



GWI Discussion Network for 2023 World Teachers' Day

Discussion 4-11 October 2023

GWI VP Education, Dr. Shirley Gillett, initiated a GWI Discussions Network discussion to observe World Teachers' Day on 5 October. Members were invited to participate in the discussion between 4 – 11 October. **Please find the discussion below organised in alphabetical order by first name.**

Teachers and Their Influence - World Teachers' Day

UNESCO has always placed teachers at the heart of the fight for the right to inclusive and quality education. Presently, a concerning shortage of teachers exists worldwide, especially secondary teachers. Yes since, and perhaps, due to COVID-19, there has been a growing emphasis on IT replacing teachers within the educational landscape. However, compelling evidence depicts that the relationship between teachers and students still holds a special significance in learning.

GWI has tirelessly supported and affirmed the value of teachers in several ways. GWI 2019 Resolution 1, Strategic Advocacy Plan calls for diversity in teacher education as a positive contribution to an equitable education. Furthermore, GWI's "Teachers for Rural Futures" project addresses one of the major barriers to girls' education in the country – a lack of women teachers at the secondary level.

Therefore, as a “shout out” to World Teachers' Day celebrated on 5 October. I kindly request you to share your experiences of teachers in your lives and their influences. What was/is schooling, and teachers like in your country and culture? For example, how many children are in a classroom? What facilities do the teachers have? What are their teaching styles and philosophies, and so on? How influential have you found teachers in your life and is there a special one who made a difference?

We look forward to hearing your comments and stories on our online GWI discussion platform.

Thank you for your insights and participation,

Dr Shirley Gillett, GWI VP Education



Discussion Contributions

Alice Merab Kagoda, Association of University Women Uganda

“In Uganda education is a privilege despite the government policy of Universal free Education for both primary and secondary education. The government is overwhelmed by the large number of school going age children drop out of school. the private schools outnumber the government aided schools. The classes are large with over 50 pupils/students, taught by one teacher. Rural schools are affected more than urban schools. Some children do not have scholastic materials like exercise books, pencils and pens and teachers struggle to teach in such situations. Some rural schools do not have furniture and writing is a real struggle.. Some schools have no infrastructure and learners study under trees and when it rains they struggle to the only being around like a church, mosque etc Imagine the teacher working under such conditions mention above among others.”

Chizuko Suzuki, Japanese Association of University Women

“Firstly, I'd like to make a report from Japan on the current problem in Japan, that is, a serious shortage of the number of teachers especially at public schools on the compulsory education level: elementary schools and junior high schools (from 6 yrs to 15 yrs children and students are to be enrolled). And the situation has been getting worse year by year. Reasons and causes for this issue have been understood as: 1) those who want to become teachers are decreasing, particularly among young people, mainly due to the hard workload against the salary, and the increasingly demanding responsibility for dealing with diverse children and students with varied peculiarities and backgrounds; 2) a lot of teachers of the baby-boomers generation have become retiring age. Outcomes from the problem of teachers shortage might be apparent and we are concerned that the quality of education will get lowered and as a result, the children/the young generation may suffer from it, being deprived of their rights to develop their own individual potentiality. To improve such a situation, some measures have started to be taken by the ministry of education and local governments which are in charge of recruiting new teachers for public schools. I, however, think they are not enough to solve the problem completely, and I believe we need to transform our fundamental concept of "teachers"; the Japanese people's image of "teachers" are confined to those who are the Japanese, university graduates, the youth and non-disabled persons. Such an idea of teachers may restrict not only recruiting sufficient numbers of teachers but also meeting the requirements for ideal education: More diversified and inclusive, as called for by GWI 2019 Resolution 1, Strategic Advocacy Plan. In conclusion, the education in Japan should be expanded both in quantity: Increasing the number of teachers, and in quality: Appointing persons with more diverse natures and backgrounds as teachers, which will make the education itself in Japan more inclusive, and equitable to lead the nation more prosperous and sustainable. Response: So informative- thank you so much for this. Teacher status, pay, and working conditions remain a major issue in the US. And because education is funded primarily by states and local funding sources there can be significant variability and inequity.”

