Introduction

Research into educational success in various countries including Singapore has shown that teaching quality is among the key factors in raising student achievement (Borko, 2004; Borman & Kimball, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011; Herdeiro & Costa e Silva, 2013; King, 2013). The McKinsey reports on the past TIMSS and PISA international tests affirm that part of the reason for most countries’ excellent performances is the effectiveness of their teachers (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; 2009). Leading educational research agencies such as the Alliance for Excellent Education (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011) and the Consortium of Policy Research in Education (Corcoran, 2007) also concur on the intimate link between the quality of teachers and what and how students learn. This report briefly illustrates the various structures, programmes and policies Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) has in place to (i) ensure and improve quality teaching and learning, and (ii) recruit and retain quality teachers.

Ensuring and improving quality teaching and learning

Ethos of the Teaching Service

Professional core identity is based on those elements which give a sense of meaning and commitment to people in their work (Eteläpelto 2007; Kirpal 2004a; Kirpal 2004b). Promoting professionalism is thus a critical part of the fabric of the Singapore system from selection for teacher preparation through retirement. To enhance professionalism, MOE aims to bring about an enhanced state of teacher ownership and leadership through galvanising its teaching fraternity through various measures.

A system that is steered and bound by a compelling moral purpose is more likely to inspire teachers to re-align their practices with the fundamentals of teaching and learning and exert intentional influence on professional learning to realise the best educational outcomes for their students (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). The ‘Ethos of the Teaching Service’ was
launched to extoll Singapore teachers to lead, care and inspire, to uphold the professional identity of teachers (MOE, 2014a). The ethos clearly states the embodiment of a shared mission, setting a common high standard for the teaching fraternity to aspire towards.

**Pre-service education**

All teachers begin their professional journey at the National Institute of Education (NIE). As Singapore’s sole pre-service teacher training agency, NIE provides comprehensive teacher education programmes with four major components: Academic Studies, Education Studies, Curriculum Studies and School-based Practicum (Lee & Tan, 2010). The Education Studies component addresses the knowledge pre-service teachers ought to have with regard the students as learners, as well as the psychological processes of learning. The Academic Studies component addresses their subject matter knowledge. The Curriculum Studies component addresses the pedagogical content knowledge of pre-service teachers in the teaching subjects they have been recruited to teach by MOE. The strong tripartite relationship between NIE, MOE and our schools provides the opportunity for the pre-service teachers to learn the critical skills of a teacher through school-based practicum. Such learning opportunities allow for the translation of theoretical knowledge to practical application in a school context (NIE, 2014).

**In-service professional learning: Teacher Ownership and Leadership**

Teachers’ professional learning journey continues upon graduation. MOE recognises the importance of continuing learning among its teachers as they navigate in an increasingly complex, ambiguous and constantly-changing global landscape. To encourage teachers to take responsibility in professional learning, MOE provides a comprehensive structure – the Teacher Growth Model (TGM). TGM empowers in-service teachers to identify areas of learning relevant to their needs as 21st century teachers. TGM was conceptualised to articulate the desired outcomes of the 21st century teacher, offer learning dimensions to
support the development of each desired teacher outcome, and customise programmes to cater to the teachers in their various stages of development under a coherent framework (MOE, 2014b).

Beginning teachers undergo a robust two-year induction programme to prepare them for the most challenging stage of their teaching career. Besides milestone courses such as the Beginning Teachers’ Orientation Programme, all beginning teachers are paired with mentors in their schools for on-the-job, school-based professional learning. According to TALIS 2014 country report (TALIS, 2014), 85% of Singapore teachers in schools have mentors who share the same teaching subjects compared to the TALIS average of 68%. Beginning teachers are also mandatorily assigned lesser teaching loads to help them ease into their work in schools.

For the rest of the teaching population, professional learning adopts various forms – from the more formal professional development courses to the less formal networked learning. Here, one key mechanism – networked learning – is described (Katz & Earl, 2010). Several platforms are created for teachers to learn and collaborate together within and beyond schools. Every school is a Professional Learning Community with several learning teams embarking on action research, lesson study or learning circles (MOE, 2014c). Common time for professional learning is set aside in each school to facilitate teacher collaboration, sharing and peer observation. Beyond schools, networked learning is also promoted through the creation of Networked Learning Communities of teachers who share similar teaching subjects, interests or roles. Some of communities are deliberated designed and set up while most are emergent in nature based on teachers’ interests. MOE also leverages on the affordances of information communication technologies. A system-wide learning content management system - One Portal All Learners (OPAL) – extends teachers’ opportunities to engage in online learning, collaboration, asynchronised discussion and exchange of resources. This system was awarded the prestigious FutureGov Awards in 2013.
Supportive policies

MOE also recognises that to encourage professional learning to take place, it requires monetary and resources support at the system level. Teachers in Singapore are entitled 100-training hours for professional development which can be utilised during school hours and days. Generous funding is given to schools and to each teacher to support their development. For teachers embarking on extended professional learning such as undergraduate and postgraduate courses, they can tap on comprehensive financial support and leave schemes. Collectively, these policies have resulted in high professional development participation rate among Singapore teachers (TALIS, 2014).

Recruiting and retaining the best

Teachers in Singapore are central to the delivery of quality learning in the students. MOE is committed to attracting, developing and retaining a quality school team. MOE recruits among the best of the country to the education profession. MOE routinely selects applicants from within the top 30% of their cohort. This is possible because it provides competitive and progressive remuneration with periodic reviews to ensure that teachers’ salaries keep pace with the private sector and commensurate with their roles and responsibilities as they move up the career structure.

While a good salary package and structure can help attract potential entrants into the profession, it may be insufficient to retain them in it. To ensure that Singapore keeps a quality teaching force, MOE looks into various ways to do so. One of these ways is to provide more career options and choices to match the aspirations of the individual teachers. Understanding that teachers have different aspiration, MOE provides three career tracks for teachers. The Teaching Track provides professional development and advancement opportunities for teachers who are keen to further develop as pedagogical and curricular leaders, adopt mentoring and coaching roles to beginning teachers and peers, and influence and implement
reform efforts in teaching and learning. The Leadership Track provides opportunity for teachers keen to take on leadership positions in schools and MOE headquarters. These teachers are groomed to lead departments, schools and HQ divisions toward quality teaching and learning. The Specialist Track is designed for teachers who are inclined towards more specialised areas where deep knowledge and skills are essential for breaking new ground in educational developments. The career structure offers flexibility for lateral movements across the three tracks, where teachers can choose to move across the different career tracks, as long as they satisfy the criteria for the role they wish to take on.

**CONCLUSION**

This report succinctly illustrates some of the key policies, structures, programmes and processes that MOE has in place to ensure and improve quality teaching through professional learning and to recruit and retain quality teachers. While we acknowledge that our students have done relatively well in several international tests, we are aware of the challenges ahead in the 21st century world, and are thus open to continual learning.

**REFERENCES**


Eteläpelto 2007

Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009


Kirpal 2004a;
Kirpal 2004b


