


QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE  
TEACHERS WHO TEACH  
DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS:  
INSIGHTS FROM THE VARKEY  
TEACHER AMBASSADOR COMMUNITY



**Alliances**  
VARKEY FOUNDATION





# QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS WHO TEACH DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS: INSIGHTS FROM THE VARKEY TEACHER AMBASSADOR COMMUNITY

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## AUTHORS

Kwame Akyeampong, University of Sussex  
Emiliana Vegas, Inter-American Development Bank  
Freda Wolfenden, The Open University  
Kaitlynn Saldanha, Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL)  
Centre, University of Cambridge  
Haifa Dia Al-Attia, Queen Rania Foundation  
Brett Wigdortz, Teach First  
Evelyn Oduro, Ghana Education Service  
Jose Weinstein, Universidad Diego Portales in Santiago

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## GLOBAL EDUCATION & SKILLS FORUM ALLIANCES

Global Education & Skills Forum Alliances are groups of experts brought together by The Varkey Foundation to think about how education can change the world. Alliance members are drawn from across the world and include leaders from academia, government, business, civil society and teaching.

Each alliance works on some of the key issues of our time: conflict, climate change, global citizenship and the status of girls' education. They also work on the future of education itself: teachers, universities, public-private partnerships and the use of assessment.

Together, these expert groups are breaking new ground on some of education's biggest issues – and showing us how education can help change the world.



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“ THE GOAL OF PROVIDING EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION FOR EVERY CHILD WILL ONLY BE ACHIEVED IF ALL CHILDREN HAVE ACCESS TO A QUALITY TEACHER.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of providing equitable quality education for every child will only be achieved if all children have access to a quality teacher. A shortage of effective teachers disproportionately affects children from poor and marginalized backgrounds. This study investigates the qualities, mindsets and behaviours of effective teachers who work with disadvantaged children using the Varkey Teacher Ambassador community. Our hope is that the findings from this study will inform policy makers across the globe and lead to improved policies to attract, develop, and retain effective teachers to serve the most disadvantaged students.

### KEY FINDINGS

- When asked about what inspires them, nearly all participants said children, either as the direct source of motivation or from seeing improved outcomes for children. Participants were also motivated by a deep belief in the power of education to transform communities and society.
- According to participants, effectively teaching disadvantaged learners requires building strong relationships with students, a commitment and ability to teach all learners, a passion for teaching, and a genuine love for children.
- The challenges faced by teachers who teach disadvantaged students are diverse, numerous and similar across contexts. They include poverty, social-emotional needs, rigid curricula, infrastructure and resources, politics, fixed mindsets and discrimination towards disadvantaged students.
- According to participants, the top needs of disadvantaged students are: 1) social-emotional needs, 2) positive adult role models including effective teachers, and 3) basic needs (nutrition and learning resources).
- According to participants in the interviews, the dominant quality for effective teachers is the ability to empathize and connect with students. Other important qualities include a passion for teaching, continuous improvement, creativity, and commitment.
- In the online survey, compassion/kindness was the dominant quality for effective teachers, followed by patience, empathy, and grit/perseverance.
- Participants all agreed that the sector is not doing enough to support teachers. Increased investment in ongoing training, higher pay, more funding and increased government support were suggestions for what is needed.
- Participants overwhelmingly suggested increased practical training could improve teacher education across contexts.
- When asked to rank teaching practices in order of importance, 46% said that getting students to believe they can do well in school was most important.
- The vast majority of participants (86%) demonstrated growth mindset.



## IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER POLICY

The findings from this study suggest that a broader conception of teacher quality and student learning is needed than that typically found in policy papers, moving beyond skills that can easily be measured. It proposes eight (8) areas for policy attention that can increase in the number of quality teachers who are effective in reducing inequalities in learning opportunities and student outcomes.

1. Amend the selection process for entry to initial teacher education programmes to include interpersonal skills and qualities in addition to academic qualifications.
2. Consider ways in which the pool of teacher candidates can become more diverse, attracting candidates with knowledge and experience of disadvantaged communities.
3. Make available more guided opportunities for student teachers to gain hands-on practical experience using skills and strategies which support the learning of all students.

4. Pay greater attention to the provision of specialist options across a variety of content areas linked to the learning needs of specific groups of students including those with disabilities and learning difficulties. Provide these opportunities for new recruits and serving teachers.
5. Create a more enabling environment by meeting students' basic needs, providing adequate numbers of teachers and ensuring teachers have the resources needed: classrooms, learning materials and improved salaries.
6. Free up curriculum time to enable teachers to meet the learning needs of their students.
7. Complement teachers with specialist psychosocial support and health services for students.
8. Invite experienced and effective teachers who teach in challenging environments to provide professional development services for all teachers.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of providing equitable quality education for every child will only be achieved if all children have access to a quality teacher. With 69 million teachers needed to fill the teacher shortage gap, this remains the biggest threat to achieving this goal.<sup>1</sup> The shortage of effective teachers disproportionately affects children from poor and marginalized backgrounds. Not only is there a huge teacher shortage gap that predominantly affects this group of children, but also a gap in teachers with the training and disposition to facilitate the learning needs of disadvantaged children. Addressing the teacher shortage gap should top the education policy agenda of all countries. It is a call for all education systems to produce teachers who view themselves as agents of social justice committed to providing quality education for all children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds – children from rural and urban poor areas, minority ethnic groups, and children affected by conflict and poverty.

However, there is a gap in the existing evidence base on the type of teacher candidate that teacher education programs should be recruiting to prepare them to meet the learning needs of disadvantaged students. To recruit teachers who can provide inclusive and equitable

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69 MILLION TEACHERS  
NEEDED TO FILL THE TEACHER  
SHORTAGE GAP

quality education for all children requires a better understanding of the values and mindsets of teachers who are sensitive to, and can address, the learning needs of all students, particularly disadvantaged students.

This study provides insight into the qualities of effective teachers working in different contexts with children from a range of disadvantaged backgrounds using The Varkey Foundation's top 50 Global Teacher Prize Finalists over the last three years (2015-2017). The expectation is that the findings will contribute to the global evidence base on the qualities of the most effective teachers and serve as a tool to inform recruitment and selection of teachers who can meet the learning needs of all children, irrespective of where they live.

## 2. THE GLOBAL TEACHER PRIZE AND VARKEY TEACHER AMBASSADOR COMMUNITY

The Global Teacher Prize, an initiative of The Varkey Foundation, is a US\$1 million prize awarded annually to an educator who has made an outstanding contribution to the profession. The prize was first awarded in 2015, shining a spotlight on teachers and bringing global recognition to the profession. Since its inception, over 60,000 teachers around the world have applied and been nominated for the prize and three winners have been crowned.<sup>2</sup> The prize has also prompted over 50 countries to look into setting up their own national teacher prizes. Applications and nominations for the Global Teacher are evaluated against the below criteria.

- **Appreciation** from parents, students, colleagues, head teachers or the community for the impact that the teacher has had on their lives.
- **Innovation** in teaching practice including embracing technology or doing something new and different that helps students achieve learning outcomes.
- **Contribution** to educational debates including blogs, conferences, social media campaigns and media participation that gives voice to the educational issues which affect them and their community.



<sup>1</sup> Close to 69 million new teachers needed to reach 2030 education goals, UNESCO, 5 October 2016

<sup>2</sup> The fourth Global Teacher Prize winner will be announced in Dubai on March 18th 2018 at the Global Education and Skills Forum.



- **Encouragement** for teachers and non-teachers who support educators and encourage others to enter the teaching profession.
- **Preparation** of young people to be open-minded successful global citizens in today's diverse and globalised world.
- **Development** of innovative ideas and initiatives which improve access to quality education for children from all backgrounds.
- **Accomplishment** which goes beyond the classroom, setting a precedent for a truly extraordinary approach to education which inspires teachers and non-teachers all over the world.

Each year, the top 50 finalists for the Global Teacher Prize join the growing Varkey Teacher Ambassador community. Varkey Teacher Ambassadors (VTAs) are role models who promote best practice in education and lead in developing future learning techniques. The community is built around three pillars: 1) raising the status of the teaching profession; 2) improving access to quality education for all children; and 3) showcasing and sharing innovative teaching practices. The community was set up to ensure a quality education for every child by connecting leading educators from around the world to promote the teaching profession and support teacher development. Since the community was formed, VTAs have collaborated on numerous projects in pursuit of this mission. The Global Teacher Prize and the Varkey Teacher Ambassador community are initiatives of The Varkey Foundation, a global non-profit established to build the capacity and status of teachers in order to help every child access a quality education.

“EACH YEAR, THE TOP 50 FINALISTS FOR THE GLOBAL TEACHER PRIZE JOIN THE GROWING VARKEY TEACHER AMBASSADOR COMMUNITY.”

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a sequential mixed-methods approach, which included an online survey and semi-structured interviews. A mixed-methods approach was chosen because it allowed for interviews with a sub-set of teachers working with the greatest number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The study took place between April 2017 and March 2018.



#### SAMPLING

Participants in the study were all members of the Varkey Teacher Ambassador community. This group of teachers can be considered highly experienced professionals whose accomplishments as effective teachers have been recognised in their respective countries. Their practical knowledge of teaching children from a range of backgrounds including the most disadvantaged should provide valuable insights into what teacher education policy and practice should focus on, to produce teachers with similar disposition and qualities. A total of 84 teachers representing 44 different countries participated in the online survey. Of these, 44% taught in major urban cities, 37% in small or medium-sized cities, 12% rural areas including villages, and 7% peri-urban. Participants in the study had an average of 20

years of teaching experience and had spent the last 11 years teaching in their current school. Participants in the sample were teachers in a wide variety of subjects teaching across levels (pre-primary, primary, elementary, middle schools, secondary and adults). Just under half of the participants had a Master's degree, 10% had completed a Doctorate degree or equivalent, and very few had completed less than a bachelor's degree. The average age of participants was 46 years. 49% were male and 51% were female.

As noted, purposeful sampling was used to select participants from the survey to interview. The 15 teachers interviewed represented 11 different countries. These included Australia, Canada, England, Greece, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Portugal, Sierra Leone and the United States.

Selected participants represented the sub-set of teachers from the sample that teach the greatest percentage of students with diverse learning needs and/or students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Selection was based on teacher self-reported data. For the purpose of this study 'disadvantaged students' are students with one or more of the below characteristics:

- students whose native language is different from the language of instruction
- low academic achievers
- students with special educational needs
- students from socioeconomically disadvantaged<sup>3</sup> homes
- first generation learners
- students who have recently migrated or are displaced



All teachers with 60% or more of their students with one more of the above characteristics were invited to interview. Of teachers that interviewed, 93% reported that 60% or more of their students had one or more of the above characteristics. The other 7% reported that 30-60% of their students had one or more of the above characteristics.

#### METHODS

In the first stage of the research participants completed a 30-minute survey that combined closed and open-ended survey items. An online survey tool was used. The survey was an adaptation of the second Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS 2013)<sup>4</sup>. The survey also contained items from the Grit Scale (Duckworth et al., 2007) and Carol Dweck's work on mindset and motivation (Dweck, 2012). The survey was administered in English.

In the second stage of the research, participants who completed the survey were selected for a 30-45-minute semi-structured interview. Interviews were conducted by a member of Global Education & Skills Forum Teachers Alliance and were conducted via Skype or telephone. The interviews were designed to yield a deeper understanding of the teacher qualities that are most important for supporting the diverse learning needs of disadvantaged students. The interview schedule is in Appendix A.

#### ANALYSIS

Closed survey questions were analysed using descriptive statistics. Interview data and open-ended questions in the online survey were analysed using thematic analysis and emergent coding. Data from both stages was analysed using Excel. Quantitative data from phase one was used to triangulate data from phase two.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. In meeting the teacher shortage gap, how can we ensure that we attract, train and retain teachers with qualities for meeting the learning needs of all children?
2. Of teachers who are the most effective in providing quality education, especially for disadvantaged children, what qualities do they have in common?
3. How should teacher education in its selection and training processes reflect these qualities?

<sup>3</sup> "Socioeconomically disadvantaged" refers to homes lacking basic necessities or advantages of life, such as adequate housing, nutrition or medical care.

<sup>4</sup> TALIS 2013 is an international survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that offers the opportunity for teachers and principals to provide input into education analysis and policy development. The survey asks school principals and teachers to provide information about issues such as professional development they have received, teaching beliefs and practices, the review of teachers' work and the feedback and recognition they receive about their work and other workplace issues such as school leadership and school climate.



## 4. QUALITIES, BEHAVIOURS, AND MOTIVATION OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

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**IS THE TEACHER LOOKING AT HIMSELF AS A SUPERIOR? AS AN EQUAL? CAN THEY MAKE MISTAKES? ARE THEY WILLING TO DO THIS?**

### TEACHER QUALITIES

In the first phase of the research, participants were asked an open-ended question about the qualities they possess that help them meet the learning needs of their students. As shown in Figure 1, the most highlighted qualities were: i) compassion and kindness; ii) empathy; iii) patience; and iv) grit/perseverance. Other qualities that emerged were a genuine belief in every child, creativity and openness to new teaching methodologies, life-long learning, passion, relationship building, and hard work.

During the interviews participants were also asked about the most important teacher qualities for effectively meeting the learning needs of all students. The main qualities shared were, i) empathy and the

ability to relate to students; ii) creativity; iii) passion for teaching; iv) continuous improvement; and v) commitment. The dominant response was empathy and the ability to relate to students. Other qualities that were mentioned included humour, talent, and pedagogical skill.

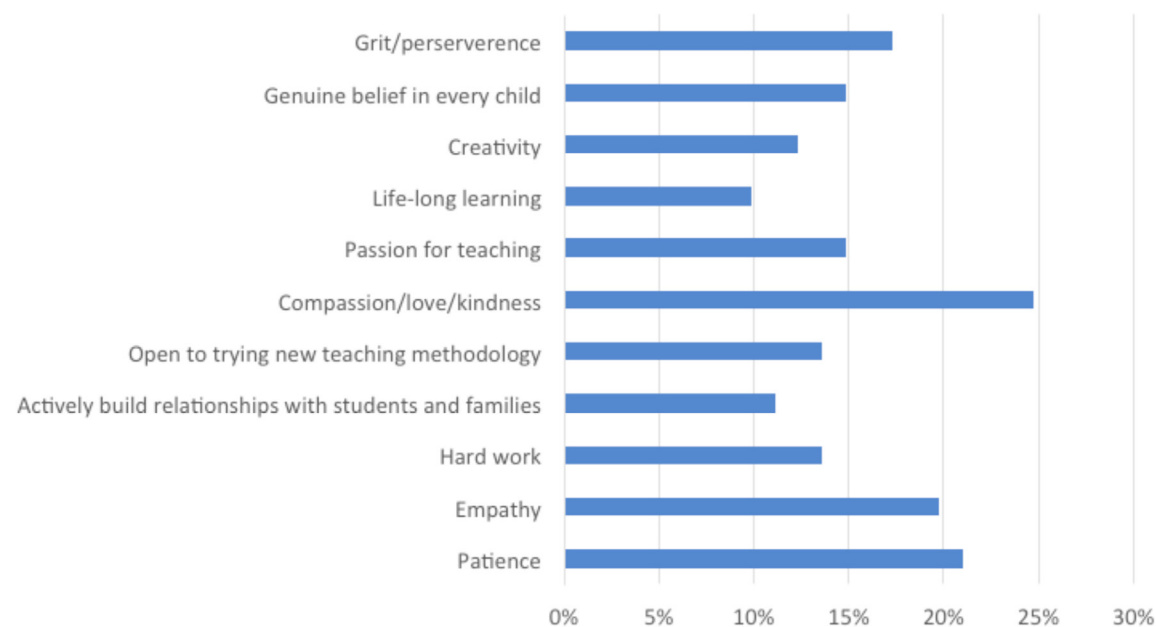
In describing the dominant quality that teachers should have, those interviewed reinforced the data in the survey with one voice: effective teachers need to be able to connect and empathize with students. The ability to know students and their needs (as opposed to knowing everything) was raised by several teachers. As one participant described:

“...relatability is very critical. There is more respect offered to teachers for being relatable than for being seen as an authority or an expert. The level of respect is about how much or how quickly students can connect and understand your point of view rather than what you know.”