Dorothy Meyer, Graduate Women New Zealand

“The Influence of Teachers in my life. I was the eldest child in my family and both my parents had been (Mother) or were teachers. We were read to, played with and encouraged to be at school and enjoying that all aspects of that experience. Despite my success and enjoyment of school I decided that I would not follow my parents into education after I finished University until an opportunity to work in a secondary school during a year of my University course made me realise that that was the direction I should take. Such was the stimulation from the opportunities during my Teacher Training year that I determined that once I had had some real experience in a classroom that I was in charge of that I wanted to expand my experience by acquiring qualifications in teacher education at a post-graduate level. I was successful in all of these aspirations but not able to fulfill them for several years due to marriage, living in two different countries and having a family. When I was finally appointed to a position in teacher training I became very disillusioned as I felt the training had not progressed as the world had and there was a need for greater collaboration between Teacher Trainers, Classroom teachers and Teacher trainees. Once I was able to obtain a position in a school where I would have responsibility for the teacher trainees when they came to the school for teaching practice I was able to put into action a more realistic and collaborative programme. The trainees who passed through my programme came to see a much fuller role for themselves when they became teachers with a classroom to be responsible for and how their contribution was part of the school’s overall programme. Of course I am talking about what was happening in schools when I retired some 30 years ago but I do know that at the time it was considered to be a successful and more realistic approach to teacher education. Because I often had responsibility for low ability classes I made certain to value these students. They were for the most part going to move into low paid service type employment but would be important cogs in the wheel of work, and that they knew this would be a key fact to impart during school lessons. That I enjoyed success in school and subsequently was in some respects due to the parents I was born to; to some of the teachers I had during my school years – both elementary and secondary and especially at the tertiary level; the colleagues I worked with, and some of the community people I worked with in order to give students a variety of experiences. Education has always been part of my life – and still is because, for example, yesterday I arranged a programme for the Ninety Plus year old members of our village community to learn about our food needs in older age. They were fascinated to know why their bodies demand that they be careful about salt intake!”

Kati Lyon-Villiger, Canadian Federation Of University Women

“The main draw-back that seems to discourage potentially excellent teachers from joining the teaching profession in Canada is the heavy political interference in the school system that prevents them from teaching scientific truth, rather than politically interpreted science, unchanged literature rather than politically correct versions, and art that is free from political rules and demands. I read with great interest Ontario’s curriculum for high schools and found it very logical. However, when I read the implementation plan that literally threatens teachers with dismissal when they do not use politically prescribed language and subjects, railroading our innocent and especially ignorant young children into situations and problems they really aren’t ready yet to deal with. This leads to them making bad decisions. Parents are responsible for their children, and their rights should not be questioned unless a child is in danger. It is so hard to see innocent young faces looking up to you, and having to feed them what you know are lies and incorrect facts. Give teachers broad guidelines, by all means, but allow them to teach the truth, the full known truth, and nothing but the truth, within these guidelines, that does not omit the two sides of augmented truth. Teachers must stand by, watching children being “dummified,” by the lack of systematic and disciplined acquisition of knowledge. Good teachers want their little or young students to be perfectly informed of the consequences of their actions, and they can only do that after rigorous, disciplined intellectual development, as we were taught. This means, they must be tested in the 37 subjects that good schools teach our children over twelve or thirteen years: mathematics: arithmetic, geometry, trigonometry, algebra, calculus, number theory, analysis, and statistics, optics and logic, chemistry, biochemistry, biology, microbiology, geology, earth sciences, natural sciences, zoology, botany, anthropology, ecology, meteorology, paleontology, cytology, sociology, psychology, political science, history, linguistics, music, architecture, English (of their native) language and literature, French (or some other) language and literature and at least one or two more languages as an optional subject, accounting, commerce, and economics. Some of our children in Ontario are, but many come to university woefully lacking or struggling with basic academic knowledge, especially reflecting their own cultures, from classic fairy-tales to quantum physics. Canada and the world need educated children, not morons primarily educated in politically imposed subjects of minor importance. I trust we all agree on that here and abroad.”

