
Education Best Practices from High-Achieving Nations

Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond offers a lot of practical advice on how to reform schools, but she starts with what not to do: one hundred years ago, school reformers "figured out the important facts to learn, divided it by the twelve years of the curriculum...and when you come out of school...you've learned all there is not know and you're ready to go out into the world." Not so easy anymore. Dr. Darling-Hammond cites a recent study of knowledge creation by the University of California, Berkeley, found that between 1999 and 2003, more new knowledge was created in the world than in all of history combined.

One example cited by Professor Darling Hammond, is the practice of Japanese lesson study, widely used throughout Asia. Teachers come together and work on a concept for a lesson, create the lesson together, and refine it. One teacher then teaches it while the others observe, either in person or through video. The teachers then come together again to look at the resulting work and debrief on the lesson examining what worked and what didn't. The lesson is revised and taught by others and followed by yet another debrief. In this way sound pedagogy and teaching practice are created. As America reforms its education system, new forms of assessment are needed--instead of multiple choice tests; we should look to high-achieving countries which assess students through essays, oral exams and performance-based tasks conducted in their classrooms. As an example of this type of reform, Dr. Darling Hammond points to Finland, which completely overhauled teacher education programs, focusing on training teachers how to teach special education and low-achieving students so they realize high academic achievement. The theory behind this is if teachers can teach these students well, they can teach any students well. Teacher training programs also focus on authentic assessments, for example, a student journalism project. Teachers in Finland control and manage their own assessments, which are performance-based and feature how to coach student investigations.