“

**THE LEVEL OF RESPECT IS ABOUT HOW MUCH OR HOW QUICKLY STUDENTS CAN CONNECT AND UNDERSTAND YOUR POINT OF VIEW RATHER THAN WHAT YOU KNOW.**

Figure 1: Teacher perception of the qualities they possess that help them meet the needs of students



Several participants shared the view that connecting with students is about making yourself an equal rather than a superior and demonstrating that you're willing and able to make mistakes. This idea of connecting and empathizing with students is an indication of the importance these teachers place on knowing their students and opening up space for them to contribute equally to learning. It is about respecting them as co-contributors of knowledge. In effect, without a deep connection with their teachers, students are unlikely to experience deep learning.

Given the Varkey Teacher Ambassadors' focus on innovative teaching methodologies, it is not surprising that creativity, the ability to innovate and "teach outside the box" was highlighted by participants as necessary. One participant pointed out that a barrier to finding teachers who are innovative is that most teachers themselves are products of a system that champions standardized tests. As one participant pointed out: "They probably received a lot of scripted lessons themselves. They think that is what teaching is."

Multiple participants shared the view that teachers need to value continuous improvement and be willing to learn and improve. This included reflection on one's own practice. Participants spoke matter-of-factly about passion describing it as having enthusiasm for teaching. One participant acknowledged the subjectivity

in measuring passion but described it as: "people who have teaching at the centre of the heart". It is about caring deeply about teaching and trying to improve one's own practice.

“

**PEOPLE WHO HAVE TEACHING AT THE CENTRE OF THE HEART.**

Commitment was a broad theme, but mostly spoke to the need for teachers to understand teaching as more than a job (i.e. "it's a responsibility") and a "willingness" to do what is necessary to help students. As one teacher noted: "One must realise what your importance is as a teacher". Given that raising the status of the teaching profession is a core area of focus for The Varkey Foundation, the fact that participants referenced dedication, commitment and teaching as a higher call to duty is not surprising. These are the qualities that had made them stand out among their peers.

### TEACHER BEHAVIORS AND HABITS

The ability to stay focused and get results under challenging circumstances is key to success in any professional field. Teachers who work with disadvantaged children often work under challenging circumstances, so finding out the behaviour and habits of the survey participants was key to understanding what made them successful. Thus, in the survey participants were asked about their personal behaviors and work habits. Questions were from Angela Duckworth's eight-item Grit Scale, which measures the extent to which an individual possesses grit, the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). According to Duckworth, grit is one trait that predicts achievement. On the whole, the participants responded to the items in such a way that demonstrates they possessed a high degree of grit. Determination to accomplish desired goals in teaching or help every child succeed in their education marks out teachers who make a difference in the lives of students.

89% of participants in the study were "most likely" or "very likely" to finish a project they begin, with 62% saying "very likely". When asked if they have difficulty maintaining focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete, 85% reported that they did not ("not much like me" or "not like me at all"). Similarly, when asked if when they set a goal, they later choose to pursue a different one, 76% said no ("not much like me" or "not like me at all"). 86% also reported that they are unlikely to be obsessed with a certain project for a short period of time and then lose interest. 57% reported that they are not likely to get distracted by new ideas

or projects, while 43% said that they were likely to get distracted by new ideas or projects (see Figure 3). In addition, 80% agreed that they were hard workers and 73% reported that they were diligent. Lastly, 48% said that they are not easily deterred by setbacks (see Figure 2).

These results suggest that teachers who work with disadvantaged children under difficult/challenging circumstances stay focused and ensure that they achieve their intended goal. They also indicate that the participants are driven by a passion to succeed and do not easily allow obstacles and difficulties to get in the way of achieving their goals.

### TEACHER MOTIVATION

"What motivates me are my students' dreams, their pure energy, the light of their eyes and the generosity of their smiles. There are many ways to be happy, mine is in a classroom."

“

**WHAT MOTIVATES ME ARE MY STUDENTS' DREAMS, THEIR PURE ENERGY, THE LIGHT OF THEIR EYES AND THE GENEROSITY OF THEIR SMILES. THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO BE HAPPY, MINE IS IN A CLASSROOM.**

Figure 2: Teacher self-perception of work habits

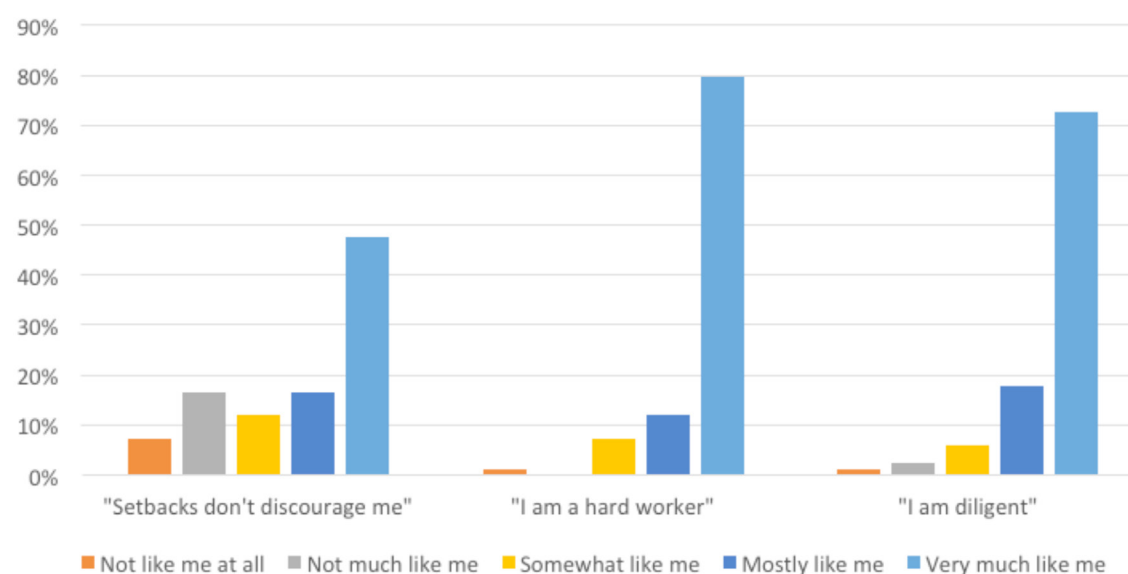
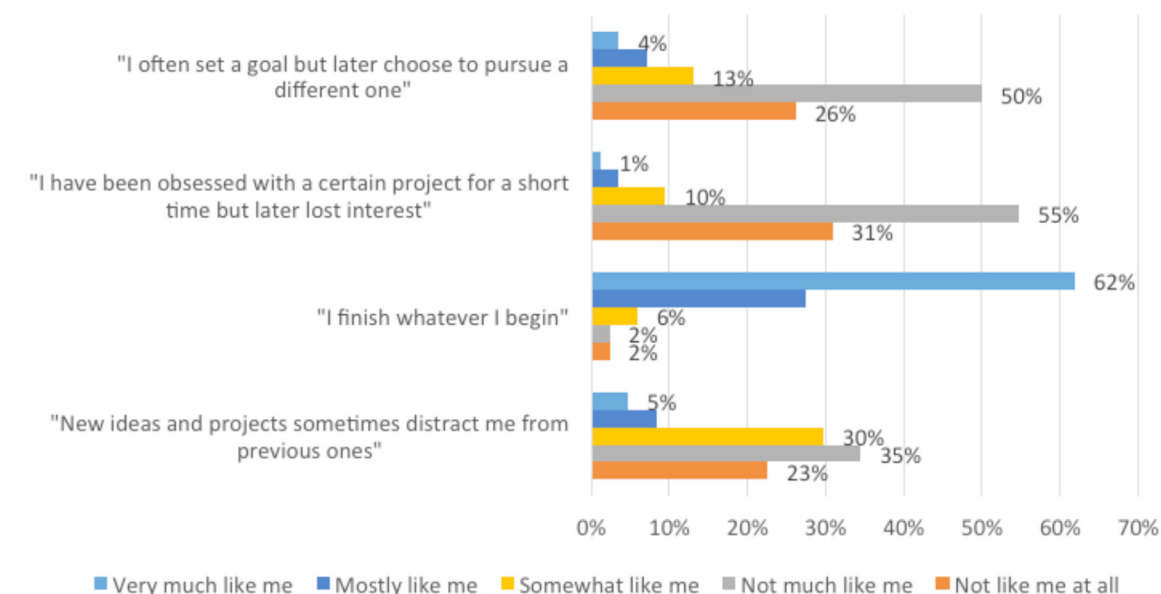


Figure 3: Teacher self-reported behavior related to the pursuit of goals



In the interviews, participants were asked to discuss the source of their inspiration or motivation for their work. Participants shared that they derive inspiration from their students, and specifically from having an impact on students. A genuine passion and enjoyment for working with children was a central theme. A deep belief in the power of education to transform individuals, communities and society also emerged as a main theme.

Having an impact on children was the most prominent theme, highlighted by two-thirds of participants. Individuals spoke about removing barriers for children, seeing children grow, "turning things around", building purpose and hope, and improving outcomes. In addition to asking about the source of their inspiration, a separate question asked participants about what they find most stimulating about their work. The dominant theme was seeing students learn and progress and knowing the contribution that they made as part of that.

Participants defined "student learning" quite broadly. Under the "umbrella" of "student learning" was increased student engagement with the community, taking risks, realising their own limitations (or lack thereof), increased engagement and enjoyment of school, taking responsibility for their own learning, and improved test scores. According to one participant: "when students realise that learning is not just about passing a test on Friday but about making the world a better place, that's what I love. And that's what gives me that intrinsic joy that allows me to fulfil my purpose that drove me to teaching in the first place."

In addition, teachers shared their stories of being inspired by seeing students take ownership of their own learning. Others reflected on feeling motivated by

seeing a student master a skill or a task. One teacher from Kenya told a story about a student who had been a victim of sexual violence and was at risk of dropping out of school. Because of the teacher's financial support and mentorship, the student just graduated from high school. The participant said: "If you don't make it through high school, you will not make it through life. That's why I target the most vulnerable children. She keeps me going. Seeing the growth in the child."

A final example was shared by a teacher who teaches in his hometown, which he describes as a rural and economically depressed part in the U.S. According to the teacher, "My 4th and 5th graders are like me 30 years ago. I want them to see that there is hope beyond the rough economic and social situations in their homes. I want them to see that learning, and school and building the character skills that I'm trying to pass onto them, having a growth mindset and a positive outlook, that all of that can lead somewhere in the future beyond what they think is possible right now."

For participants who spoke about gaining inspiration from students, the examples they shared included students' resilience, the challenge of understanding ("figuring out") what motivates each student, learning from students and students' dreams. One sub-theme was the ability to learn from students. As one participant shared: "I talk to them about life outside and they tell me everything. I get to learn a lot.... It puts me in a position to understand better."

For participants who shared a strong belief in the power of education as the source of their inspiration, sub-themes ranged from teaching as having the power to change the world, education and teaching



as “transformational”, and the “need” for education in communities. One participant from West Africa spoke about how achieving a sustainable, developed, stable country requires an educated citizenry. Without education “you don’t know who to trust, you are incredibly vulnerable.” Several other participants expressed similar views about the power (and urgency) of education to transform communities and society. One unsurprising sub-theme given the Varkey Teachers Ambassadors’ focus on raising the status of the teaching profession, was the importance of the role of the teacher. As one participant from the U.S. expressed: “Everything is an inspiration, as teaching has the ability to change the world.” For these teachers, teaching was not simply about helping children learn, it was also about inspiring them to be change agents in their own societies.

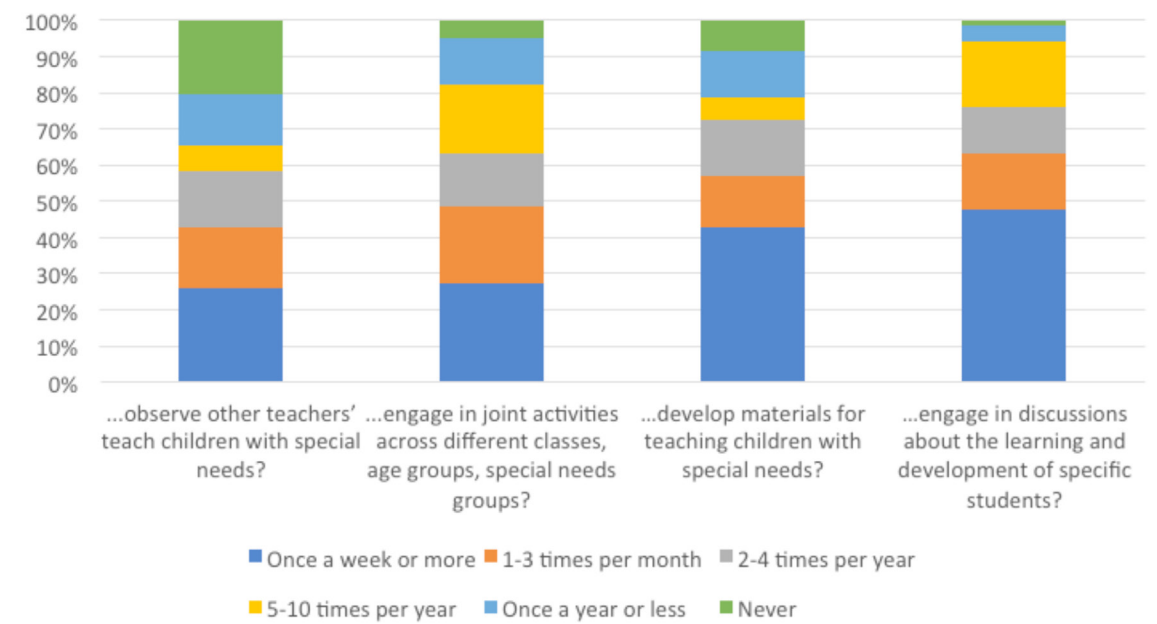
## 5. PRACTICES USED BY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

### WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH DIVERSE LEARNING NEEDS AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

In the survey, 76% of participants reported that some of the students they teach have special needs, and only 1 in 10 reported not to serve students with special needs. Additionally, participants were asked how often they engage in activities related to serving students with special needs. As shown in Figure 4, 48% of participants engage in discussion about students’ special needs and 43% develop specialized materials for teaching children with special needs once a week or more. 27% engage in joint activities across different classes and age groups once a week or more, and 26% reported observing other teachers teach children with special needs once a week or more.