Maryline Lamp, Graduate Women International Netherlands

“May I still say thank you so much. And write yes to the reads and experiences, wisdoms and memories about our teachers around the world. I am so happy with the lessons, the philosophies, motivations and lots of meetings with each one of my former primary education and grammar school teachers (from the Dutch Kingdom). I cannot ever forget them. For today "we" still value the need and "richness" of Permanent Education everywhere. Many regards.”

Dr Meera Bondre, GWI VP Education, Indian Federation of University Women's Associations

"India is a very populous country and there are many economic, social and cultural strata. Although Hindi is the National language, each State has its own language and customs. Naturally, this makes an impact on the educational structure and system. So, it is a big challenge to educators and teachers, and it goes to their credit that they are doing a good job across the country in the area of imparting Inclusive quality education. The number of children in a classroom is mostly between 50 to 60 and sometimes even 70 to 80, The teachers are always overloaded, but still are coping well with this. The students in a class do differ in their capacities and the teachers have to follow a middle path. They are facing these challenges well and effectively educating their students. During the covid 19 period the teachers themselves got trained and conducted online classes to the best of their abilities. Thus the teachers in our country are doing a really good job."

Monique Sirois Kelly, De la fédération des femmes diplômées du Canada- LA FCFDU/Canadian Federation of University Women

"Bonjour du Canada:

J'ai enseigné toute ma vie à Montréal du Québec au Canada. Aujourd'hui une classe de maternelle à 37 enfants me dit ma voisine! Nous en avons 11, dans les "Années 80's" ! C'est sa deuxième année d'enseignement elle vient de passer d'une maternelle à une 7eme année! Il y a que les besoins de sa Commission scolaire qui compte ici à Toronto, Canada. En Ontario les journaux locaux nous apprennent qu'il y a 4 000 postes d'enseignants vacants toujours. en fin septembre pour cette année 2023-2024 scolaire! Quel désarroi! Les profs ici sont respectés comme professionnels! Les enseignants et enseignantes un peu moins. J'ai été choyée par un système privé, non gratuit; mais le système publiques chez-nous a toujours souffert! Tout le monde a été marqué par un bon prof! C'est un travail magique que nous faisons. Merci pour votre excellent travail!"

Rachel Anne Gillett, Graduate Women International Netherlands

"Dear GWI education VP and team,

Thanks for the opportunity to contribute to this rich forum. As a parent and an educator who has lived and experienced early childhood and primary education in three countries I have witnessed firsthand the shortage of teachers and the vital importance of funding, resources, and political advocacy for teaching and teachers. One of the consistent findings in longitudinal studies (for example the large, longitudinal Dunedin Study, which has followed 1000 individuals from birth to middle age) is that early childhood education and the influence of teachers matters massively in health and in economic and social stability and personal wellbeing, not to mention opportunity. In one of the wealthiest areas of the United States, with substantive state-level commitment to public education, and substantial tax income from biotech and Universities (Cambridge Massachusetts) our children went to the closest public, state-funded school, we didn't have or need a choice. They got free breakfasts and lunches - these were available for ALL children regardless of income (> no stigma!) and made a huge difference to me as a working parent. The school also had a choir, music lessons, art lessons and sports, all taught by specialist teachers. Our children flourished and we, as a family, experienced higher wellbeing. In the Netherlands, the shortage of teachers is drastic and teacher burnout is really high. We have also experienced the system as being rigid, not invested in seeing each child's potential, having a high dependence on standardized testing and spelling and memorisation. At one of the children's schools, classes of 28 were divided among other classes, when a teacher was absent and no relief teacher could be found, leading to classes of over 32 students per teacher - or they were sent home. The quality of schooling is deeply dependent on the leadership and many schools are run by large conglomerates which are an odd public-private mix, due to the past history of religious community-based services and high separation between religious communities in the Netherlands. These brief snapshots reflect specific neighbourhoods but also larger issues. The most significant of which is, in a highly resourced area, with lower class sizes (max 18, and almost always a teacher-aide in the class, and other support services) everyone learned better and had much better wellbeing, in our family's experience. Teachers seemed happier and had time to chat. Our children learned more and faster and felt happier. The upshot is that resources, teacher support, and openness to growth and child-centredness, are vital. Teachers are vital to functioning societies. Women's education is a key metric in social wellbeing. That takes teachers, it takes massive resources and it takes political advocacy. It takes moving spending from defence into education. It takes centering children and families in a government's spending priorities. And it takes funding University research on teaching and teachers, on student wellbeing, and on what happens in the classroom so teachers create an atmosphere of welcome and belonging and growth for all children, of all genders, and from every ethnic and socio-economic group - this also takes training but fosters belonging and achievement (plenty of research on this too.) Money, money, money, advocacy, money, respect, status, and funding. Pay teachers well, ensure lower class sizes, child-centered education, openness to diversity and difference, training for belonging and inclusion as well as the range of abilities and basic skills - which includes music, arts, and PE. These reflections and both personal and supported by research - and by decades of working with students that are the product of primary and High School education, in an array of University settings. Thanks for the forum."

