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One Piece of the Whole

**TEACHER EVALUATION AS PART OF A
COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM FOR TEACHING
AND LEARNING** PAGE 4

18

**New Haven's Approach
to Teacher Evaluation**

27

**The Importance
of Teaching Content**

34

**Professional Development
on the Classics**



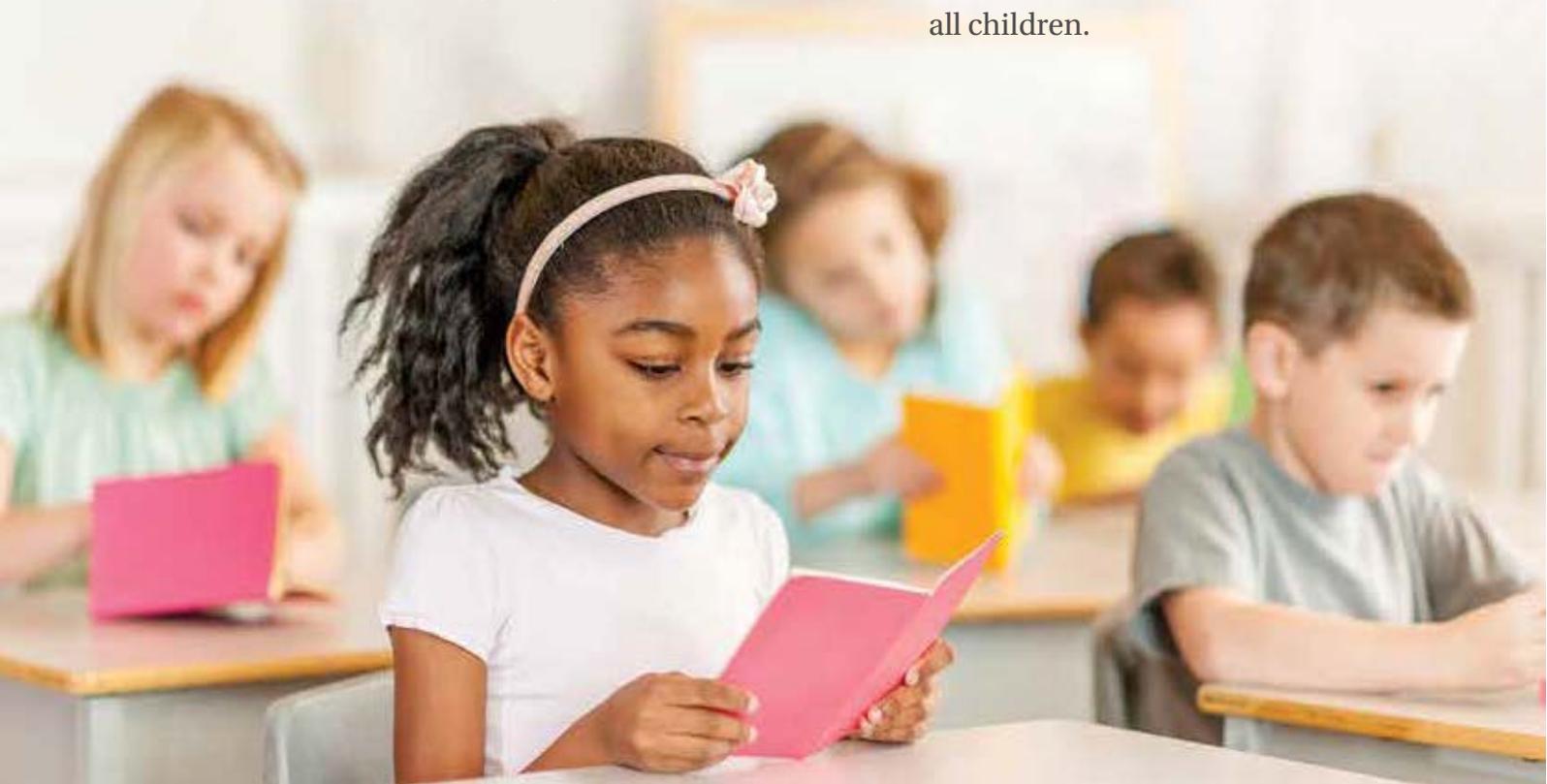
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—ERIN BENHAM