Similarly, teachers were asked how often they engage in activities specifically related to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. While there was

Figure 4: Teaching practice for serving students with special educational needs



a broad range of responses, fewer teachers dedicate time specifically to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. For instance, 27% take part in collaborative professional learning focused on the learning needs of disadvantaged students once a year, 19% said once a week or more, 17% 2-4 times per year, 14% never, 13% 1-3 times per month, and 10% 5-10 times per year. The responses were similarly diverse

with respect to how often teachers coached other teachers on how to teach disadvantaged children. 1 in 5 teachers do this once a year, 2-4 times per year and never. 35% attend a conference once a year that includes a theme on teaching disadvantaged children and 30% collaborate once yearly with teachers from other schools on teaching disadvantaged children (see Figure 5).

“ WHEN STUDENTS REALISE THAT LEARNING IS NOT JUST ABOUT PASSING A TEST ON FRIDAY BUT ABOUT MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, THAT’S WHAT I LOVE. AND THAT’S WHAT GIVES ME THAT INTRINSIC JOY THAT ALLOWS ME TO FULFIL MY PURPOSE THAT DROVE ME TO TEACHING IN THE FIRST PLACE.

Figure 5: Teaching practice for serving students from disadvantaged backgrounds

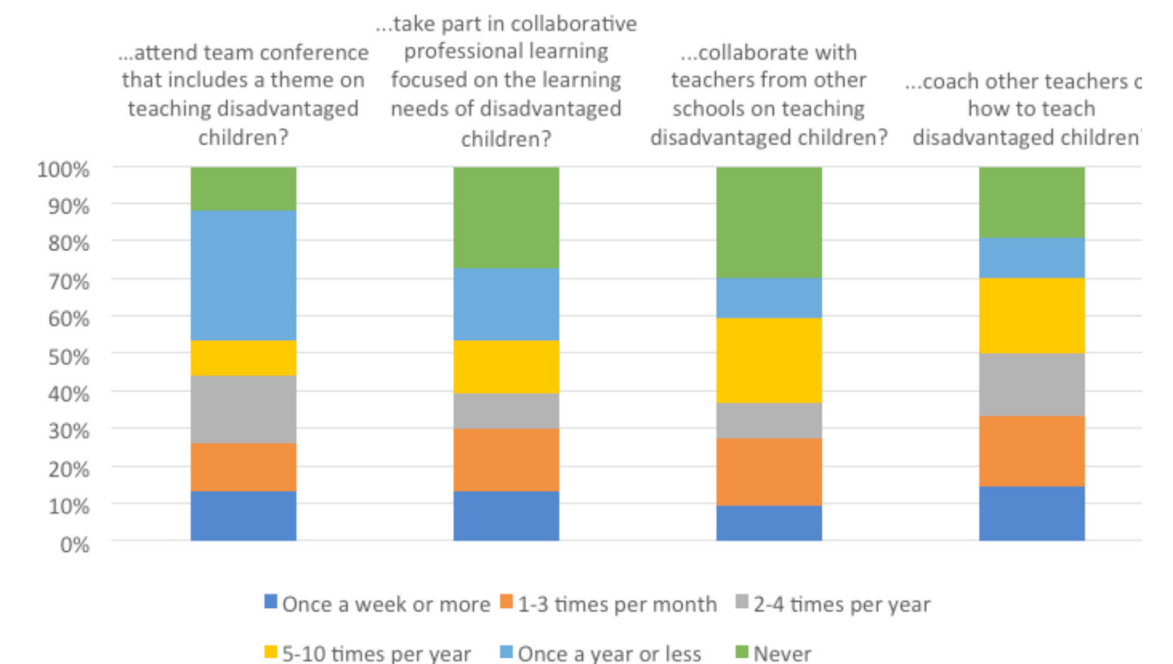
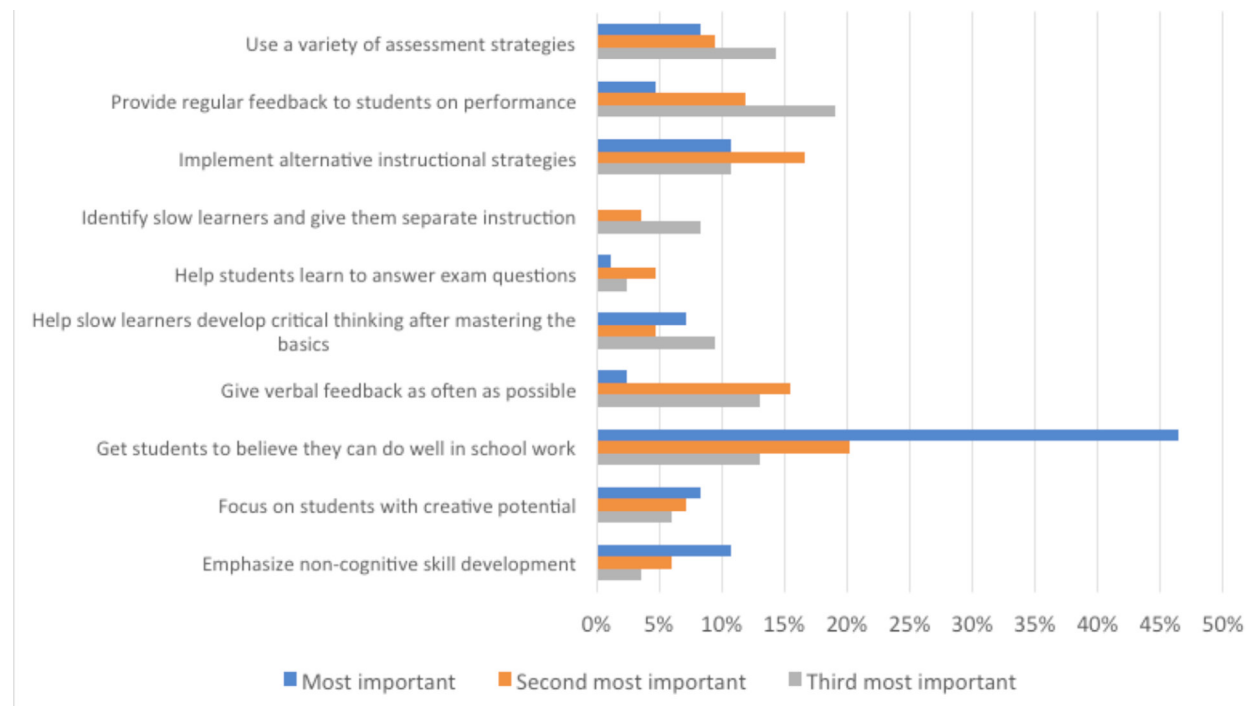


Figure 6: Teachers' views on the most important teaching practices of effective teachers



TEACHING PRACTICES

Participants were also asked to rank teaching practices in order of importance (most important, second most important, and third most important). Figure 6 summarises the responses. Almost half (46%) of participants said that getting students to believe that they can do well in school was most important. This was followed by an emphasis on non-cognitive skill development (11%) and implementing alternative instructional strategies (11%).

Teachers were also asked how often they use standard teaching practices such as lecture-style instruction, independent or group work, and opportunities to share their work in class. As shown in Figure 7, 92% reported “frequently” or “in all or nearly all classes” giving students opportunities to display and talk about their work. 86% said that they “frequently” or “in nearly all lessons” have students work in small groups to come up with joint solutions to problems.

In contrast, participants reported dedicating less time to lecture-style instruction. 69% reported “never or almost never” or “occasionally” using lecture-style instruction. A substantial proportion of teachers (71%) reported “frequently” or “in all or nearly all classes” having students engaged in independent written tasks, while

29% “occasionally” or “never or almost never” use this practice. Lastly, 38% said that they “frequently” or “in almost all lessons” prioritise knowledge development over skill development; 44% reported “occasionally” doing so.

In the survey, participants were also asked about the amount of time they spend engaging in practices to address the different learning needs of students. As Figure 8 shows, 86% of teachers reported “frequently” or “in all or nearly all lessons” designing or selecting learning materials that reflect the specific learning needs of students. Similarly, 70% of teachers reported “frequently” or “in all or nearly all lessons” using ICT to expand learning opportunities for students with learning difficulties. A relatively lower percentage (61%) reported “frequently” or “in all or nearly all lessons” providing different assignments for students with diverse learning needs. About half of those surveyed reported “frequently” meeting parents to discuss students’ learning needs and progress. 43% reported meeting with parents “occasionally”.

Figure 7: Teacher reported frequency of classroom practices

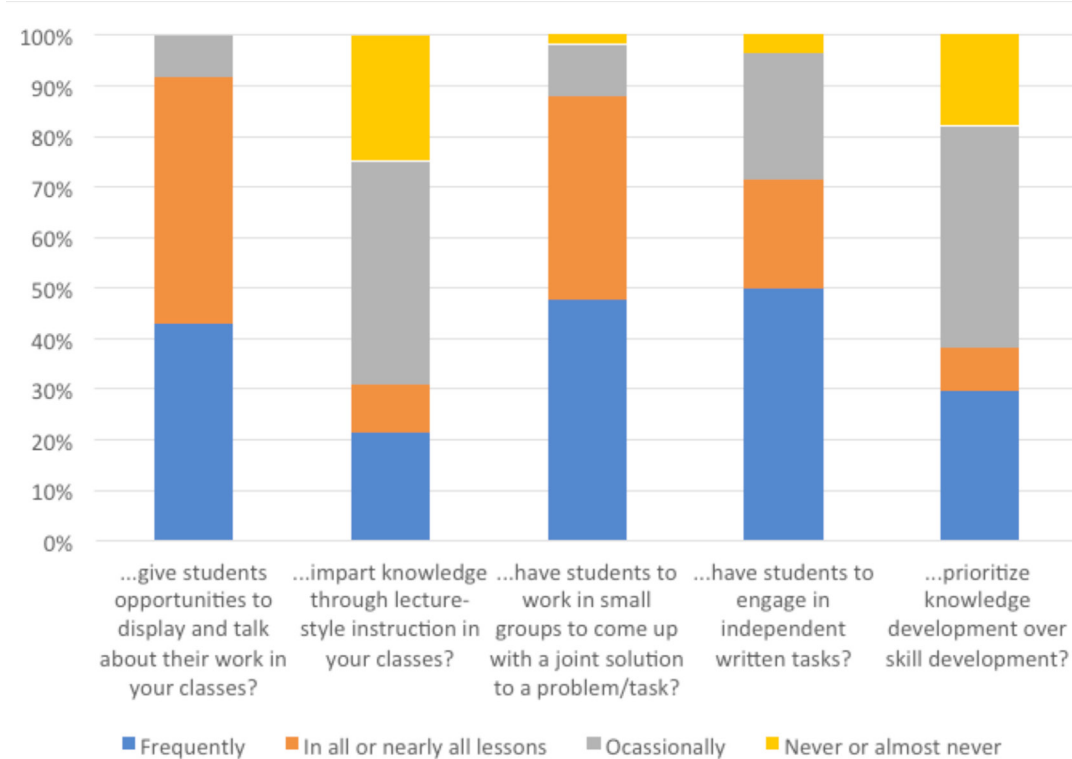
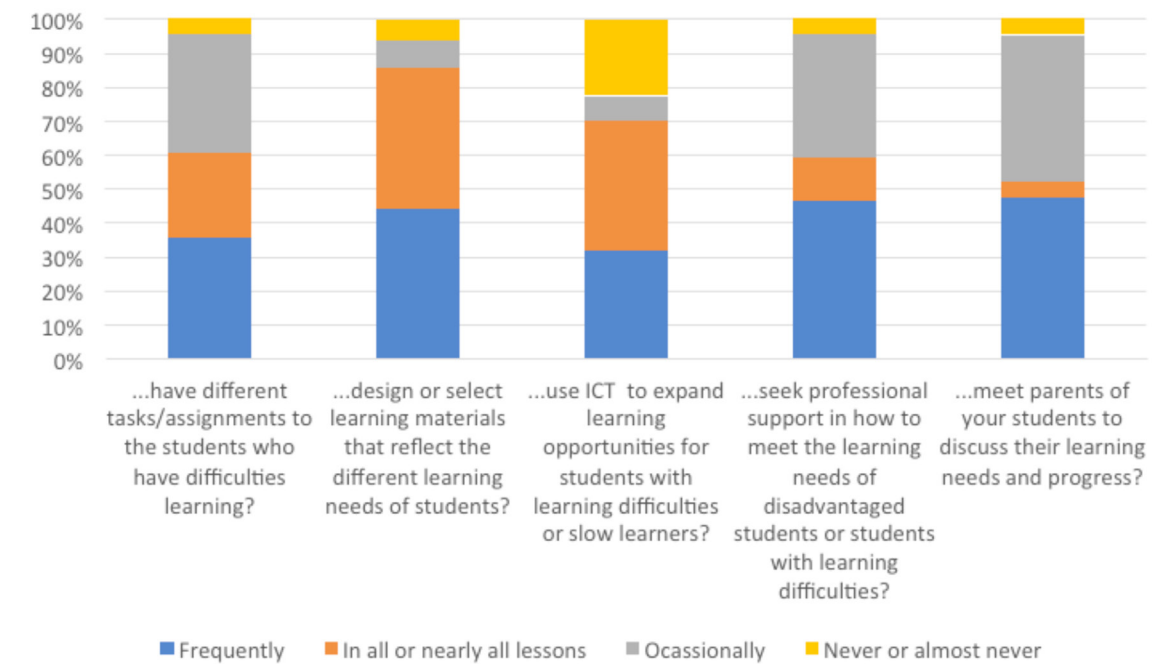