Dr Ranjana Banerjee, President, Indian Federation of University Women's Associations/GWI Fellowship Committee

“Dear All,

I have been a teacher for 35 years at the UG / PG level having worked with students in the specialised subjects, expert teacher for training young leaders in the Teacher Training courses and mentoring young professionals to guide and advance their careers. However, the most satisfying years of my life was my own junior school experience which remains green in my memory and the initial years of teaching at the primary level. I do keep touch with one of my aged teachers who had contributed to my growing up in manifold ways. My childhood memories of the teachers who also became our temporary mothers in our primary school stage are remembered with love and respect. Their way of compassionate communication, effort to be with young children and disciplining us through stories of morals has left marks in my memory. The foundation years were made strong by their teaching pedagogy which is way different from the methodologies that we have now, but theirs was awesome! Our desire to attend school every day was perhaps because of what we received from their teaching learning systems. World of teaching has changed drastically in India. Today we are more based and used to technical support in our classrooms even at the primary level. If we consider this as a mark of progress, it makes us ponder that can the human touch of classroom teachers be replaced by technology. A populous country like India, with different socio economic levels is greatly influenced by various factors such as funding, policies, and societal attitudes, however amidst innumerable challenges primary rural teachers' are doing a marvellous job. Covid has taken a huge toll in destroying the face to face student teacher relationship that truly contributes the learning of a child and his holistic development. Technology entered the realm of education as a savior with its use of multiple gadgets; however it took away the irreplaceable positive human contact. The parents depend, value and appreciate the contribution and dedication of teachers in their wards life. To primary school children whether urban or rural, teachers occupy an important place to each one of them, It is true that teachers go thru problems with language whilst disseminating knowledge especially with first generation learners, however, they remain attached to their commitment of quality education. Government bodies may not always make things very comfortable for them but that does not deter them from educating the children. As a teacher with the TTC (Primary level teacher training course) students, when asked to report why they took to this profession they replied by saying that it has given them utmost fulfilment in their lives, has made life more purposive and happy to give back to society generations of young learners. There are diverse views also where they feel that remuneration and work conditions are not up to the mark coupled with administrative and governmental pressures. In India, there have been cases where teachers have taken their lives on account of stress at workplace. Today, management of education by government, private and public bodies has found importance considering that the teachers are the makers of a nation. Professional training and mentoring at all levels is in place along with an effort to provide a satisfactory and congenial work environment through different support systems. Happy to be a lifelong member of this fraternity.”