President, Meriden (Conn.) Federation of Teachers

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Teaching and Learning over Testing

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

I'M OFTEN ASKED how I can be in favor of the Common Core State Standards while opposing the fixation on standardized testing in education. The question is as revealing as the answer. Unfortunately, the standards have come to be associated with testing rather than the deeper learning they were intended to promote.

The Common Core standards hold great promise, but their potential has been and will continue to be squandered if policymakers keep reducing the standards to high-stakes test scores. The very purpose of public education and the joy of learning are at risk when authorities try to capture everything about teaching and learning, whether for students or teachers, in a number or algorithm.

To truly reclaim the promise of public education, we must make it about three things: helping students build trusting relationships—with both their peers and adults; equipping them with essential knowledge and the ability to think critically; and helping them develop persistence and grit to deal with struggles and setbacks. Test-based accountability and black box algorithms don't capture those things.

But common sense regarding what we need to do to help children hasn't lessened many officials' love of education's big data instrument—value-added modeling. VAM attempts to predict how a teacher's students will score by using past test scores and various assumptions—and then compares that prediction with actual results. It is an algorithm, a mathematical equation. And, like predicting the weather, VAM is subject to many factors that influence the final result, and its flaws and limitations are well-established. As a data point, VAM is informative; as a high-stakes measurement used to sort, rank, and evaluate teachers—it is wrong.

The AFT has always been leery about VAM—and we've said since day one that VAM should never be the singular

measure of student learning used to evaluate teachers. In 2007, I questioned the fairness and accuracy of value-added metrics in a *New York Times* column. Today, there is even more evidence that not only has VAM not worked, it has been harmful and has become a favorite cudgel of those seeking to turn public education into a numbers game.

Examples of this abound, such as the haywire system in Florida, where an elementary school teacher who was named Teacher of the Year by her colleagues was labeled unsatisfactory based on a VAM score for students she hadn't taught.

In Washington, D.C., district officials attempted to downplay the recent revelation that at least 44 teachers received inaccurate VAM scores (including one teacher who was fired). Teachers are rightly alarmed about attaching high stakes to such an unreliable measure.

I may have labeled VAM a sham, but that is based on looking at the evidence.

A recent study funded by the U.S. Education Department found significant variations in teachers' value-added scores, concluding that the variations do not reflect the quality of teaching, but that they are likely due to "measurement error." The Rand Corporation and the Board on Testing and Assessment of the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences both conclude that VAM results shouldn't be used to evaluate individual teachers.

California has moved to focus on teaching and learning over testing. As Bill Honig, former California state superintendent of public instruction, recently wrote, there is deep opposition to high-stakes

testing but broad support for the Common Core standards in his state. That's because Gov. Jerry Brown and lawmakers understood that to make the standards work, they must be delinked from the high-stakes tests.

It's time to call the question. Will authorities continue to be more concerned with creating testing and data

The purpose of **public education is at risk** when everything about teaching and learning is **reduced to a number or algorithm.**

systems that rank and sort schools and educators but do nothing to improve teaching and learning, and that ignore the countless ways educators nurture and develop our children? Or will they look at the evidence and join educators, students, and parents in fighting to reclaim the promise of public education?

We can reclaim that promise by supporting strong neighborhood public schools that are safe, collaborative, and welcoming environments. Schools where teachers and school staff are well-prepared and well-supported, with manageable class sizes and time to collaborate. Schools with rigorous standards aligned to an engaging curriculum that focuses on teaching and learning—and the joy of both—and that includes art, music, civics, and the sciences. Schools with evaluation systems that are not about ranking and firing but about improving teaching and learning. And schools with wraparound services to address our children's social, emotional, and health needs.