Figure 8: Teacher practices for serving students with diverse learning needs



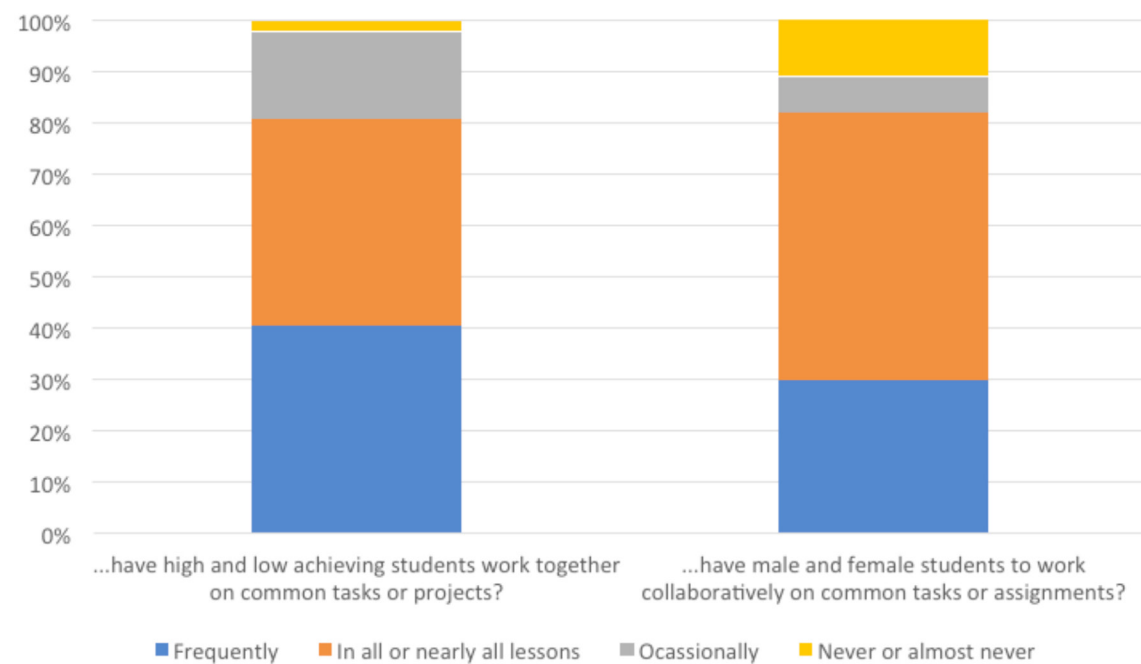


When asked which practices are always useful for effectively teaching students from disadvantaged backgrounds 58% said mixed ability group work, 56% experiential learning, and 40% individualized instruction. Noticeably, 40% agreed that whole class instruction was never useful when teaching students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

When specifically asked about the frequency that they employ practices that bring together diverse students, such as students of mixed abilities and male and female students, as Figure 9 shows, over 80 percent of teachers reported using these practices “frequently” or “in all or nearly all lessons.”. Nevertheless, 1 in 5 reported “occasionally” or “never or almost never” using practices that integrate diverse students.

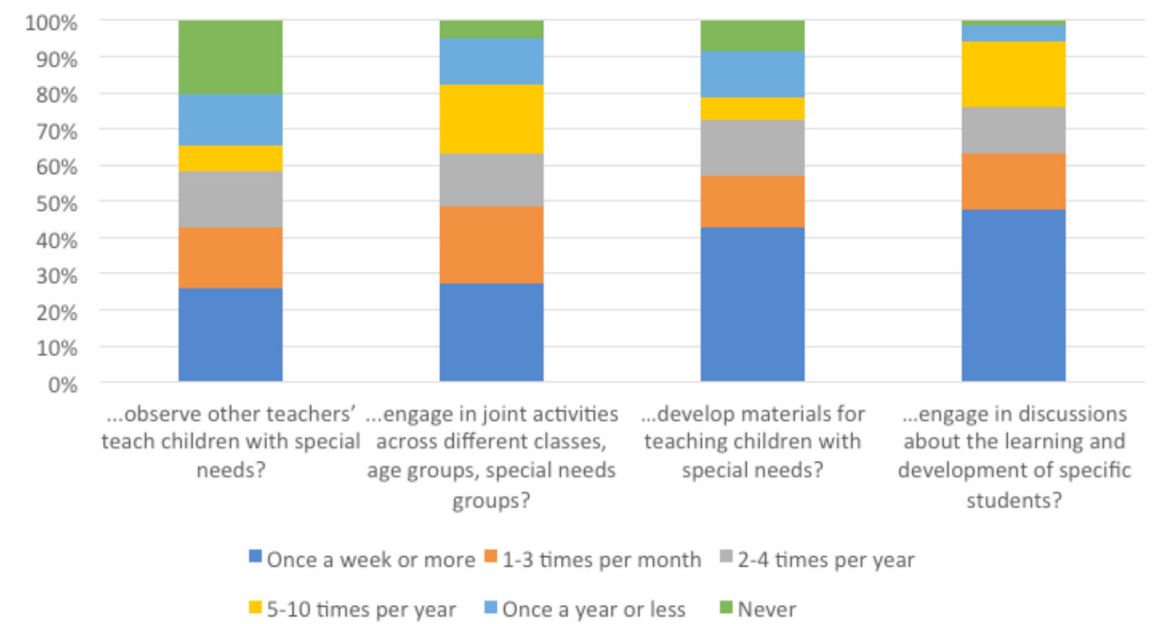
Lastly, participants were asked to estimate the frequency with which they provide emotional support to students from challenging or difficult backgrounds and how often they seek professional support to meet the learning needs of these students. Providing emotional support to students reflects the importance of emotional well-being for effective learning. As shown in Figure 10, a sizeable majority (80%) reported “frequently” or “in all or nearly all lessons” to provide emotional support to students from challenging or difficult backgrounds. A much lower percent (59%) reported “frequently” or “in all or nearly all lessons” to seek professional support to meet the learning needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Figure 9: Teacher practices that integrate students of diverse abilities and gender



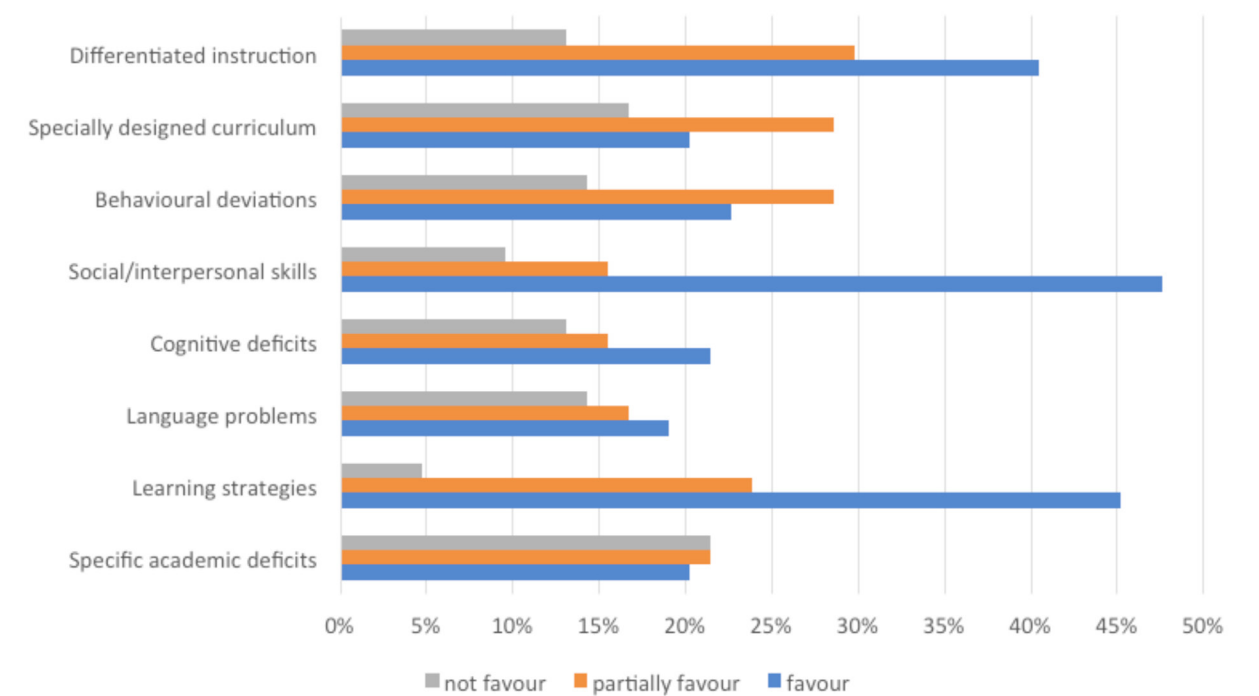
“ PROVIDING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT TO STUDENTS REFLECTS THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING.”

Figure 10: Teacher practice related to serving students from disadvantaged backgrounds



In the survey, teachers were asked about the strategies that they use to support the most disadvantaged students to learn. For example, teachers were asked which interventions they use to address the needs of students with learning difficulties. As Figure 11 shows, the three teacher-preferred interventions are i) social and interpersonal skills; ii) learning strategies; and iii) differentiated instruction.

Figure 11: Top interventions to address the needs of students with learning difficulties



Teachers were also asked to state, based on their own experience, which practices are most useful to teach students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As Figure 12 shows, teachers highlighted three main practices: experiential learning, mixed ability group work, and individualized instruction. Finally, teachers were asked to state the extent to which they agree/disagree with a selection of commonly used strategies for addressing the needs of disadvantaged students. Most teachers reported that they agree or strongly agree that: i) being

from a disadvantaged background can be a barrier for student learning; ii) students from disadvantaged backgrounds are often not well-served by the national curriculum; and iii) that unearthing the potential of disadvantaged students requires specialised teachers. Teachers disagreed about the extent to which enforcing written tasks may help disadvantaged students learn. They also disagreed about whether deep knowledge about a student's background is needed to help students reach their full potential (see Figure 13).

Figure 12: Teacher perception of useful practices for teaching students from disadvantaged backgrounds

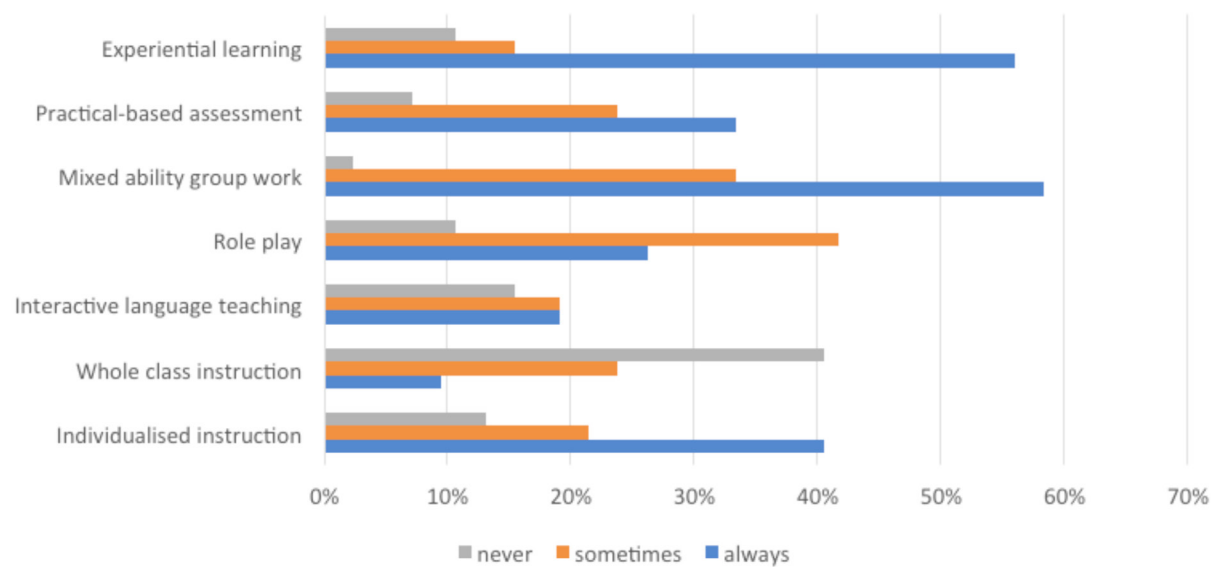
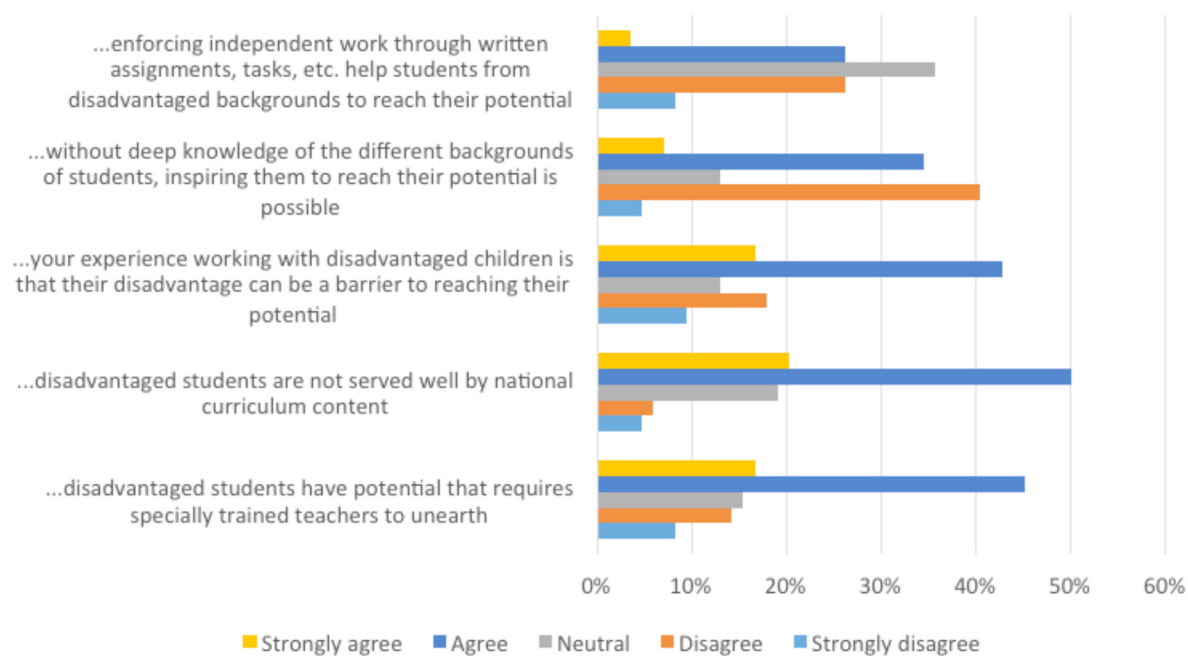


Figure 13: Teacher perception of top strategies for addressing the learning needs of disadvantaged students



### INNOVATIVE TEACHING METHODS

In addition to data from the online survey, in the interviews, participants shared a range of innovative teaching methods, which as previously mentioned, form part of the selection criteria<sup>5</sup> for the Global Teacher Prize. Examples included a school-based urban food production business, the use of hydroponics and technology to increase student engagement in science, and a social justice curriculum that empowers marginalised girls and victims of sex trafficking to become community leaders. Another method shared was a science-based mind mapping tool for English Foreign Language students to facilitate English language learning for students with dyslexia. According to the participant, the method includes three parameters (neuroscience, technology and art), which create a holistic experience for students intended to yield deeper knowledge. Without this "holistic experience", students will only learn the curriculum.

