



Pearson

Brazil: What makes an effective teacher?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.

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BARBER & MOURSHED, 2007

Decades of research make it clear: teachers make a difference in student learning. In fact, Stanford University economist Eric Hanushek (1992) has noted that the difference between a good and a bad teacher can be a full level of achievement in a single school year. Given the strength of these findings, nations around the world recognize that in order to improve educational outcomes and equity they must focus on effectiveness of teachers. A critical step toward achieving that goal is for individual countries to identify the competencies required for effectiveness and use them to inform teaching standards, pre-service teacher preparation, professional development programs and performance evaluations. To make an impact, those systems and processes will need to be based on a common understanding, within each country, of what it means to be an effective teacher.

Oxfam’s international study of teacher competences and standards concludes that in order to build that common understanding, it is “absolutely necessary that the question as to what is considered a quality educator is investigated among stakeholders” (Bourgonje & Tromp, 2011, p. 145). Giving stakeholders a voice not only allows us to understand how they think and feel about a topic; it provides an opportunity to help frame important policy decisions that directly impact their lives. Pearson is therefore surveying learners, teachers, principals, education researchers, policymakers and parents in 23 countries regarding their perceptions of what it takes to be an effective teacher. Pearson is comparing the views expressed by these stakeholders with both current government teaching standards and research on effective teaching.

This report, the sixth in the series, summarizes the results of the survey conducted in Brazil, where the government has been working to provide a high quality education to all children, yet still faces significant struggles in developing and training teachers to deliver high quality instruction. In the global report, 23 participating countries are compared not only across stakeholder groups, but by country as well.

The Survey

To learn the top qualities education stakeholders in Brazil seek in their teachers, we administered surveys across the country (see **Figure A1** in the Appendix). The stakeholder groups include:

- Students ages 15-19
- Parents of K-12 students
- K-12 teachers
- K-12 administrators
- Education researchers and policymakers

Respondents were asked to list, in their own words, between three and fifteen qualities that they feel are most important in making an “effective” teacher and to indicate what type of teacher, by subject(s) and grade level(s), they were thinking about while creating their list. The survey did not define “effective” for respondents, other than that it meant “good,” allowing respondents to define what an effective teacher meant for themselves. We developed a coding system to categorize responses, based on prior research about competencies of effective teachers. This coding scheme was reviewed by teachers, principals, education policymakers and researchers and revised iteratively as additional responses were coded, resulting in a final list of 32 categories.

The Most Important Qualities of Teachers in Brazil

We found remarkable consistency in how the groups of surveyed stakeholders responded when they were asked to list between three and 15 of what they believed to be the most important qualities or competencies of effective teachers. The most common response across the full sample was that effective teachers need to build trusting, compassionate *Relationships* with their students. It was also the most common response when comparing elementary, middle and high school grade levels. Private schools and female respondents also valued this critical skill the most.

The second and third most common responses across all stakeholder groups were *Professionalism* and a *Patient, Caring* and kind personality. *Professionalism* refers to the teacher’s workplace demeanor and responsibilities, including compliance with rules and policies and was most often expressed as being attentive, responsible and respectful. Patient, caring refers to positive personality characteristics, with patience, friendliness and kindness emphasized most.

Most Important Qualities of Teachers in Brazil

1	Ability to Develop Trusting, Productive Relationships
2	Professionalism
3	Patient, Caring, Kind Personality
4	Dedication to Teaching
5	Teaching Skills/Pedagogical Practices
6	Ability to Make Ideas and Content Clear
7	Subject Matter Knowledge
8	Ability to Engage Students in Learning
9	Classroom Management
10	Knowledge of Learners

When the responses of all stakeholder groups are combined, the other seven categories in the Top 10 qualities or competencies mentioned, were in descending order:

