot assume from this that class size is unimportant for job satisfaction or that if class sizes were increased teachers’ job satisfaction would not fall!

The main findings from the survey chime with those of other research on teacher effectiveness and school improvement and point to the value of:

Engaging teachers in school decisions

Other research on school leadership has also pointed to the value of distributing leadership by involving teachers in decision making in appropriate ways.

Providing more professional development opportunities

It is worrying that teachers in England spent less than half the number of days on professional development (PD) than the TALIS average (10 versus 22) and reported less engagement in educational conferences or seminars, individual or collaborative research or PD that leads to professional qualifications. Increasing opportunities for worthwhile ongoing professional development is increasingly necessary given the fast pace of educational change and should be a priority for funding by policy makers.

Providing meaningful feedback to help improve teaching practice

The report highlights the lower proportion of teachers in England who see positive changes in their motivation, public recognition or job satisfaction after appraisal or feedback. Formative feedback is recognised as important for learning, and ideally should link with relevant professional development. Unfortunately a large minority of teachers felt appraisals were only an administrative exercise in their schools.
It is worth noting that teachers report high numbers of working hours in a typical school week and the total is slightly higher in England than the TALIS average (51 hours). Teachers in England spend most time teaching and on closely linked activities (planning, and marking). The findings confirm the intensity and complex demands of teaching in schools most countries.

Finally the TALIS report finds only a minority believe teaching is a valued profession in their country and this that should also worry policy makers, given the importance of teachers in preparing children and young people for their future lives as productive and engaged citizens.

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\[\text{See the CfBT reviews of Effective Teaching by Ko & Sammons (2013)}\]

and on Successful School Leadership by Day & Sammons (2013)