Another participant promotes independent learning among the poorest students. According to the participant, independent learning reduces tolerance of "holes" in a school's provision of education and protects students against weak teachers. As part of the method, teachers are facilitators of student learning. They routinely share good practice, and have weekly conversations about any student for whom there are concerns for developing a common approach.

Another participant shared about his experience using technology to create cross-cultural student-led service learning opportunities. Specifically, the participant uses video conferencing to connect his students with people in other countries. His students are asked to think critically about a problem they learnt about through the video conferencing experience, and are then asked to help solve it. He described that some of the most powerful learning experiences for students have come from generating an emotional response, which becomes easier when you're connecting with real people in a different part of the world through video. The participant shared that student passion (not the curriculum) is the starting point – "that's the art of teaching".

A final participant described the use of mobile devices and solar energy to improve education quality in remote locations through "digital learning communities". Specifically, he is enabling access to existing online resources and learning tools to facilitate development of 21st century skills like creativity, communication, and collaboration as well as literacy and numeracy development. One aim is for the project to train teachers in remote off-grid locations to use active learning methodologies.

<sup>5</sup> One piece of criteria for the Global Teacher Prize is the use of "innovative and effective instructional practices" that are replicable and scalable to influence the quality of education globally.

“ WITHOUT THIS “HOLISTIC EXPERIENCE”, STUDENTS WILL ONLY LEARN THE CURRICULUM.



## 6. BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

### TEACHING STUDENTS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward teaching and learning may affect their effectiveness. For example, a teacher who believes that all students can learn will likely make the effort to ensure that each of her students is making progress. In contrast, if a teacher is convinced that some students cannot learn, she or he may not make the effort to ensure learning opportunities for those students.

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TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD TEACHING AND LEARNING MAY AFFECT THEIR EFFECTIVENESS.

Participants were asked about their beliefs toward the development of intelligence and talent (Dweck, 2012). As Figure 14 shows, most teachers believed that intelligence and talent are not fixed but, instead can be developed over time. 86% said they “agree” or “strongly agree” that no matter who you are you can significantly change your intelligence level. Similarly, 75% reported that no matter who you are you “can significantly change your level of talent” (Figure 15). Participants were also asked the extent to which raising the confidence level of the lowest performing students is more important than focusing on raising their cognitive abilities. 70% agreed (either “strongly agreed” or “agreed”) that confidence was more important.

When asked whether teaching students with diverse learning needs is difficult, the response was not uniform. One-third agreed, one-third disagreed, and another third responded with a neutral response. Teachers were also asked how capable they feel in addressing the learning needs of students with diagnosed learning disabilities. 75% reported that they feel capable of meeting the learning needs of these students. Just 7% said that they disagreed. While teachers felt capable of meeting the learning needs of students with learning disabilities, 68% believed that teachers still need peer or school level support to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties (Figure 16).

Figure 14: Teachers' beliefs about changing one's level of intelligence

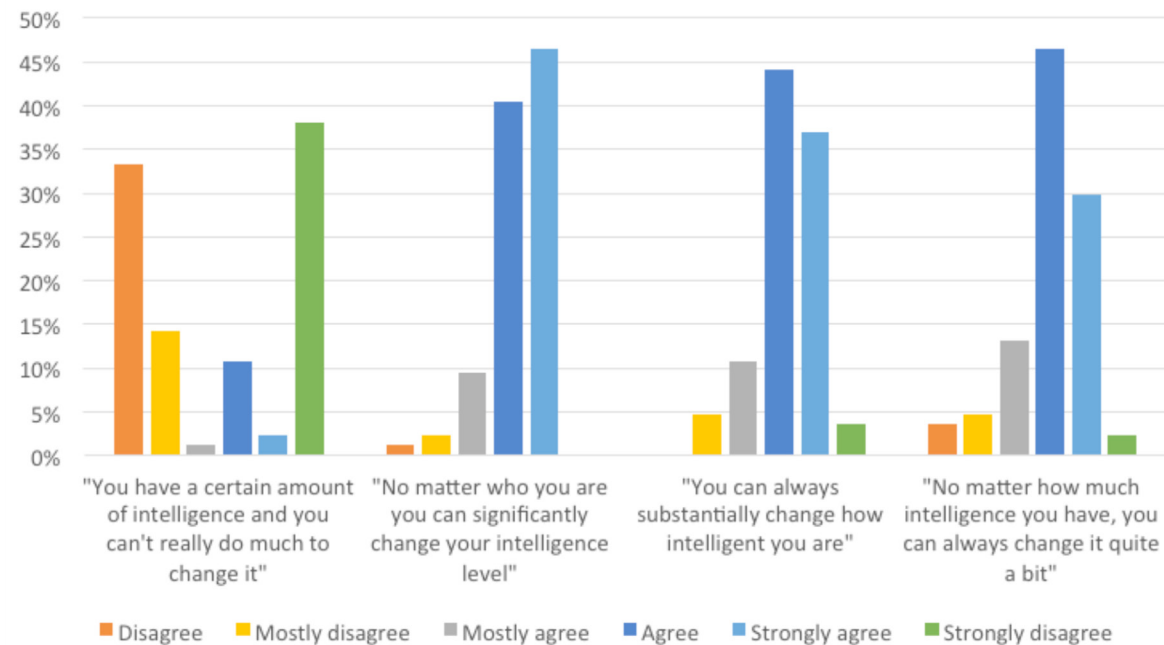


Figure 15: Teachers' beliefs about developing talent

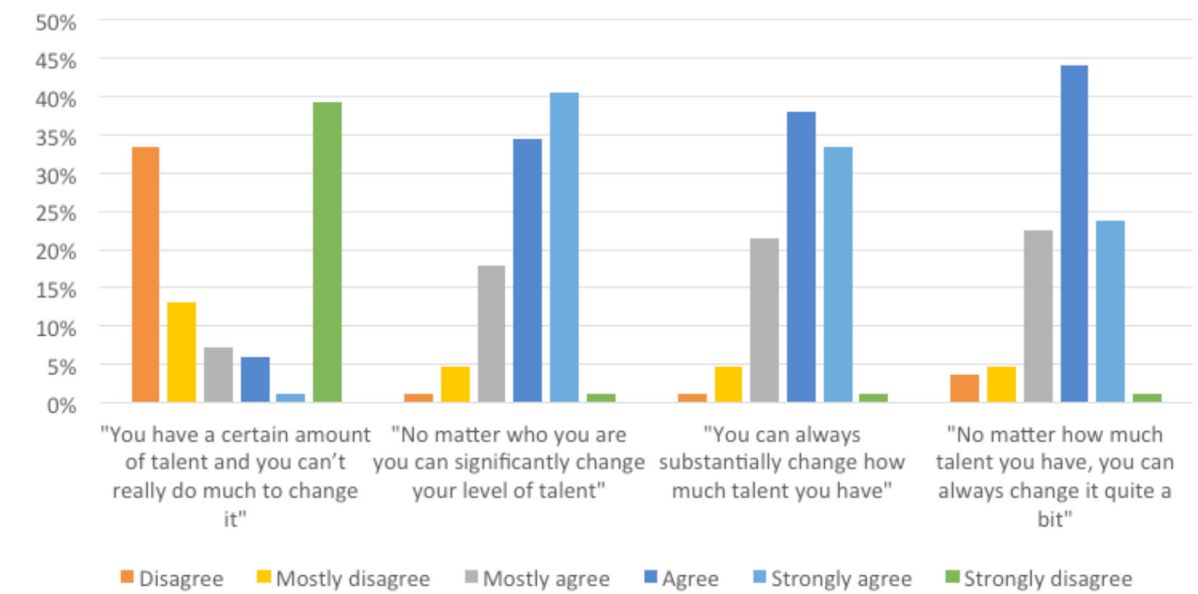
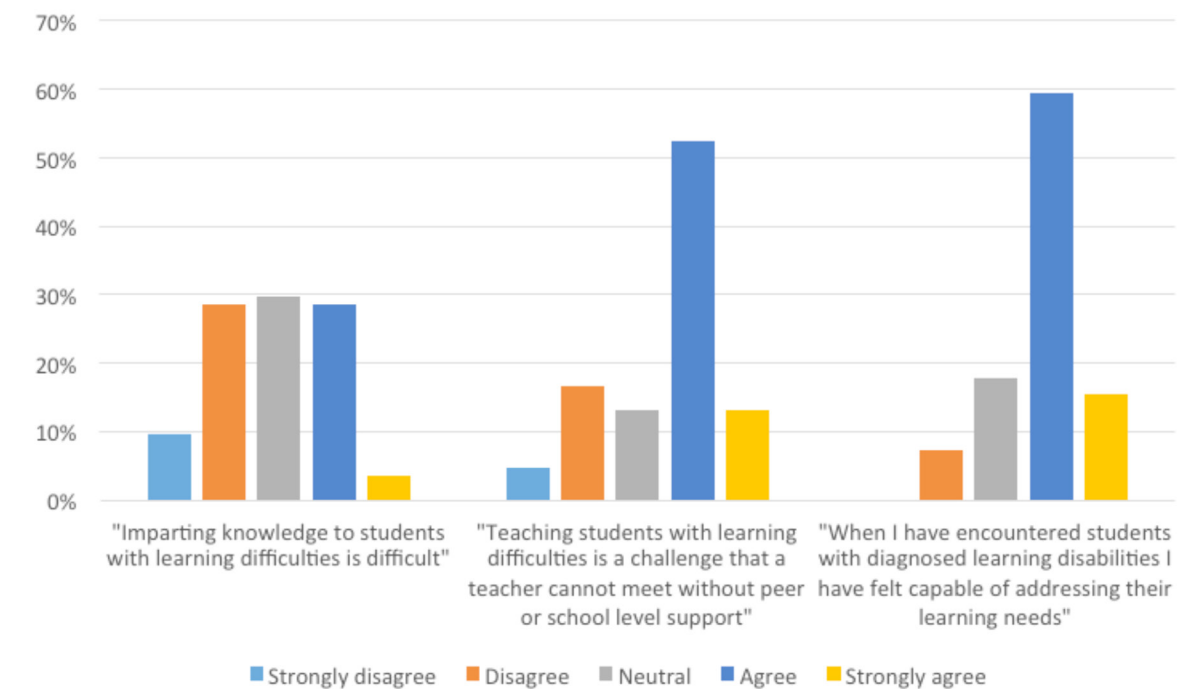


Figure 16: Teachers' attitudes towards working with students with diverse learning needs



One of the closed-survey questions asked participants about what was most important with respect to effective teaching. The most popular response was “skills in providing individualized student learning” followed by “pedagogical competencies in teaching my subject or field” (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Teacher perception of important skills for effectively teaching students with diverse learning needs

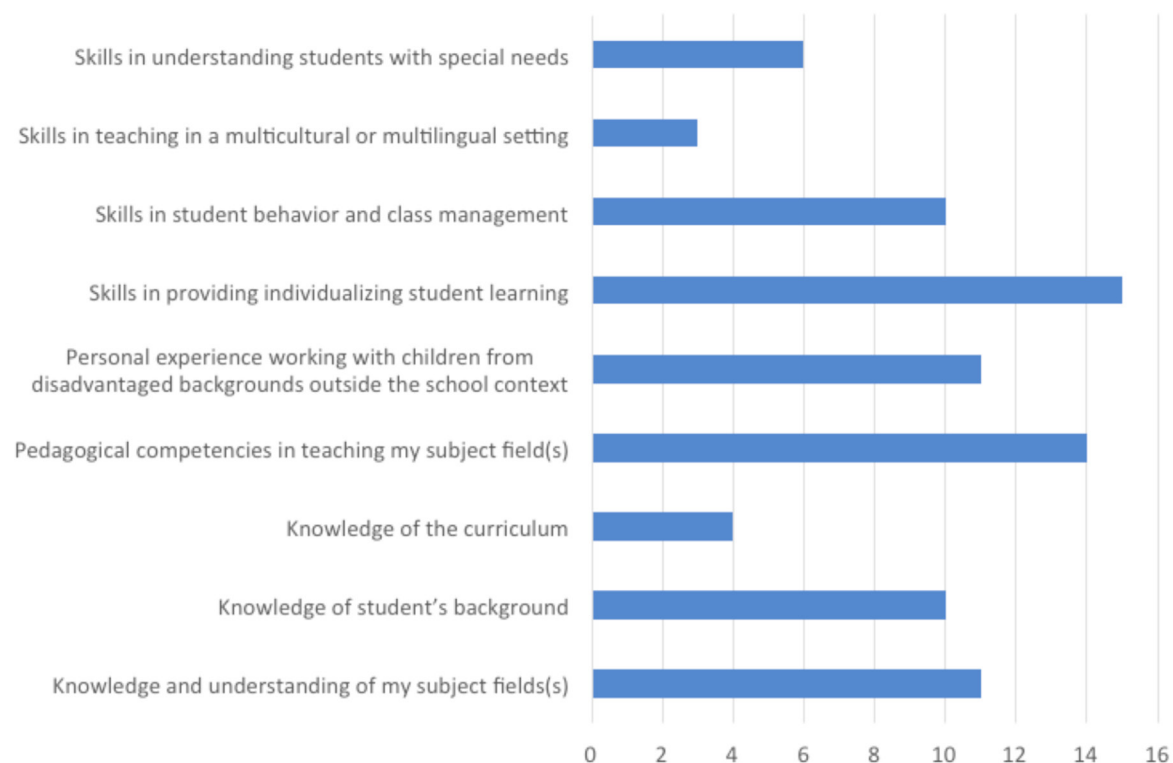
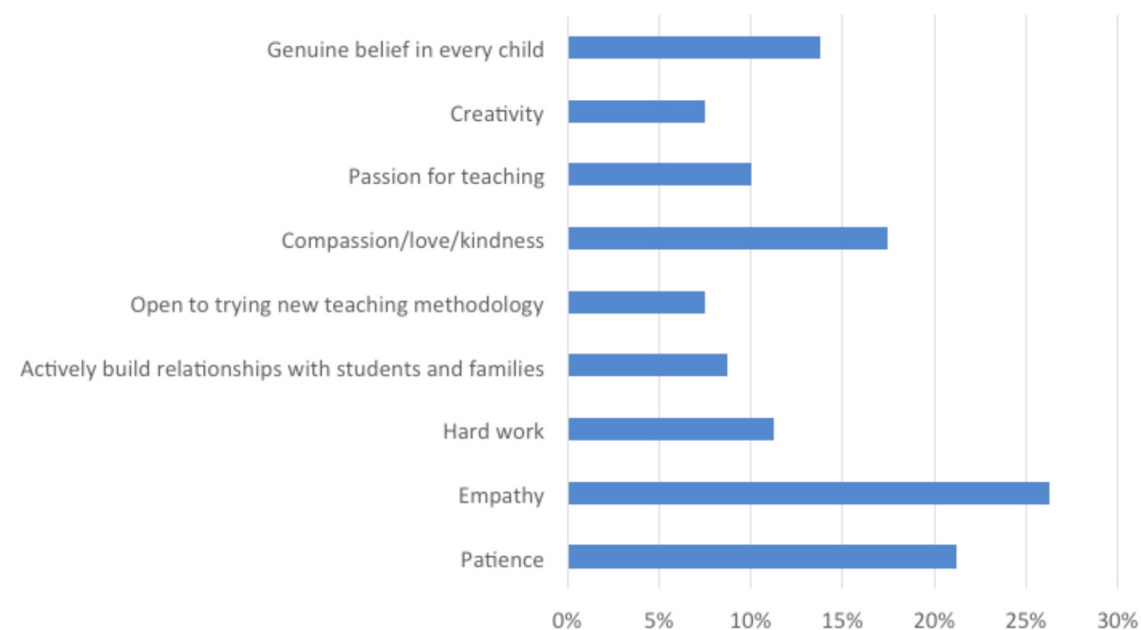


