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York Perspectives

Research to inform policy from the University of York Education Department

Talent spotting: identifying high-quality teachers

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Professor Rob Klassen, March 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increasing the proportion of talented teachers is a 'quick win' to improve education. But finding and identifying the people that have that special spark isn't always easy. Researchers at the University of York have developed and tested teacher selection methods that identify candidates who are best suited to the job.

If applied widely the methods developed at York will increase teacher quality and reduce the time and money spent on teacher recruitment and selection.

> 69 million teachers will need to be selected and trained by 2030 worldwide [UNESCO 2016]

CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

All over the world a shortage of high-quality teachers is hampering education improvement. UNESCO recently estimated the world will need nearly 70 million new teachers in the next decade. In the UK the Department for Education spends over £35 million on teacher recruitment every year, but the selection methods used in teacher education are 'ad hoc and information poor' and may result in lower quality teachers and higher attrition rates. Improving teacher selection improves national outcomes: replacing a less effective teacher with an average-performing teacher increases students' lifetime income by approximately $250,000 per classroom.

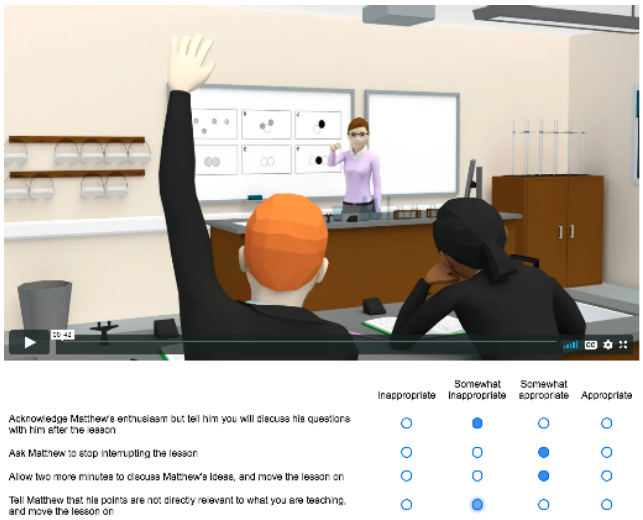
Recruiting, selecting and training excellent teachers is key to improving education.

NEW RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

The first step is to find the right people. Over the last decade, Klassen and his research team at the University of York's Teacher Selection Project have tested selection tools based on classroom simulations that assess key personal attributes associated with teaching effectiveness.

Using online classroom simulation tools known as 'situational judgment tests' (SJTs) and reliable interview protocols (multiple mini-interviews, or MMIs), they have devised better ways to measure classroom judgment. *"Often there are more applicants than places. Our selection tools help to reliably sift out the best (and worst) applicants,"* says Klassen.

Similar screening and selection techniques have been widely used by medical schools for some time but this is the first time they have been used to select prospective teachers. Klassen and his colleagues have developed context-specific SJTs and MMIs and administered them to over 80,000 teacher training applicants around the world, including the UK, Australia, Finland, and other countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa.



Online situational judgment test from Teacher Selection Project

The findings indicate that SJTs are more effective and efficient than conventional methods routinely used to identify future teachers.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Significant time and money can be saved if these screening tools are applied widely to teacher selection, and in the long term the Teacher Selection Project will translate into higher quality education and a reduction in people leaving the profession.

Education ministries and teacher training institutions around the world need to adopt research-supported selection tools. The evidence shows that methods developed by the Teacher Selection Project reliably identify the people who are best suited to teaching, saving significant amounts of time and money spent on recruitment and selection. In the longer term the Teacher Selection Project is expected to lead to greater teacher effectiveness and a reduction in people leaving the profession.

An evidence-based approach needs to be applied to all aspects of teacher improvement. The Teacher Selection Project at the University of York are world leaders in teacher selection research, making them ideally placed to help improve the teaching workforce.

AUTHORS

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Professor Rob Klassen is the lead researcher for the Teacher Selection Project and Professor and Chair of the Psychology in Education Research Centre at the University of York. His work on the Teacher Selection Project (TSP) is funded by the European Research Council (2015-2021) and is conducted in eight countries. He has published over 100 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on the topics of motivation, teacher selection and teacher development. He is a Chartered Psychologist in the UK and a Fellow of the American Psychological Association.

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Further information

EduSelect is the commercial arm of the Teacher Selection Project. EduSelect provides tools to improve and streamline selection and development using online teaching simulations. The work is based on over 10 years of research and focuses on developing selection programmes for teacher training organisations and national education systems; and building teacher development interventions using interactive, online 'scenario-based' learning methods.