



Fostering learning communities among teachers

- According to the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), teachers across countries overwhelmingly desire more professional development.
- In all TALIS countries, there are low rates of co-operative professional development and collaborative teaching practice.
- Countries could use professional development to effectively and efficiently build and improve professional learning communities in schools.

What is TALIS?

TALIS is the first international survey examining teaching and learning environments in schools. It asks teachers and school principals about their work, their schools and their classrooms. This cross-country analysis helps countries identify others facing similar challenges and learn about their policies.

TALIS 2008 focused on lower secondary education teachers and their principals. It sampled 200 schools in each of 24 countries and 20 teachers in each school. TALIS 2013 is currently being conducted in 33 countries.

The information in this brief comes largely from the 2012 report *Teaching Practices and Pedagogical Innovation: Evidence from TALIS*. More information available at www.oecd.org/talis.

Teachers' professional development experience

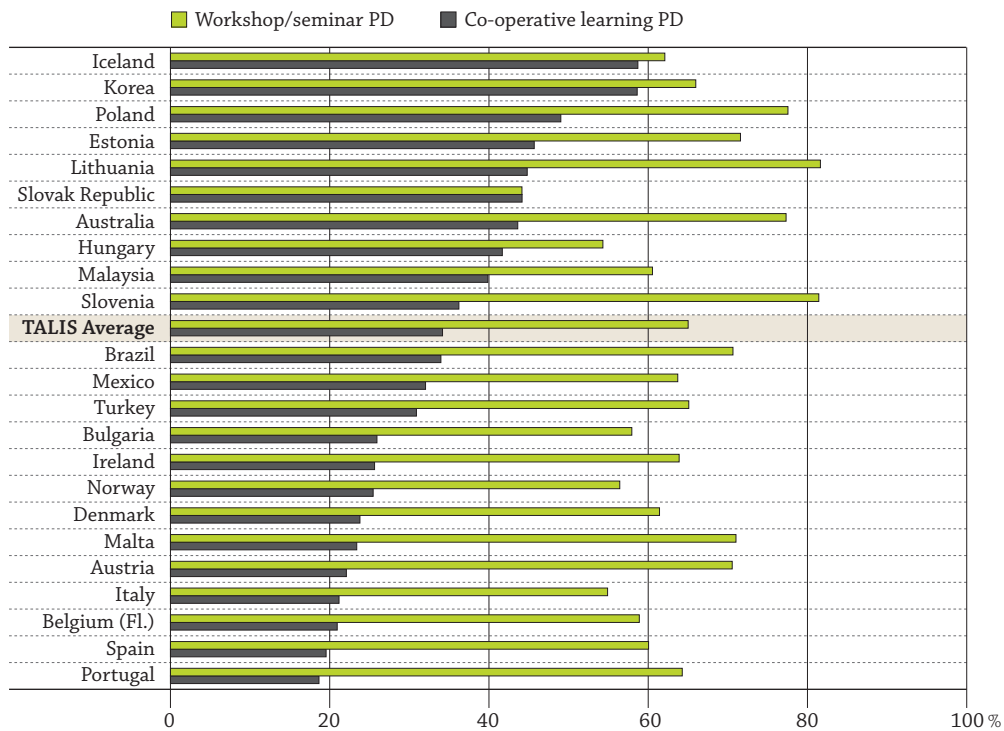
The TALIS survey asks teachers about their access to and experience with professional development and how they feel it affects their development as teachers. Across the countries surveyed, the average amount of professional development of teachers varies. Overall, teachers have higher participation rates in workshop or seminar-style professional development compared to more co-operative-style professional development (see Figure 1). Co-operative professional development is more interactive and personalised than workshops or seminars might be, as it involves activities like observing and visiting other schools, participating in a network of teachers with a common objective, mentoring, and/or peer observation and coaching.

On average, 65% of TALIS teachers reported participating in workshop or seminar-style professional development as opposed to only 34% reporting participation in co-operative professional development.¹ However, the differences in participation in co-operative professional development across countries are quite varied. Teachers in seven countries (Portugal, Spain, Belgium (Fl.), Italy, Austria, Malta, Denmark) report less than 25% participation in co-operative professional development while only two (Korea and Iceland) experience rates above 50%.