Figure 18: Qualities that teachers believe are most important to effectively meet the needs of disadvantaged students



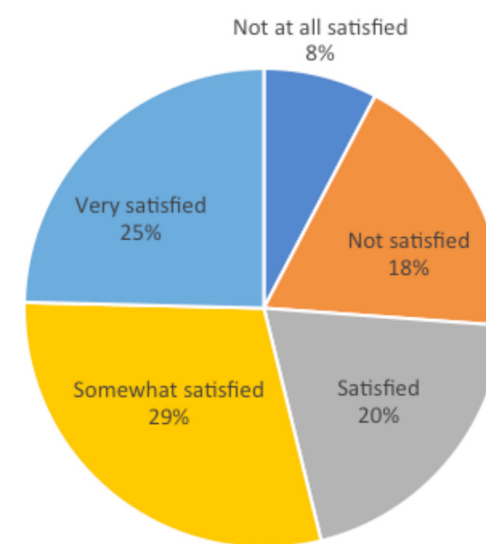
Lastly, participants were asked about the qualities they believe are most important for a teacher to effectively meet the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As shown in Figure 18, the four most valued traits were: i) empathy; ii) patience; iii) compassion, love, and kindness; and iv) a genuine belief in every child. It is worth noting that with the exception of grit/perseverance, these qualities overlap with those that participants reported that they possess and that help them meet the learning needs of their students.

#### PRE-SERVICE TRAINING AND SKILLS LEARNT IN THE CLASSROOM

As part of the survey, participants were asked about their pre-service training or teacher education programme. 77% of participants had completed an accredited pre-service training. Of those who had completed a programme, 29% had an undergraduate degree in education, 29% a Master's degree, 27% a non-degree based programme, and 14% both an undergraduate and Master's degree in education.

Of those who had been through a pre-service programme, 62% believe that teaching disadvantaged students requires specialized training (22% disagreed with this), and 45% said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the training they received for serving students from disadvantaged backgrounds. An additional 29% said they were “somewhat satisfied”, and 1 in 4 were unsatisfied with their preparation (Figure 19).

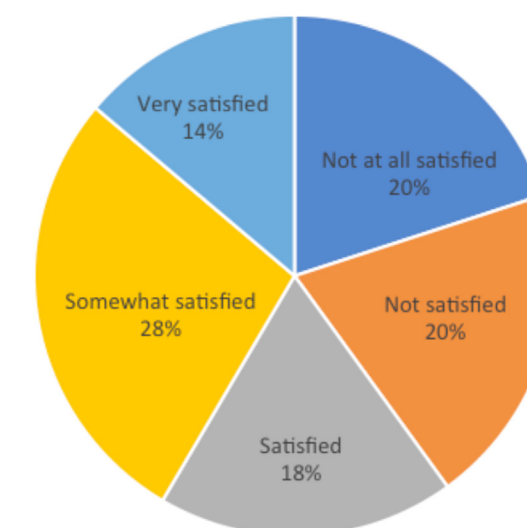
Figure 19: Teacher satisfaction with training for serving students from disadvantaged backgrounds



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I LEARNT HOW TO INDIVIDUALISE FOR EACH CHILD; HOW TO TEACH CHILDREN AND NOT THE CURRICULUM.

Figure 20: Teacher satisfaction with training for serving students with special educational needs



When asked about their satisfaction level with respect to the preparation they received for serving students with special educational learning needs, satisfaction was lower. 32% were “satisfied” or “very satisfied”, 28% were “somewhat satisfied”, and 40% were not satisfied or not at all satisfied (Figure 20). It is striking that many of the teachers were not satisfied with the training they received to support disadvantaged students or students with special needs. As a result of years of learning from practice, these teachers may have become acutely aware of teacher education's lack of space to make knowledge from practice a significant part of learning to teach.

“I learnt how to individualise for each child; how to teach children and not the curriculum.”



In the online survey, participants were asked an open-ended question about the skills they had learnt on the job (rather than in their teacher preparation programme) that enable them to meet the learning needs of their students. On the whole, teachers had much to say and the majority offered multiple ideas, suggesting that much is learnt on the job. The most common skills mentioned were, i) catering to the diverse needs of students (29%); ii) classroom management (22%);

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I LEARNT HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO CREATE A CLASSROOM CULTURE THAT ENCOURAGES STUDENTS FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE TO LEARN...

iii) self-directed learning (13%); iv) teaching values and character skills (13%); v) using technology in the classroom (13%); and vi) building effective partnerships with parents and communities (13%) (Figure 21). Other common skills mentioned were the importance of passion, relationship building, teaching in low-resource

settings, managing out-of-school factors like poverty, empathy-based learning, managing time and workload, meeting students' social emotional needs, 21st century skills and innovative teaching methods.

With respect to self-directed learning, one participant described: "you need to pay attention to each student as an individual. Helping students become autonomous is more important than teaching content." Another offered, "teachers need to be the creators, engineers, facilitators of learning opportunities. Learning will only happen when it is owned by the learners." On the importance of passion, participants described this as "teaching from the heart", "love matters more than content", and "giving love and passion". For meeting students' social emotional needs, one participant shared that they learnt to help students with serious issues at home including violence and drugs. Another shared that teacher education does not teach about the effects of poverty, trauma, abuse nor structural racism. With respect to classroom culture, one participant described, "I learnt how important it is to create a classroom culture that encourages students from all walks of life to learn...". Touching on several of the most common skills (teaching diverse learners, social emotional needs and using technology), one teacher summarized: "methodology of teaching was really outdated when I studied. Only after becoming a teacher and actually teaching at school did I learn to differentiate my lessons to suit the needs of all students. Secondly, I learned to pay attention not only to the content of the lesson, but

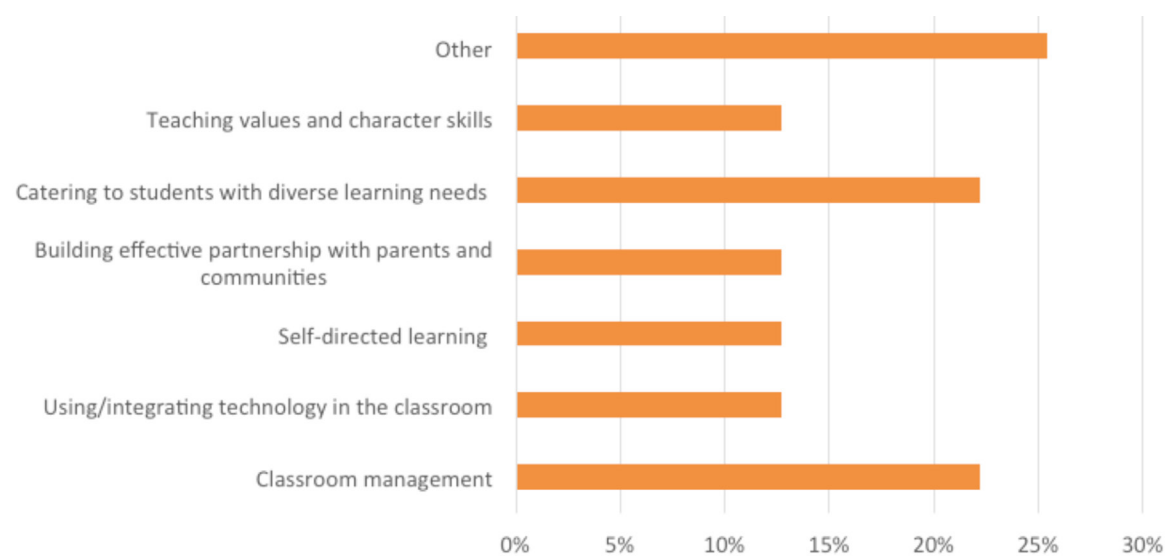


also to emotions and mood in the classroom. Thirdly, I learned to use technology to connect my classes to a wider world and to develop students' creativity."

1 in 4 participants mentioned a unique skill that wasn't previously mentioned and was categorised as "other". Within this category were skills like varying assessment;

understanding how people learn; content knowledge; classroom culture; cultural competency; working with the government; data analysis; and listening. This not only further emphasises the aforementioned point about the volume of learning that takes place on the job, but also highlights that effective teaching demands a vast range of skills.

Figure 21: Teacher perception of most important skills learnt on the job



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TEACHERS SHOULD BE TRAINED FOR THE CHALLENGES THEY MIGHT FACE IN PRACTICE. FOR THAT IT WOULD BE GOOD THAT THEY HAD AN EXCELLENT SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND, SUPPLEMENTED BY AN IN-DEPTH PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING. THEY SHOULD BE TRAINED USING VERY DIVERSE AND PRACTICAL SITUATIONS, AND SHOULD BE MADE AWARE OF ALL THE CONTEXTS IN WHICH THEY WILL BE WORKING.



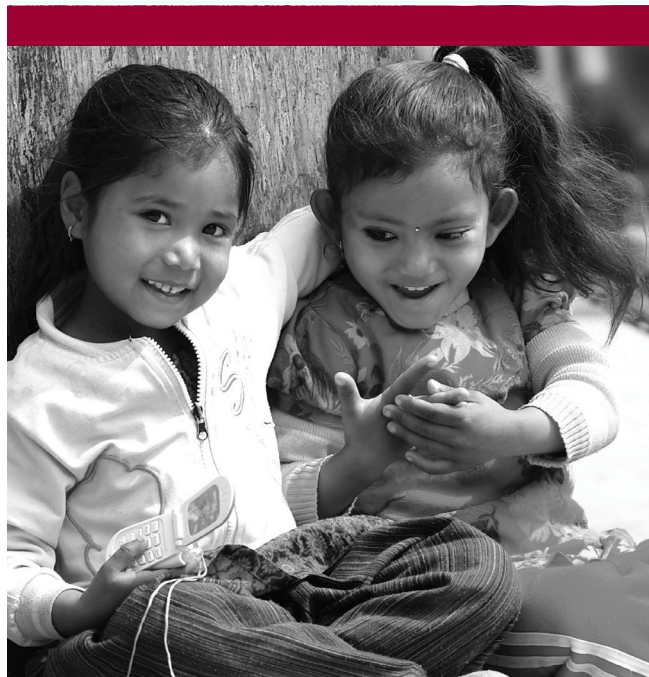
“THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT DOING ENOUGH. IT’S SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST HERE. WE NEED MORE TEACHERS ALLOCATED TO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS THAT ARE PAID BY THE GOVERNMENT.”

“Teachers should be trained for the challenges they might face in practice. For that it would be good that they had an excellent scientific background, supplemented by an in-depth pedagogical training. They should be trained using very diverse and practical situations, and should be made aware of all the contexts in which they will be working.”

Building on findings from the survey, during the interviews participants were asked how teacher education in their context might be improved to better equip teachers to meet the learning needs of all students. The response overwhelmingly pointed to increased practical training. The need for teacher education to be more child-centric and include cultural competency training were also main themes. Additional suggestions included an increased emphasis on teacher self-care, growth mindset, and teaching teachers to be life-long learners and systems-level practitioners. In accordance with findings from the survey, increased specialised training for teachers working with children with special educational needs and diverse learning needs was also suggested.

With respect to increased practical training, participants described this as training that reflects the real-life scenarios that teachers encounter on a daily basis in the classroom. As one participant shared: “In too many [teacher] college settings everything is theory (book stuff). There is the need to have much more preparation for the classroom, more case studies, examples to work through so that the student teachers are ready for what they encounter in a classroom.”

When asked for suggestions for how to amend the system, various ideas were offered. These included teacher residencies (similar to the medical profession) where teachers would train under a master teacher for several years before receiving their teaching certificate. A similar idea about turning the classrooms of master teachers into “living laboratories” for teachers in



training was suggested. Getting into the classroom to begin practical training as early as possible at the start of one’s career was recommended.

With respect to cultural competency training, participants described this as being “aware of the context” and understanding the communities where students come from. Race, gender and identity as specific topics that teachers should be versed in were mentioned. As one participant<sup>6</sup> shared: “There needs to be more open dialogue about race and gender identity – issues that our kids are dealing with that teachers are afraid to talk about. Teachers come to me and ask me how to deal with pronouns for instance. There needs to be more talk like that. As much as we want to say that race isn’t an issue, we know that it is.”

<sup>6</sup>One The participant noted that she felt that her own teacher education had adequately prepared her to teach low-income communities of colour.

With respect to teacher education programmes being more child-centered, multiple participants spoke to the need for programmes to focus more on the real-life needs and challenges faced by children, as well as training on how to build relationships with students and work with children broadly speaking.

#### SECTOR SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS

“The government is not doing enough. It’s survival of the fittest here. We need more teachers allocated to community schools that are paid by the government.”

Lastly, in the interviews participants were also asked if the education sector is doing enough to support teachers who teach disadvantaged students participants. All participants agreed that not enough is being done and offered multiple suggestions for the way forward. Suggestions included increased investment

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MANY TEACHERS ARE TEACHING THE SAME IN YEAR 20 AS THEY TAUGHT IN YEAR ONE OF THEIR CAREER...

in ongoing teacher training; higher teacher pay; more funding for resources; and increased government support and leadership at all levels. Additional ideas noted by participants included increased social safety nets; removing/reducing high-stakes testing; hiring more teachers; and elevating the status of the teaching profession.

With respect to increased sector support for ongoing teacher training and development, participants highlighted the need to stay up-to-date on the latest teaching methodologies and practices. The idea that students are learning and growing each day should also apply to teachers. As one participant in India described: “Many teachers are teaching the same in year 20 as they taught in year one of their career... Teachers shouldn’t have to invest in this in their own time. They need space for study and growth.”