- *Dedication* to teaching and students' success
- Knowledge and use of pedagogical methods or *Teaching Skills* that support student learning
- The ability to make new or complex *Ideas and Content Clear* for learners
- Deep content or *Subject Matter Knowledge*
- Ability to make content and learning engaging and motivate students to learn
- Ability to create a safe, productive learning environment (*Engaging, Classroom Management*)
- *Knowledge of Learners* and how they develop cognitively, socially and emotionally, and the ability to adapt content to meet the needs of individual learners, including those with special needs

Seven of the Top 10 most frequent responses for each group of stakeholders were shared by all groups. Moreover, the responses of stakeholders associated with public and private schools were also remarkably similar: they shared the same Top 10 response categories, reported in slightly different order. When addressing the competencies most valued for an elementary, middle or high school teacher, respondents shared nine of the Top 10. Male and female respondents also shared the same Top 10, in slightly different order.

The categories of qualities mentioned most often across the entire sample reflect how strongly education stakeholders in Brazil value dispositions of character (responsibility, trustworthiness) and care (relatedness, responsiveness) in their teachers. There is research that supports the link between these dispositions, teacher effectiveness, and learner outcomes. What was notable was that the survey responses did not generally align well with the guidelines or set of norms for teachers outlined in Brazil's *Lei Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para o Curso de Pedagogia (National Curricular Guidelines for the Pedagogy Course)*. Additionally, there were some significant gaps between what the educator stakeholder groups valued most and what research tells us matters most in enhancing student learning. Few responses addressed the importance of knowledge and use of *Assessment* to evaluate and track student progress. Yet researchers suggest that this is the single most important aspect of teaching practice to enhance student learning. Also, few referenced making learning *Challenging* and rigorous for all students, in the belief that all can learn. A “watered-down” curriculum, in fact, has been shown to increase drop-out, repeating grades, and/or needing remediation, all of which are documented problems in Brazil's public schools.

Implications

The greater emphasis placed on teacher dispositions such as caring, kindness, passion, effort and professionalism, than on teaching skills may reflect the belief that without these critical dispositions, subject knowledge and pedagogical skills are insufficient to foster effective learning. Given the challenges in recruiting the “best and brightest” into teaching, and improving the quality of pre- and in-service teacher training, this study offers an opportunity for Brazil to re-think teacher effectiveness policies and the impact on the quality of the teaching workforce. Ultimately, the survey results reaffirm the notion that, at its foundation, learning is a social enterprise, and effective teaching is about trusting relationships between teachers and learners that foster learner success, as these communities define it.

Using These Results to Improve Teaching Practice in Brazil

We recommend that the results of this survey be used to inform and guide the definition of what it means to be an effective teacher in the teaching and learning contexts of Brazil. Moreover, the results can inform discussions about teacher preparation, hiring, training, and evaluation in Brazil, particularly in light of the problems in these areas documented by research.

Given the stakeholders' emphasis on the importance of teacher-student relationships, teacher training programs could place greater emphasis on dispositions that stakeholders believe are essential for effectiveness, such as patience, passion, and responsibility. The programs could assess these qualities in candidates, counsel candidates on career fit and provide training to improve teaching dispositions in future teachers. As other researchers have noted,

focusing on improving the social relationship that is at the heart of student learning should lead to improvements in a wide range of student outcomes in schools.

Likewise, training programs may want to emphasize the knowledge and skills that were mentioned less frequently but have been shown to be critical to effective teaching and student learning, such as assessment of learner progress and provision of a challenging, rigorous curriculum for all students, with an emphasis on the learning process and what have been referred to as “non-cognitive” skills.

While this research identifies many different qualities and competencies of effective teachers, we caution against using the results to generate a checklist approach under the misguided belief that there is a single winning pattern of competencies to be an effective teacher. Finally, it cannot be overstated that to be effective teachers, the work conditions and environment, first and foremost, must be well managed; school context and community culture have a profound influence on the way different teacher roles and competencies are understood, prioritized, and practiced.

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