1. The scales were calculated by performing an average sum of the individual items associated with these scales.



Figure 1 • Participation in two types of professional development, by country
Average participation rates in each type of professional development



Source: OECD, TALIS Database. Teaching and Learning International Survey 2008.

Demand for more professional development

On the whole, teachers are reporting a need for more professional development. In TALIS,² 55% of teachers across the countries say that they want to participate in more development than they did in the previous 18 months. In some countries, this rate is even higher, with more than 3/4 of teachers in Mexico (85%), Brazil (84%), Malaysia (83%), and Portugal (76%) saying they want to participate in more professional development activities. Only in the Flemish community of Belgium do fewer than 1/3 of teachers want more development than they received.³

TALIS also asked teachers to indicate what kind of barriers prevent them from participating in more professional development. Across the participating countries, the most commonly cited reasons were a conflict with the teacher's work schedule (47%) and the feeling that there was no suitable professional development available (42%).

What this means in practice

Teachers want more professional development but are seeing many barriers to getting the development they need. The challenge for policymakers and school leaders is how to provide teachers with the support they need while accommodating their busy work schedules and making sure that appropriate, high-quality offerings are readily available.

2. TALIS 2008 report: *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Results from TALIS*.

3. TALIS 2008, Table 3.3.



The emergence of professional learning communities

Professional learning communities (PLCs) can be defined as school-wide communities “aim[ed] at continuous improvement of teaching practices by involving staff in in-depth, systematic, collaborative activities of professional development at the school level” as defined by Hord (1997).⁴ PLCs establish a school culture that promotes student learning through the establishment of values, norms, and shared expectations among teachers.⁵

In TALIS, teachers were asked six questions that can be taken to reflect characteristics of a PLC. The items chosen to define these characteristics relate to the level of shared vision, focus on learning, reflection, de-privatisation of practice, and collaborative activities in the teacher’s school. Theoretically, if a teacher reported experiencing all five dimensions in Table 1 below, she could be said to participate in a PLC.

Table 1. **Item wording for professional learning communities scale**

Dimension	Teachers are asked: how often do you do the following in this school?
Shared vision	Attend staff meetings to discuss the vision and mission of the school.
Focus on learning	Ensure common standards in evaluations for assessing student progress.
Reflection	Take part in professional learning activities (e.g. team supervision).
De-privatisation of practice	Observe other teachers’ classes and provide feedback.
Collaborative activities	Exchange teaching materials with colleagues.
	Teach jointly as a team in the same class.

Source: OECD (2012), *Teaching Practices and Pedagogical Innovation: Evidence from TALIS*, OECD Publishing, Table 3.2, page 55.

The TALIS data show that in many countries, collaborative activities among staff are common, but participation in reflection and de-privatisation of practice were much less common. The research literature echoes this trend as well; PLCs have become popular in many countries, but attempts to establish PLCs too often rely on conventional, top-down programmatic implementation as compared to more ground-up, context-based development.⁶

Using professional development to build professional learning communities

Professional development has important associations with professional learning communities across all TALIS countries. First of all, professional development, especially the co-operative type, is particularly appropriate for developing the values, norms, and shared expectations among teachers that PLCs are known for. Analysis of TALIS data (see Figure 2) shows that teachers who participate in co-operative learning professional development also experience higher levels of participation in a PLC in their schools as opposed to when they participate in workshop or seminar professional development. (The only exception to this is Norway.) In 19 of the countries surveyed, the association of co-operative professional development with PLC is often even greater than that of self-efficacy, which is also known to be strongly related to professional learning communities.