Those who see testing, measuring, and labeling as the be-all and end-all in education would do well to heed the wisdom of former AFT member Albert Einstein: "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything we count, counts."



4 One Piece of the Whole

Teacher Evaluation as Part of a Comprehensive System for Teaching and Learning

BY LINDA DARLING-HAMMOND

As a major policy focus, teacher evaluation is currently the primary tool promoted to improve teaching quality. But evaluation alone is not enough. What will most transform teaching quality—and the profession—is the creation of a larger system that supports teaching and learning through on-the-job evaluation and professional development, and that ultimately focuses on continuous improvement.

14 Survey Says

Using Teacher Feedback to Bolster Evaluation

BY ROSS WIENER AND KASIA LUNDY

Like many leading businesses, school systems can use a survey-based approach to make teacher voice integral in shaping teacher evaluation and providing the necessary supports.

18 The Professional Educator

A Fine Balance

BY DAVID CICARELLA

A local union president shares how his members worked with the school district to create an evaluation system focused on supporting struggling teachers and helping those already strong in their craft continue to improve.

22 The Mind Shift in Teacher Evaluation

Where We Stand—and Where We Need to Go

BY ANGELA MINNICI

Before teacher evaluation can succeed, we must change the way we think about its main purpose. Those engaged in designing and implementing effective evaluation systems must agree on critical components, such as defining what good teaching is, as well as avoiding common missteps, such as excluding educators from the work.

27 Minding the Knowledge Gap

The Importance of Content in Student Learning

BY DAISY CHRISTODOULOU

A former teacher in the United Kingdom debunks the myth that teaching facts prevents understanding, and she explains why teaching content knowledge is part of the primary mission of education.



34 Promethean Summer

Professional Development Boldly Focuses on the Classics

BY JENNIFER DUBIN

Each year, a three-week summer program in Dallas provides teachers from across grade levels and disciplines the opportunity to study literary classics that reinvigorate their teaching and renew their passion for lifelong learning.

38 Teaching and Its Spiritual Power



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Readers Respond to Wineburg

In its Winter 2012–13 issue, *American Educator* published Sam Wineburg's article "Undue Certainty: Where Howard Zinn's *A People's History* Falls Short," and until now has not printed a formal response. We at the Zinn Education Project (www.zinnedproject.org) encourage you to read two articles *American Educator* chose not to publish: (1) "When Assessing Zinn, Listen to the Voices of Teachers and Students" (www.hnn.us/article/149974) by Robert Cohen, with insights from teachers and students, voices absent from Wineburg's article, and (2) "Bashing Howard Zinn: A Critical Look at One of the Critics" (www.bit.ly/1dYJp2W) by Alison Kysia, a careful comparison of Wineburg's representation of *A People's History* to the original text, revealing many distortions. Also, please see comments by AFT members on the AFT's Facebook page (<http://on.fb.me/1foOaoZ>) in response to the initial posting of Wineburg's article.

—DEBORAH MENKART AND BILL BIGELOW
Codirectors, Zinn Education Project
Washington, DC

I have great respect for Sam Wineburg, the author of "Undue Certainty," and I take his positions seriously. As someone who has taught *A People's History* for several years and been in touch with other educators who also use it, I think Wineburg may be missing a crucial piece of information. He presupposes that Zinn's work is taught in isolation from other texts, or that it is presented as historical narrative that students must digest.

When I use Zinn's work in my classroom, it serves two purposes: to expose students to an accessible form of social history and to give a perspective on history that is read in the context of other pieces of evidence and scholarship. In my class, students read *A People's History* not in isolation, nor as a straight narrative to digest, but as one interpretive voice that exposes them to the work of historians in two ways. First, they can see multiple perspectives on the same event. Then, they can draw their own conclusions from the evidence.

To throw out the textbook and simply substitute *A People's History* as "real history" without doing any kind of interpretive work around the text elicits no more historical/analytical thinking from students than simply reading a traditional textbook.

