

Excellent teachers or small classes?

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In Singapore’s high-scoring schools, teachers are paid well, but expected to teach larger classes.

What’s more important: excellent teachers or small class sizes? Singapore’s educational success is based on highly qualified, well-trained and well-paid teachers capable of handling large classes, reports *The Economist*.

Classes average 36 pupils, compared with 24 in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.

Better, so the thinking goes, to have big classes taught by excellent teachers than smaller ones taught by mediocre ones. Teachers who want more kudos but not the bureaucratic burden of running schools can become “master teachers”, with responsibility for training their peers. The best teachers get postings to the ministry of education and hefty bonuses: overall, teachers are paid about the same as their peers in private-sector professions. Teachers are also subject to rigorous annual performance assessments.

In Singapore, teachers lead their classes in the old “sage on the stage” model, notes *The Economist*.

While “critics contend that Singapore has a ‘drill and kill’ model that produces uncreative, miserable maths whizzes,” students don’t just excel in tests of reading, math and science, the story observes. They also aced a 2015 PISA assessment of collaborative problem-solving.

“They also reported themselves to be happy— more so than children in Finland, for instance, a country that educationalists regard as an example of how to achieve exceptional results with cuddlier methods of teaching.”

Singapore is introducing reforms to encourage creativity and reduce stress.

In the U.S. the Opportunity Culture initiative is trying to extend the reach of excellent teachers, giving more students access to first-rate instruction. Early results are very promising.