With respect to increased government support, while participants spoke to specific challenges unique to their context, themes of inadequate funding and lack of accountability and leadership were common across interviews. One participant who teaches in a low-income urban neighborhood in the U.S. told a story about a colleague, a case worker who works with students with special educational needs. The case worker approached the participant to talk about a particular student, and mentioned that the student “shouldn’t bother” applying to college because

they didn’t have a chance at being accepted and communicated that they would not support the student with the college admissions process. That student was later admitted to University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) after receiving support from the participant on the application process.

On the theme of accountability, a participant in Sierra Leone discussed “lax practices” including schools not starting for the first two to three weeks of term as students “drift in” and weak record keeping and data resulting in a lack of meaningful targeted improvement efforts. In Kenya and Mozambique, the need for the government to hire more teachers was shared by participants. Also in Kenya, a participant spoke about insufficient government follow-through on policy implementation.

Several participants shared that insufficient government support disproportionately affects low-income populations and marginalised groups. As one teacher noted with respect to Canada, “Where we are not doing enough mostly has to do with children of indigenous heritage. Very frustrating to hear about



the lack of clean water and access to medical care in these communities.” A participant who works in Kibera highlighted challenges of trauma and HIV and the need for targeted government support in Kenya’s slum communities. The need for specialized training for teachers and professionals working in the most disadvantaged communities was offered.



With respect to higher teacher pay and more funding, the suggestions were straightforward and echoed by the majority of participants teaching in contexts as diverse as Los Angeles, Kenya, Mozambique, Portugal, Australia, Madagascar, Sierra Leone, and Chicago. With respect to more funding, classroom resources including books, teaching materials, and furniture were specifically mentioned. With respect to social policy, participants specifically referenced health services and food. As one participant in the U.S. reflected, children that come to school without these "...come to school so far behind their peers that it is difficult for the school system to catch them up."

## 7. LESSONS FROM EFFECTIVE TEACHERS WHO TEACH DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

### CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS

"Meeting the needs of all learners is challenging. This is easy to say but difficult to execute, especially for large classes or classes dominated by special needs students."

In the online survey teachers were asked about challenges they face that impact their ability to meet the learning needs of their students. Challenges mentioned were numerous and diverse. Of challenges mentioned, the most common were lack of funding, resources, and insufficient learning facilities (22%), heavy workload coupled with a lack of time (22%), meeting the diverse needs of students (18%), and insufficient support from the school administration (15%). Other challenges shared by participants were insufficient training; large class sizes; low salary; lack of respect for the profession; discrimination towards

“

MEETING THE NEEDS OF ALL LEARNERS IS CHALLENGING.



students; insufficient parental support; colleagues' mindsets; and lack of political support. With respect to political support and discrimination towards students, one teacher described this as: "There is a lack of faith in my student's abilities, potential and future, which results in a lack of support (financial, legal, curricula, etc.) for this population and for my school." 16% of challenges expressed by participants fell into an "other" category. These included out of school factors like insufficient food at home; educational inequality; encouraging creativity in students; and using technology in the classroom.

Infrastructure was a challenge expressed across contexts. As one participant described, in Mozambique: "Students have no classrooms, they have classes by the shade of the big trees outside. There are no tables or chairs." Another participant shared: "we run a theatre without a theater".

Neither infrastructure and resources nor fixed mindsets, discrimination and stigma towards students, while expressed as challenges, appeared to hinder the work of participants in the study. As one teacher shared, "Staying positive is hard. I'm proud that my kids are able

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THE CHALLENGE IS NEVER WITH MY KIDS, EVER. IT'S THE POLITICS AND DISCRIMINATION OF OTHER ADULTS AND THOSE RUNNING THE DISTRICT. IT'S PEOPLE SHUTTING DOWN MY KIDS AND THE WORK THEY DO. STAYING POSITIVE IS HARD.

"The challenge is never with my kids, ever. It's the politics and discrimination of other adults and those running the district. It's people shutting down my kids and the work they do. Staying positive is hard."

In the interviews, participants were also asked about challenges and barriers that they face in their work. According to participants, the challenges faced by teachers who teach disadvantaged students are diverse, numerous, and similar across contexts. Challenges include fixed mindsets and discrimination towards students; politics and bureaucracy; infrastructure and resources; standardized learning; poverty; mismatch between the curriculum and employable skills; large class sizes; and lack of time. The main challenges reported were insufficient infrastructure and resources and fixed mindsets and discrimination towards students. It is interesting to note that both teachers that identified politics and bureaucracy as a challenge, are both teachers of the arts who spoke about a lack of political support broadly speaking for their programmes.

to pull it off every time without the space and resources they need. People in charge couldn't care less that we don't have the resources. My kids are pretty resourceful and resilient. I've learned a lot from them."

With respect to poverty, participants spoke of malnutrition and its impact on student attentiveness in school, long journeys to school, insufficient resources at home for books and school supplies, and insufficient support and attention to students' social-emotional and mental health needs. As one participant shared: "Most children come to school without breakfast, it is difficult to wake them up, as they are tired and hungry... Half of my students walk one hour to reach school...during the rainy season they walk home in the rain as there is no public transport so they are absent for 2-3 days."



“ MOST IMPORTANT IS BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS. TEACHERS CAN'T BE ANY HELP WITHOUT THESE. IT'S ESSENTIAL TO LEARN HOW TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS.

**NEEDS OF DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS**

“... children can't learn if they are depressed, have low self-esteem, no self-worth or confidence in their ability to learn. This needs to be incorporated into 'learning' at school.”

In the interviews, participants were asked about what they had learnt about the needs of disadvantaged students. Similar to the challenges faced by teachers, when asked about students' needs, multiple participants noted that the needs of their students were numerous and that the needs of each student are different. The myriad of responses further suggests that disadvantaged students have diverse needs. Nevertheless, three themes emerged: 1) social emotional needs; 2) the need for positive role models including effective teachers; and 3) basic needs including nutrition and learning resources.

In terms of social emotional needs, participants repeatedly spoke about the need for students to feel loved, accepted, important and to build confidence and emotional intelligence. Social-emotional needs were also referred to as “emotional baggage” and “baggage affecting their learning”. Within social-emotional needs, the need for love and compassion and self-confidence were strong sub-themes. In addition, several participants referred to fulfillment of social emotional needs as a precondition for academic learning. As one participant described: “Students come to school with much baggage. This affects their learning.... I've learnt that it is not just about teaching or about the curriculum, this isn't enough. Children sit and listen, but a lot is going on in their minds which affects their learning and concentration.” Several participants commented that

social emotional learning is especially important for children coming from underserved communities or living in poverty, but that these needs are often not addressed in school.

With respect to the need for positive role models including effective teachers, participants spoke about the need for committed and hardworking teachers who can play multiple roles (teacher, friend, mentor, etc.). There was also a sub-theme around children needing someone to believe in them (which may come from an adult role model). Multiple participants highlighted the need for adult role models to build strong relationships with students, and the need for these role models to understand students' lives. For instance: “My students and I share deep moments. They talk to me. I focus on their social well-being. They say that I understand them more than other teachers.” Similar to social emotional needs, building strong relationships with students was referenced as a precondition for academic learning. As one participant expressed: “Once a stable and safe relationship is there, then you can teach reading and writing.”

Lastly, participants reported that their students' most basic needs including adequate food, parental care and supervision, and school materials were not always met. Similar to social emotional needs and the need for adult role models, basic needs including books and school materials were highlighted as impacting other needs (literacy for instance), which is more difficult if books, newspapers, and the internet are not available.

**EFFECTIVELY TEACHING DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS**

“Most important is building relationships with students. Teachers can't be any help without these. It's essential to learn how to build relationships.”

In the interviews, participants were asked what they have learnt about what it takes to effectively teach disadvantaged students. The main themes were 1) the ability to cultivate strong relationships with students; 2) the willingness and ability to teach all learners; 3) love for students; and 4) a passion for teaching. Other themes that emerged were adaptability and resilience, creativity and self-sacrifice.

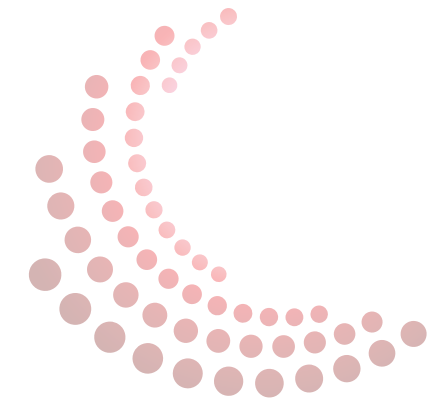
For those that spoke about the importance of building relationships with students (which included the majority of participants), participants spoke about the importance of connecting and bonding with students. This included “playing”, “learning”, “laughing”, and “being friends” with students. The ability to listen to students was a strong sub-theme. Several spoke to building relationships with students' families as part of the broader process of relationship building with students.

For participants that expressed the importance of teaching all learners, this was described as a “commitment” to teaching each child; being child-centered; providing personalised coaching (where needed); an ability to define success for each student; “accommodating” all learners and finding the strengths, interests, needs and unique motivation of each child. Creativity and the ability to innovate were sub-themes, clearly utilised by teachers in the sample as a means to effectively teaching all learners. As one participant reported: “I've learnt that innovation and imagination are key and you can't always 'follow the masses.' Thinking outside the box may not be revered but as a teacher you need to do what's best for kids.”

It is worth mentioning that there was overlap between participants who expressed the importance of

relationship building with students and those who said that teaching all learners was important. This was often described as leveraging one's relationship with a student in order to better teach to their needs. It was also expressed as using students' interests, motivations and unique needs as a means to connecting with students.

Of participants that expressed the importance of love, this was described as caring about students as individuals, empathy, kindness, and unconditional love. As one participant shared: “Your kids need to understand that you care about them. Once you do that, magic happens.” From the interviews conducted, it is unclear how the teachers interviewed work to ensure that students know they care.



“

CHILDREN CAN'T LEARN IF THEY ARE DEPRESSED, HAVE LOW SELF-ESTEEM, NO SELF-WORTH OR CONFIDENCE IN THEIR ABILITY TO LEARN.



## 8. LESSONS FOR POLICY AND TEACHER EDUCATION

### IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER POLICY

Raising the learning outcomes of students from disadvantaged communities and/or those with diverse learning needs requires quality teaching. Currently this is too rarely found in classrooms. Although the teachers in this study are exceptional teachers, that exceptionality has come from their effective practice built through their knowledge of what works and why in very diverse contexts across the world. Thus, their insights represented in the findings of this study can provide policy makers with areas teacher policy should focus on if student teachers or early career teachers are to be trained and supported to become successful in working with disadvantaged students.

### A. Recruitment and Training of Teachers

- Amend the selection process for entry to initial teacher training programmes to include interpersonal skills and qualities in addition to academic qualifications.
- Consider ways in which the pool of teacher candidates can become more diverse, attracting candidates with knowledge and experience of disadvantaged communities.

Currently many countries base their recruitment almost entirely on an applicant's prior academic qualifications with little use of interviews or other methods to explore applicants' soft skills. This can lead to a teacher cadre which is less diverse than the student body and which provides limited role models for some groups of students. Positive role models were highlighted as a priority need for students, building dynamic



The work here suggests a broader conception of teacher quality and student learning than what is typically found in policy papers, moving beyond skills that can easily be measured, but nevertheless, are essential in becoming an effective teacher. It suggests three areas of teacher policy where changes should be explored to ensure an increase in the number of quality teachers who are effective in reducing inequalities in student outcomes.

relationships with students and helping students to extend their sense of what it is possible for them to achieve and practical routes to realise their aspirations; such role models do not always need to be teachers.

An interest in and empathy with children, commitment to the social justice goals of teaching, patience, compassion, creativity and adaptability were all

“ CURRENTLY MANY COUNTRIES BASE THEIR RECRUITMENT ALMOST ENTIRELY ON AN APPLICANT'S PRIOR ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS WITH LITTLE USE OF INTERVIEWS OR OTHER METHODS TO EXPLORE APPLICANTS' SOFT SKILLS.

highlighted as qualities critical to success as a teacher working with disadvantaged students. Above all it is important to explore how teacher candidates are able to connect with students and work collaboratively to explore and share ideas in a horizontal manner rather than merely disseminating knowledge to students. Successful teachers working with disadvantaged students are also open to suggestions for improvement, including those from students, and in doing so they demonstrate a growth mind-set. They are innovative, persistent and resilient in achieving their goals and moving deeper into practice.

The use of such criteria for the selection of teacher candidates is not unproblematic; it raises questions of “objectivity” and transparency but a number of institutions are developing tools and practices – for example asking candidates to teach a short lesson or including the voice of students on interview panels, which offer promise to overcome these challenges. Deploying more comprehensive teacher selection processes is inevitably more time consuming and resource intensive, however the trade-off is considerable; increased teacher motivation and retention with improved learning outcomes for students, particularly the most disadvantaged. Governments and institutions should review and amend their entry criteria for new recruits to include this broader range of skills and attributes. They should explore different ways of assessing these qualities in their particular context and how they might be implemented.

### Professional Training for Teachers

- Make available more guided opportunities for student teachers to practice skills and strategies which support the learning of all students.
- Pay greater attention to the provision of specialist options across a variety of content areas linked to the learning needs of specific groups of students including those with disabilities and learning difficulties. Provide these opportunities for new recruits and serving teachers.

Findings from this research reinforce the vision of teacher education programmes advocated by multiple scholars: Trainee teachers need to learn to teach different students not just the subject. Currently many trainees are offered only very short practical training periods and many teachers feel under prepared to use child centred pedagogies effectively with disadvantaged students. Trainee teachers need opportunities to learn about the lives of the students they will be teaching, to be given tools to develop an effective practice with diverse groups of students, to have “safe spaces” to try out and evaluate these practices as well as opportunities to enact and reflect on these practices under supervision in real classrooms.





Reflection is critical in developing teachers' understanding of their students' needs motivations, and participation. Knowing how to harness each student's motivation in service of their unique learning goals is central to raising students' "horizons for action" – convincing students they can be successful learners. Greater attention also needs to be given to supporting teachers to develop their competencies in pedagogic techniques such as designing differentiated activities, using digital technologies with students and guiding small group work. One possible solution is a teacher residency approach.

But these opportunities to learn in practice need not be restricted to schools alone. In college or university studies trainee teachers could benefit from opportunities which connect more directly to classroom practice, such as critically analysing videos of expert teachers to understand how they design and facilitate personalised student learning, examining the local curriculum, studying examples of students' work. These type of activities could be integrated into "theoretical" courses to support trainee teachers in analysing problems of practice in different contexts.

Additionally, teacher training programmes for beginning teachers need to develop teachers as lifelong learners who attend to their own development as well as that of their students. Teacher educators need to model approaches and support teachers to be open to interrogation and debate on difficult issues of deep concern to many students such as gender and racial identity and to develop mutually trusting relationships with parents and the broader community which the school serves.