—JOSH HATALA
Emma Willard School
Troy, NY

I felt let down by Wineburg's article. A more constructive piece could urge teachers to highlight Zinn's first chapter,

which discusses the making of history, to use the classroom to promote inquiry throughout the book, and to add other writings to their lessons, such as primary sources, to teach students how to interpret history.

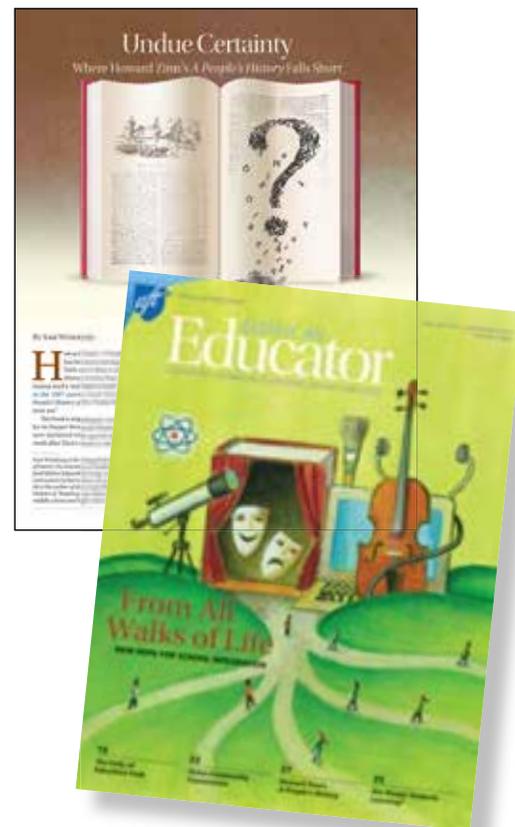
The article's most reasonable critique was of Zinn's "yes-no" historical questions, but *A People's History* operates as a counterhistory to many "yesses" that students have already been taught. In an accessible way, Zinn destabilizes those yesses so readers can question a dominant narrative. If the book just asked open-ended questions instead of presenting aspects of U.S. history that have previously been made invisible, it wouldn't be as influential.

—ADAM QUINN
Hampshire College
Amherst, MA

I actually agree with Wineburg's article. When I first read *A People's History*, I was shocked by how tentative and questionable Zinn's conclusions were. It's a decent book for another perspective, but it's in no way authoritative. I'm a dyed-in-the-wool liberal, but I just cannot recommend Zinn's work as a reliable secondary source for history.

—ANONYMOUS

I want to express my gratitude to Sam Wineburg for being brave enough to write "Undue Certainty." I teach fifth grade (including colonial American history) in the Los Angeles Unified School District. I depend on a lot of outside materials and



my own knowledge (a constant work in progress) to enliven the vapid textbooks, whose bones have been picked clean by the vacuum of political correctness.

I encourage my students to read about an event, marshal the facts, then try to help them answer their questions ranging from the practical to the abstract. To answer them satisfactorily, I need a broad range of content knowledge on a subject, knowledge that is sequential. I need to know facts about geography, agricultural trends, economics, politics, indigenous cultures, and the New World colonies. Many teachers are content to use textbooks spiced up with their remembrance of Zinn's breathless anecdotes, and I think this does a huge injustice to young minds, especially in a school such as mine, where the tedium of poverty often eclipses the will or the means to acquire additional educational resources.

I am thrilled that someone else, especially with such sterling credentials, has a similar take on the thrill of history.