Shaila Rao Mistry, GWI VP Advocacy, Women Graduates-USA

“I am a teacher and taught at many levels from teaching children to adults, from subject expert teacher to training leaders and professionals, to mentoring young professionals to map and advance careers. Not least, I have been a Sunday School teacher for twenty plus years. That was where I experienced the joy of teaching the most! I still remember my grade school teachers, and delighted to report that I am still in touch with one of them. Nothing magnifies the childhood memories of your teacher, even though we have all had good teachers in our education journey. The best teachers are of course are your parents and grandparents who pass on their wisdom from the irreplaceable stories and knowledge of our families, ancestry, and our rich cultural heritage. Thank you Mummy and Amama! Thank you Nana For inspiring me to accomplish all that I have! Much has changed since then, teaching and teachers are very different, their status varies based on where they are in the US education system. It is important to note that the status of teachers in the US education system is a complex and multifaceted issue, influenced by various factors such as funding, policies, and societal attitudes. COVID has indeed distorted many of the expected relationships of student teacher. Technology drives education and has helped hugely, but also brought with it some aspects that are not conducive to positive human contact, and need addressing. Mostly parents appreciate and value the hard work and dedication of teachers in educating their children. They often view teachers as important figures in their children's lives and trust them to provide quality education. However, there may also be instances where parents have concerns or disagreements with specific teachers or aspects of the education system. Teachers themselves have diverse feelings about their profession. Some teachers find great fulfillment in their work, feeling a sense of purpose and satisfaction in making a positive impact on students' lives. However, others may experience challenges such as heavy workloads, limited resources, and administrative pressures, which can lead to stress and job dissatisfaction. It is important to recognize that individual experiences can vary significantly. Education authorities generally regard teachers as crucial contributors to the education system. They recognize the importance of providing professional development opportunities, support systems, and resources to enhance teaching effectiveness. However, education authorities face challenges in adequately addressing the needs and concerns of teachers. A trend we observe globally. Thank You for this discussion.”

Prof. Shirley Randell AO, PhD, Australian Graduate Women Inc.

“The issue is more about teachers and their influence - In Australia more funding is needed for public schools that educate 80 percent of our disadvantaged students. Funding is also needed to appropriately pay teachers in the public school system.”

Response: “So true here too Shirley”, Maureen Byrne, GWI United Nations Representative, New York, Women Graduates-USA.

Thokozani Chapomba, Independent Member

“In Malawi, schooling and the role of teachers play a vital role in the country's educational system. The classroom sizes can vary depending on the location and resources of the school. In some cases, classrooms may be overcrowded with 100-140 students, with a large number of students per teacher. However, efforts are being made to reduce this ratio and improve access to quality education for all. The facilities available to teachers in Malawi can also vary. In well-equipped schools, teachers may have access to resources such as textbooks, teaching aids, and technology. However, in more rural or underprivileged areas, teachers face challenges in terms of limited resources and infrastructure. Despite these limitations, teachers often demonstrate remarkable dedication and resourcefulness to provide quality education to their students. Teaching styles and philosophies also vary among teachers in Malawi. Some teachers emphasize traditional lecture-based teaching methods, while others incorporate more interactive and participatory approaches. With an increasing focus on student-centered learning and active engagement, efforts are being made to encourage teachers to adopt more student-centered approaches that foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. Teachers have a significant influence on the lives of students in Malawi. They serve not only as educators but also as role models and mentors. Many students see their teachers as a source of inspiration and guidance, contributing to their personal and academic development. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping the future of students by nurturing their potential and providing guidance as they navigate their educational journey. During my time in secondary school, there was a particular teacher who played a significant role in shaping my academic journey. I believe that I am where I am today due to his exceptional mentorship and unwavering dedication. I attended a Community Day Secondary School where physical science was not a part of the curriculum. However, driven by my future ambitions, I independently pursued the subject by studying at home. Whenever I faced difficulties or challenges, I knew I could rely on this teacher for support. One specific incident stands out in my memory. As I was preparing for my final secondary school exams, I found myself struggling with a certain procedure in physical science that I had not been exposed to before. Without hesitation, I turned to him for guidance. Despite being on study leave and busy preparing for his own final exams, he willingly scheduled two hours of one-on-one teaching for me that late afternoon. To my surprise and delight, I not only understood the procedure, but I also excelled in it, achieving a distinction in the physical science exam. I owe my success to his passion and dedication to the teaching profession. This teacher, Mr. Nathan Zakeyu, has truly made a difference in my life and I am grateful for his impact on my academic journey.”

Response: “Fascinating discussions! Thank you so much for sharing.” Hally Siddons, CFUW-Ottawa

GW I extends their gratitude to everyone who took the time to participate in the World Teachers’ Day discussion. Your inputs are valuable and insightful for others.

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