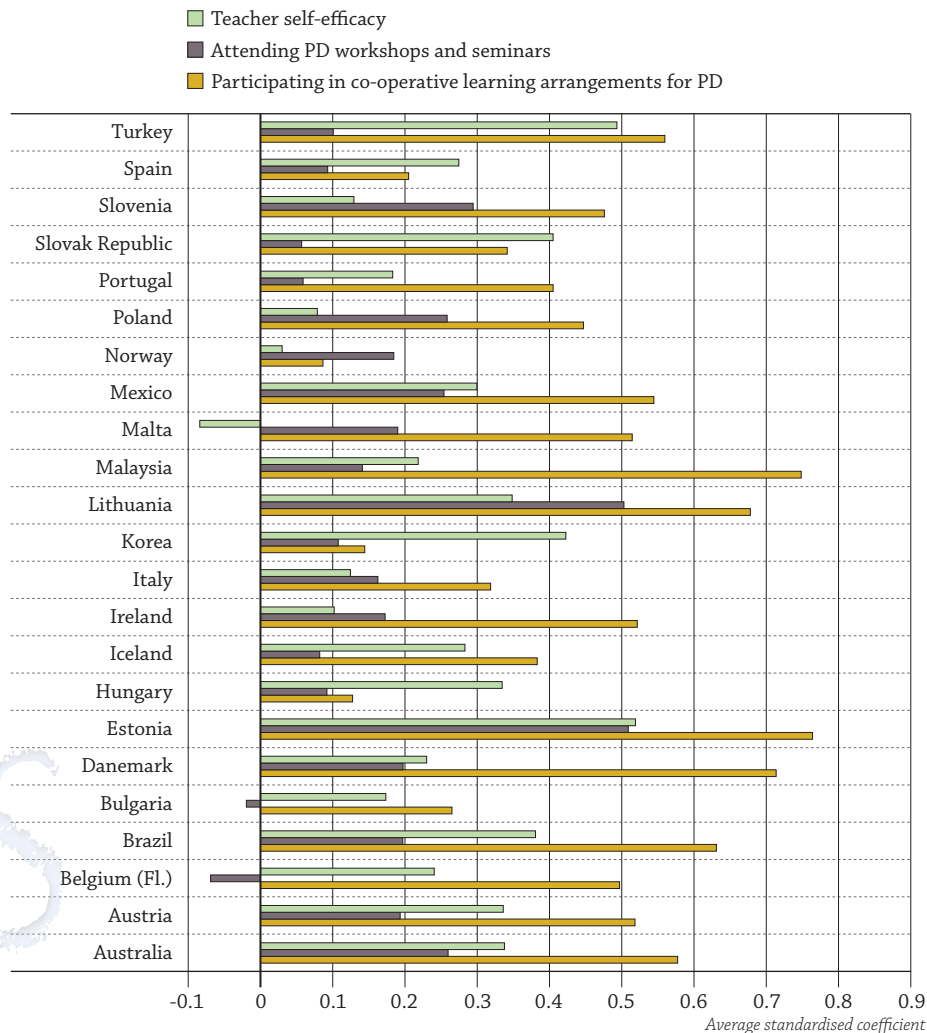
4. OECD (2012), *Teaching Practices and Pedagogical Innovation: Evidence from TALIS*, OECD Publishing, page 34. See Hord, S.M. (1997), *Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement*, Southwest Educational Laboratory, Austin, Texas.

5. Bryk, A.S. and M.E. Driscoll (1988), *The high school as community: Contextual influences and consequences for students and teachers*, National Center on Effective Schools, University of Wisconsin - Madison, Madison, Wisconsin.

6. OECD (2012), *Teaching Practices and Pedagogical Innovation: Evidence from TALIS*, OECD Publishing, page 33.



Figure 2 • Association of two types of teachers' professional development and teacher self-efficacy with professional learning communities, by country



Source: OECD, TALIS Database. OECD (2012), *Teaching Practices and Pedagogical Innovation: Evidence from TALIS*, OECD Publishing, Annex B, pp. 131-143.

The bottom line Professional learning communities in schools have the potential to provide school-wide, ongoing support within the teacher's own context. Given that teachers want more professional development, but often have difficulty finding offerings that fit with their schedule and provide the right support when they need it, focusing efforts on co-operative professional development would appear to be received well by teachers and at the same time might aid in the development of professional learning communities at a school level.

Visit
www.oecd.org/talis

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To learn more
OECD (2012), *Teaching Practices and Pedagogical Innovations: Evidence from TALIS*, OECD Publishing.