—JANE DE HAVEN
Aragon Avenue Elementary School
Los Angeles, CA

One Piece of the Whole

Teacher Evaluation as Part of a Comprehensive System for Teaching and Learning



BY LINDA DARLING-HAMMOND

The United States is at a critical moment in teacher evaluation. The evaluation process is undergoing extensive changes, some of them quite radical, in nearly every state and district across the country. As we embark on these reforms, it is crucial for schools, teachers, and, especially, students

Linda Darling-Hammond is the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University, where she is the faculty director of the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education and the founding director of the School Redesign Network. She is a former president of the American Educational Research Association and a member of the National Academy of Education. This article is adapted, with permission of Teachers College Press, from Linda Darling-Hammond, Getting Teacher Evaluation Right: What Really Matters for Effectiveness and Improvement. Copyright 2013 by Teachers College, Columbia University. All rights reserved. The book was inspired by the Good Schools Seminar Series, supported by the Albert Shanker Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization endowed by the American Federation of Teachers to promote excellence in public education.

that new policies improve the quality of teaching while avoiding pitfalls that could damage education. It is imperative that we not substitute new problems for familiar ones, but that we instead use this moment of transformation to get teacher evaluation right.

Virtually everyone agrees that teacher evaluation in the United States needs an overhaul. Existing systems rarely help teachers improve or clearly distinguish those who are succeeding from those who are struggling. The tools that are used do not always represent the important features of good teaching. It is nearly impossible for principals, especially in large schools, to have sufficient time or content expertise to evaluate all of the teachers they supervise, much less to address the needs of some teachers for intense instructional support. And many principals have not had access to the professional development and support they need to become expert instructional leaders and evaluators of teaching. Thus, evaluation in its current form often contributes little either to teacher learning or to accurate, timely information for personnel decisions.

These problems are long-standing. They were obvious when my colleagues and I first studied U.S. teacher evaluation systems in the

early 1980s.¹ As part of a Rand Corporation study, Arthur Wise, Milbrey McLaughlin, Harriet Bernstein, and I searched the country for effective evaluation systems and found ourselves rummaging for the proverbial needle in a haystack. We discovered only a very few that offered opportunities for teachers to set goals and receive regular, useful feedback, along with systems that could support both learning and timely, effective personnel decisions.

There were some bright spots, like the then-brand-new Toledo Peer Assessment and Review (PAR) model—a labor-management breakthrough that introduced intensive mentoring and peer evaluation for both novice teachers and struggling veterans, and that ensured serious decisions for tenure and continuation.* Also noteworthy was the Greenwich, Connecticut, model of teacher goal-setting and continuous feedback—which involved teachers in collecting evidence about their practice and student learning long before this was fashionable elsewhere. Although the use of some of these successful models has spread, the broad landscape for teacher evaluation has changed little, and impatience with the results of weak systems has grown.

As my colleagues and I found in our research nearly 30 years ago, and as I experienced as a high school teacher some years ago

promotion, advanced certification, and dismissal. As a consequence, most states in the country are in the process of dramatically overhauling their evaluation systems for both teachers and administrators.

Although there is widespread consensus that teacher evaluation in the United States needs serious attention, simply changing on-the-job evaluation will not, by itself, transform the quality of teaching. For all of the attention focused on identifying and removing poor teachers, we will not improve the quality of the profession if we do not also cultivate an excellent supply of good teachers who are well prepared and committed to career-long learning. And teachers' ongoing learning, in turn, depends on the construction of a strong professional development system and useful career development approaches that can help spread expertise. Finally, improving the skills of individual teachers will not be enough: we need to create and sustain productive, collegial working conditions that allow teachers to work collectively in an environment that supports learning for them and their students.

In short, what this country really needs is a conception of teacher evaluation as part of a *teaching and learning system* that supports continuous improvement, both for individual teachers



This country needs a conception of teacher evaluation as part of a *teaching and learning system* that supports continuous improvement.

myself, most teachers want more from an evaluation system. They crave useful feedback and the challenge and counsel that would enable them to improve. Far from ducking the issue of evaluation, they want more robust systems that are useful, fair, and pointed at productive development.

