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'Most great learning happens in groups. Collaboration is the stuff of growth' - [Sir Ken Robinson Ph.D.](#)

Teachers are considered, rightly, the most important element within schools influencing student learning. In other words: it takes a good teacher to make a good learner. But what makes a good teacher? Undoubtedly vocational abilities, personal characteristics, and individual attitudes are part of the picture. However, this is also true for many other professions. Some would argue that it all boils down to knowing what to teach and how to teach it! While this might be true, it still leaves many questions open if we think of the diversity of our classrooms in terms of social, economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

A recent Eurydice report ([The Teaching Profession in Europe](#), 2015) shows that in Europe, three components shape lower secondary teachers' competences during their initial training: knowledge of the subject, pedagogical training, and in-school placements. Although in quite different ways and proportions, almost all education systems provide time and space for these three aspects. In addition, in most countries newly qualified teachers go through an induction phase, and are quite commonly followed by a mentor who supports them when needed.

When asked how prepared they feel to teach, knowledge of their subject rarely seems to be an issue both for new and older teachers. However only 40 % of teachers declare feeling very well prepared in pedagogy, and less than half in the practical aspects of teaching.

Similarly, when asked about their needs in terms of professional development, 75 % of teachers express low or no needs at all in knowledge of the curriculum or their subject field. Conversely, many teachers express needs in areas that would allow them to innovate and tailor their pedagogical approaches such as ICT skills for teaching, approaches to individualised learning, or teaching cross-curricular skills. Other highly ranked topics, such as managing student behaviour, teaching in a multicultural and multilingual setting, and student career guidance and counselling, show that teaching today is a rather complex profession and that the 'how to teach' part is multi-faceted. Moreover, it also tells us that teachers see their role as going beyond the simple transmission of specific and subject-based knowledge: they are, or wish to be preparing students for the complexities of contemporary life, with its pressure to be active citizens, respectful of diversity, critical, creative, flexible...

As pointed out by the [European Commission](#) in a report on 'Supporting teacher competence development for better learning outcomes', 'the range and complexity of competences required for teaching in the 21st century is so great that any one individual is unlikely to have them all, nor to have developed them all to the same high degree'. This may partly explain the increasing number of networks of teachers that are growing for exchange of practices and professional development, allowing for more peer-based, collaborative, less structured, bottom-up and possibly ICT-enabled

forms of mutual support. Interestingly, teachers are more satisfied with their job and consider it better valued by society when they work in an environment that shows a collaborative school culture, shared responsibility, and active participation in school decisions.

All this calls for a different way of looking at our teachers. When thinking about them, most of us would picture an individual, maybe with the face of our favourite or most detested teacher, in front of a classroom more or less respectful, with a blackboard behind, imparting some lecture on some topic. Instead, we might need to 'break the isolation of the classroom and the "one teacher one classroom" doctrine' and recognise that 'effective teaching requires the involvement of teams of professionals rather than individual teachers' (European Commission, [Strengthening Teaching in Europe](#), 2015).

So, there might not be one single recipe for what makes a good teacher for every single student in our education systems, but stimulating teams of teachers to work out together what is best for their own students, and providing them with the support they need to get there, might be a good starting point... and this is probably what a good teacher would suggest if asked how to improve teaching in the 21st century.

Authors: Peter Birch and Elisa Simeoni