Throughout their careers teachers benefit from opportunities to refresh their ideas and practice. For those relatively new to working with disadvantaged communities, specialist training needs to be made available, learning from experienced peer practitioners. In the short term those employing or assigning teachers may want to look at candidates' practical experiences during their training programme. Longer term teacher educators need to consider ways to centre classroom practice in teacher education programmes, through this the role of pre-service education in improving the quality of teaching and learning will be enhanced.

#### B. Support for Teachers:

- **Recognise teachers as key influencers in the lives of their students.**
- **Create a more enabling environment by meeting students' basic needs, providing adequate numbers of teachers and ensuring teachers have the**

“ REFLECTION IS CRITICAL IN DEVELOPING TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR STUDENTS' NEEDS, MOTIVATIONS, AND PARTICIPATION.



**resources needed: classrooms, learning materials and regular salaries.**

- **Free up curriculum time to enable teachers to meet the learning needs of their students.**
- **Complement teachers with specialist psychosocial support and health services for students.**

For successful teachers, teaching is much more than a job: they are dedicated and willingly accept responsibility for their students' development and onward trajectories. This commitment needs to be recognised more widely through enhancing the status of the teaching profession.

The expert teachers in this study were motivated by interactions with their students and by their students' achievements. But they were unanimous in their perceptions that policy changes were essential to increase support for teachers working with disadvantaged students; these students are most affected by inadequate support. Central to their analysis was recognition of their students' success; recognition of the needs of teachers and students (in particular resource needs) and recognition of the role of the teacher.

Requests for increased funding for different forms of resource are not new but remain imperative in many contexts; students' learning is hindered by a lack of adequate nutrition and other basic needs and teachers

are struggling to secure resources to enact engaging relevant learning experiences for their students.

Perhaps less frequently highlighted is teachers' need for curriculum and teaching space to use creatively to support their students. This includes time to create trusting relationships with students and their families and understand their needs and interests. When alignment of the curriculum and employability skills is weak teachers are required to make difficult choices. Freedom from the hegemony of standardised tests would facilitate student ownership of their learning and allow time to explore student interests. Teachers also need time to engage in collaborative professional practice with peers. Too frequently, teachers of disadvantaged students are accorded little time to interact with their peers and specialists in the joint enterprise of improving student outcomes.

Working with disadvantaged students is highly demanding on teachers and they frequently provide emotional support to these students. Whilst many teachers see this as an integral part of their commitment

“ FOR SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS, TEACHING IS MUCH MORE THAN A JOB.





and passion to their students, greater provision of psychosocial specialists would free up teachers to devote more time to meeting students' learning needs.

Retaining effective motivated teachers involves a complex interaction of multiple factors but reducing teacher turnover is critical if teachers are to have time to build productive relationships with their students and the wider community of the school, particularly in marginalised communities.

## 9. CONCLUSION

This study has produced insights into what governments and their institutions should focus on if disadvantaged students are to receive education that transforms their lives and gives them a chance to be productive contributors to society. It has also highlighted what works in making a difference to the lives of many children who are taught by effective teachers across diverse countries and who have been recognised as making a positive difference in their lives and community. Insights from such exceptional teachers are valuable to teacher policy as they reflect the craft knowledge that is so often missing in the vision of producing teachers who can make a difference in the lives of every child.

If no child is to be left behind in accessing quality education in every country, ensuring that those recruited into teacher education have the disposition to work in the most challenging conditions should be top priority. It is also about fostering this disposition through teacher education programmes including opportunities for continuous professional development in contexts that allow these qualities to be valued and nurtured. The striking evidence laid out in this report demonstrates not only teachers' capacity to make a difference to the lives of disadvantaged children from every part of the world, but also how best to identify, nurture and develop the next generation of teachers who will be key to providing equitable quality education for every child.

## 10. APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me how you got into teaching or how you became a teacher?
2. Where do you draw your inspiration as a teacher? (i.e. what motivates you?)
3. In the course of your career what have you learnt about what it takes to be an effective teacher?
4. Tell me about your current teaching job? What do you find stimulating about it? What do you find challenging or frustrating?
5. What have you learnt about the needs of the students you teach? What about the needs of boys versus the needs of girls?
6. If you were to advice institutions that recruit teachers to teach in the area/school where you work, what would your advice be on the most important qualities they should look out for? Why?
7. In your country, do you feel that the education sector has done (or is doing) enough to support teachers like you who teach disadvantaged children/students or who work in disadvantaged communities? If no, what is needed? If yes, what specific things have been that you consider positive?
8. What should teacher education in your country do (or focus more on) to produce teachers like you who can work effectively with students with disadvantaged backgrounds or learning difficulties?
9. Tell me about your most effective methods that get you results when it comes to teaching your students (i.e. methods that brings out the very best in your students' abilities)? Why do you think they are so effective?
10. Do you see yourself remaining as a teacher in the foreseeable future? If yes, would you still want to continue teaching in your current school or you would prefer to move elsewhere? Any reason why?

### APPENDIX B: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

#### Section I: Background Information

1. What is your name? (optional)
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your year of birth?
4. In what country do you teach?
5. How would you describe the area in which the school you teach is located?
  - a. Village
  - b. Major urban city
  - c. Small or medium-sized city
  - d. Peri-Urban
6. How many years have you been working as a teacher at your current school?
7. How many years have you been working as a teacher in total?
8. What grades do you currently teach? Please select all that apply.
  - a. Pre-primary (ages ~3-5)
  - b. Primary (class 1-2, ~ages 5-8)
  - c. Elementary (classes 3-5, ages ~8-11)
  - d. Middle school (classes 6-8, ages ~11-13)
  - e. Secondary (classes 9-12, ages ~13-18)
  - f. All
  - g. Other (write in)
9. What subjects do you currently teach?
  - a. Maths
  - b. Language Arts
  - c. Science
  - d. Social Studies/history
  - e. Foreign language
  - f. English
  - g. Art
  - h. Physical Education
  - i. Class 1/Class 2/Class 3/Class 4/Class 5/Class 6
  - j. All
  - k. Other



10. How many students total (all classes combined) do you currently teach?
11. How many students (approximately) are in each of your classes (ie. average class size)?
12. Across all classes that you teach how many of your students are special needs students?<sup>7</sup>
- None
  - Some
  - Most
  - All
13. We would like to understand the composition of your students. Please estimate the broad percentage of students who have the following characteristics: i) Students whose home language is different from the language of instruction, ii) low academic achievers, iii) students with special needs, iv) students from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes<sup>8</sup>, v) students who are first generation learners<sup>9</sup>, vi) students who have recently migrated or are displaced.
- None
  - 1% to 10%
  - 11% to 30%
  - 31% to 60%
  - More than 60%

14. How did you end up teaching in your current school?
- I moved to teach here because I wanted to teach in this type of school
  - I applied to teach in this school through a scheme announcing vacancies
  - I was posted to teach in this school by the local district or government
  - I was posted to teach in this school through the national posting system

<sup>7</sup> Special needs students cover those for whom a special learning need has been formally identified because they are mentally, physically, or emotionally disadvantaged. Often, they will be those for whom additional public or private resources (personnel, material or financial) have been provided to support their education.

<sup>8</sup> "Socioeconomically disadvantaged homes" refers to homes lacking basic necessities or advantages of life, such as adequate housing, nutrition or medical care. Students may fall into multiple categories. Please use rough estimates and mark one choice in each row.

<sup>9</sup> A first-generation learner is someone whose parents or guardians did not attend a post-secondary institution.

15. Would you be open to a short 30-minute follow-up interview conducted by members of the Global Education and Skills Forum Teachers Alliance?
- Yes/No

## Section II: Training and Professional Development

In this section, we would like to better understand any formal training and professional development that you have received. "Professional development" is defined as activities that aim to develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher.

16. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?
- Secondary/high school
  - Post-secondary two-year community or junior college degree/diploma, non-university vocational institutes or associate degree
  - Bachelor's degree or equivalent
  - Masters degree or equivalent
  - Doctorate degree or equivalent
  - No formal education
17. If you completed a post-secondary degree in what field(s) was the degree?
18. Did you complete an accredited pre-service teacher education or teacher training program? Yes/No
19. If you completed an accredited pre-service teacher education/training program, what type of program was it?
- Undergraduate degree in education
  - Masters degree in education
  - Both an undergraduate and a Masters degree in education
  - A non-degree based program (i.e. PGCE or a professional diploma in education)
  - Other (write in)

20. If yes, how satisfied are you that it prepared you to teach students from disadvantaged backgrounds?
- Not at all satisfied
  - Not satisfied
  - Somewhat satisfied
  - Satisfied
  - Very satisfied

21. If yes, how satisfied are you that it prepared you to teach students with special learning needs?
- Not at all satisfied
  - Not satisfied
  - Somewhat satisfied
  - Satisfied
  - Very satisfied
22. Please describe three things that you have learnt about teaching that you did not learn from your teacher education or teacher training program.
23. Based on your experience, please rank the following in order of importance when it comes to becoming a successful teacher. Please rank on a scale of 1-10 with 1 as least important and 10 as most important.
- Knowledge and understanding of my subject fields(s)
  - Pedagogical competencies in teaching my subject field(s)
  - Knowledge of the curriculum
  - Knowledge of student's background
  - Skills in student behavior and class management
  - Skills in providing individualizing student learning
  - Skills in understanding students with special needs
  - Skills in teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting
  - Personal experience working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds outside the school context





### Section III: Teaching Practice

In this section, we would like to better understand your teaching practice in relation to teaching disadvantaged students.

24. On average, how often do you do the following? For each, please use one of the following response options: Never, Once a year or less, 2-4 times per year, 5-10 times per year, 1-3 times per month, Once a week or more.
- Observe other teachers' teach children with special needs
  - Engage in joint activities across different classes, age groups, special needs groups
  - Develop materials for teaching children with special needs
  - Engage in discussions about the learning and development of specific students
  - Work with other teachers in your school to ensure common standards in evaluations for assessing all student progress
  - Attend team conference that includes a theme on teaching disadvantaged children
  - Take part in collaborative professional learning focused on the learning needs of disadvantaged children
  - Collaborate with teachers from other schools on teaching disadvantaged children?
  - Coach other teachers on how to teach disadvantaged children
25. Based on your experience how would you rank the following in relation to teaching? Please rank each on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being least important and 10 as most important.
- Get students to believe they can do well in school work
  - Help students learn to answer exam questions
  - Identify slow learners and give them separate instruction
  - Help slow learners develop critical thinking after mastering the basics
  - Focus on students with creative potential
  - Use a variety of assessment strategies
  - Implement alternative instructional strategies

- Provide regular feedback to students on performance
  - Emphasize non-cognitive skill development
  - Give verbal feedback as often as possible
26. How often does each of the following happen throughout the year in your class(es)? For each, please mark one of the following response options: Never or almost never, Occasionally, Frequently, In all or nearly all lessons.
- Given students opportunities to display and talk about their work
  - Impart knowledge through lecture-style instruction
  - Get students to work in small groups to come up with a joint solution to a problem/task
  - Get students to engage in independent written tasks (i.e. worksheets, assignment, etc.)
  - Give different tasks/assignments to the students who have difficulties learning
  - Have high and low achieving students to work together on common tasks or projects
  - Get male and female students to work collaboratively on common tasks or assignments
  - Give students from disadvantaged backgrounds leadership roles in the classroom
  - Design or select learning materials that reflect the different learning needs of students
  - Use ICT (information and communication technology) to expand learning opportunities for students with learning difficulties or slow learners?
  - Provide emotional support to students from challenging or difficult backgrounds
  - Seek professional support in how to meet the learning needs of disadvantaged students or students with learning difficulties.
  - Prioritize knowledge development over skill development
  - Meet parents of your students to discuss their learning needs and progress



### Section IV: Personal Beliefs and Attitudes towards Teaching

In this section, we would like to understand your personal beliefs about teaching students from disadvantaged background and issues about their learning.

27. What would you consider (a) essential, (b) useful, (c) not necessary, as assessment information for meeting the learning needs of disadvantaged students?

Assessment information	Essential	Helpful	Not necessary
History of students' academic performance			
Evaluation of language proficiency			
Diagnostic testing data			
Classroom-observation of students learning			
Hands on/practical-based assessment			
Student self-assessment			

28. When it comes to working with students with learning difficulties or students from disadvantaged backgrounds which would you favour, partially favour or not favour as a focus of a teacher's intervention?

Intervention	Favour	Partially Favour	Not Favour
Specific academic deficits			
Learning strategies			
Language problems			
Cognitive deficits			
Social/Interpersonal skills			
Behavioural deviations			
Specially designed curriculum			
Differentiated instruction			



29. From your teaching experience which of the following practices are (a) always useful, (b) sometimes useful, or (c) never useful, when it comes to teaching students from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Practice	Always useful	Sometimes useful	Never useful
Individualized instruction			
Whole class instruction			
Interactive language teaching			
Role play			
Mixed ability group work			
Practical-based assessment			
Experiential learning			

30. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. For each, please use one of the following responses: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, or Strongly Agree.

- Impart knowledge to students with learning difficulties is difficult
- Disadvantaged students have potential that requires specially trained teachers to unearth.
- Disadvantaged students learn best when you give them different activities that require a wide range of skills
- Disadvantaged students are not served well by national curriculum content
- My experience working with disadvantaged children is that their disadvantage can be a barrier to reaching their potential
- Without deep knowledge of the different backgrounds of students, inspiring them to reach their potential is possible.
- Enforcing independent work through written assignments, tasks, etc. help students from disadvantaged backgrounds to reach their potential
- Teaching students with learning difficulties is a challenge that a teacher cannot meet without peer or school level support
- When I have encountered students with diagnosed learning disabilities I have felt capable of addressing their learning needs.
- I believe raising the confidence level of lowest performing students is more important than focusing on raising their cognitive abilities.

For questions 31-38 please use one of the following response options: Very much like me, Mostly like me, Somewhat like me, Not much like me, or Not like me

at all.

31. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones

32. Setback don't discourage me

33. I have been obsessed with a certain project for a short time but later lost interest

34. I am a hard worker

35. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one

36. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete

37. I finish whatever I begin

38. I am diligent

For questions 39-46 please use one of the following response options: Strongly agree, Agree, Mostly agree, Mostly Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree.

39. You have a certain amount of intelligence, and you can't really do much to change it.

40. No matter who you are, you can significantly change your intelligence level.

41. You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.

42. No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.

43. You have a certain amount of talent, and you can't really do much to change it.

44. No matter who you are, you can significantly change your level of talent.

45. You can always substantially change how much talent you have.

46. No matter how much talent you have, you can always change it quite a bit.

47. What qualities or traits do you possess that help you meet the needs of your students?

48. In your opinion, what qualities or traits in a teacher are most important to ensure that they are able to effectively meet the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds?

49. What are the main challenges that you perceive in your role as a teacher?