Today, teacher evaluation is receiving unprecedented attention, in large part because new teacher evaluation systems are a requirement for states and districts that want to receive funding under the federal Race to the Top initiative or flexibility waivers under No Child Left Behind. As teaching has become a major focus of policy attention, teacher evaluation is currently the primary tool being promoted to improve it. Federal requirements include the use of multiple categories of teacher ratings, rather than just “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory,” based on multiple observations, feedback, and the use of student test scores to assess effectiveness. They also encourage the use of these evaluations to inform decisions about tenure and continuation, compensation,

and for the profession as a whole. Such a system should enhance teacher learning and skill, while at the same time ensuring that teachers who are retained and tenured can effectively support student learning throughout their careers.

Of all the lessons for teacher evaluation in the current era, perhaps this one is the most important: that we not adopt an individualistic, competitive approach to ranking and sorting teachers that undermines the growth of learning communities. Research shows that student gains are most pronounced where teachers have greater longevity and work as a team.² (See the sidebar on page 6 for an example of how this collective approach can work.) At the end of the day, collaborative learning among teachers will do more to support student achievement than dozens of the most elaborate ranking schemes ever could.

How Should We View the Improvement of Teaching?

Some proponents of teacher evaluation reforms have conjectured that if districts would eliminate the bottom 5 to 10 percent of teachers each year, as measured by value-added student test scores, U.S. student achievement would increase by a substantial

*To learn more about peer assistance and review, see “Taking the Lead: With Peer Assistance and Review, the Teaching Profession Can Be in Teachers’ Hands,” by Jennifer Goldstein, in the Fall 2008 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2008/goldstein.pdf.

amount—enough to catch up to high-achieving countries like Finland.³ However, there is no real-world evidence to support this idea and quite a bit to dispute it.

In fact, high-achieving Finland* does not do what these advocates propose. Rather than focusing on firing teachers, it has one of the strongest initial teacher education systems in the world, and leaders credit that system with having produced nationwide improvements in student learning.⁴ There is relatively little emphasis in Finland on formal on-the-job evaluation, and much more emphasis on collaboration among professionals to promote student learning. In truth, we cannot fire our way to Finland. If we want to reach the high and equitable outcomes it has achieved in recent years, we will have to *teach* our way to stronger student learning by supporting teachers' collective learning.

Despite the current focus on in-service evaluation, a highly skilled teaching force results from developing well-prepared teachers from recruitment through preparation via ongoing professional development. Support for teacher learning and evaluation needs to be part of an integrated whole that promotes effectiveness during every stage of a teacher's career. Such a system must ensure that teacher evaluation is connected to—not isolated from—preparation and induction programs, daily professional practice, and a productive instructional context.

At the center of such a system are professional teaching stan-

*For more on education in Finland, see "The Professional Educator: Lessons from Finland," by Pasi Sahlberg, in the Summer 2011 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/summer2011/Sahlberg.pdf.

dards that are linked to student learning standards, curriculum, and assessment, thereby creating a seamless relationship between what teachers do in the classroom and how they are prepared and assessed. A productive evaluation system should consider teachers' practice in the context of curriculum goals and students' needs, as well as multifaceted evidence of teachers' contributions to student learning and to the school as a whole. And it should create the structures that make good evaluation possible: time and training for evaluators, the support of master or mentor teachers to provide needed expertise and assistance, and high-quality, accessible learning opportunities supporting effectiveness for all teachers at every stage of their careers.

If learning to teach is to be a cumulative, coherent experience, a common framework should guide a comprehensive system that addresses a variety of purposes:

- Initial and continuing teacher licensing;
- Hiring and early induction;
- Granting tenure;
- Support for supervision and professional learning;
- Identification of teachers who need additional assistance; and
- Recognition of expert teachers who can contribute to the learning of their peers, both informally as colleagues and formally as mentors, coaches, and teacher leaders.

The system must also allow for the fair and timely removal of teachers who do not improve with feedback and assistance. It may also be asked to support decisions about compensation, as policymakers are increasingly interested in tying compensation

When Evaluation Supports a Collective Perspective

Lynne Formigli, a National Board Certified Teacher in science and a leader in her local union, describes how participating in the alternative evaluation program in the Santa Clara Unified School District helped her reach her goal of improving student writing and learn much more in the process:

I teamed up with a seventh-grade writing teacher and an eighth-grade writing teacher. Our focus was on how we teach writing at different grade levels. We spent time observing each other teaching the writing process. Afterward, we met and compared our observations. We came away with specific ways to improve our students' writing, as well as ideas for integrating writing throughout all grade levels and subjects. Observing other teachers helped me understand how critically important modeling is, allowing me to overcome my fear of giving students the answers when I give them examples.

We found that in our search to help students be more effective communicators, we had all developed similar tools to scaffold their writing. During our discussions, we were excited to consider

the impact on our students if we standardized the tools we use, so students would recognize them from class to class, grade level to grade level. As we continue to work toward that goal as a school, we have the added benefit of increased communication and collaboration among teachers. The end result is of great benefit to the students we teach every day.

Formigli's principal also learned from the experience. After Formigli and her two colleagues presented a summary of their work and a reflection on the process, he wrote in his formal evaluation narrative:

At the middle school level, it is beneficial when students can see a common strand run through their instructional day. When something learned in science is tied to something learned in English, both make more sense. When instruction is coordinated from subject to subject and then from one grade level to the next, we not only have good education, we have magic. And that is what Lynne [and her colleagues] created. ... Participating in

the reflective discussion related to the alternative evaluation project was an evaluation-supervision highlight for me. We spoke about the writing process, genre, cross-grade and cross-subject education, staff development opportunities, standards, the need to share learning experiences, validation, and a host of other things.

It is possible for evaluation to be structured in ways that support this collective perspective. However, it is equally possible for individually focused and competitively oriented evaluation and compensation practices to undermine collegial work, harming the chances for professional sharing and learning. If teachers are ranked and if rewards are competitively allocated, evaluation is likely to undermine efforts toward collective improvements, to the ultimate detriment of teacher and student learning.

Source: Accomplished California Teachers, *A Quality Teacher in Every Classroom: Creating a Teacher Evaluation System That Works for California* (Stanford, CA: National Board Resource Center, Stanford University, 2010). As featured in Linda Darling-Hammond, *Getting Teacher Evaluation Right* (2013).

to judgments about teacher effectiveness, either by differentiating wages or by linking such judgments to specific responsibilities and salary increments for more expert teachers. An approach that supports the development and sharing of greater expertise, rather than one that fosters competition and isolation, holds the most promise for improving teaching and learning overall.

Understanding Teacher Quality and Teaching Quality

In building a system, it is important not only to develop skills on the part of individual practitioners, but also to create the conditions under which practitioners can use their skills appropriately. The importance of this is easily seen if we think of medicine, where both the professional skills and professional contexts are relatively well developed through licensing of doctors and accreditation rules for hospitals, the places where many physicians practice.

It would do little good to prepare doctors through intensive residencies in their specialty area if pediatricians could be assigned to cardiac surgery or ophthalmologists were asked to treat spinal injuries. If out-of-field assignment were allowed (as it too often is in teaching), the quality of medical care would suffer even if individual doctors were highly skilled in their fields. Similarly, a cardiologist supported by the latest technology and medical resources

Key to considerations of context are the curriculum and assessment systems that support teachers' work, the "fit" between teachers' qualifications and what they are asked to teach, and teaching conditions. An excellent teacher may not be able to offer high-quality instruction in a context where he or she is asked to teach a flawed curriculum or lacks appropriate materials. Similarly, a well-prepared teacher may perform poorly when asked to teach outside the field of his or her preparation or under poor teaching conditions—for example, without adequate teaching materials, in substandard space, with too little time, or with classes that are far too large. Conversely, a less skilled teacher may be buoyed up by excellent materials, strong peer support for lesson planning, and additional specialists who work with students needing extra help.

The extent to which teachers experience dissimilar teaching conditions—and students experience very different learning conditions—has been made clear in the school finance lawsuits brought in many states, which describe in vivid terms the differences between rich and poor schools. In *Williams v. California*, for example, teachers, parents, and students from low-income communities described overcrowded schools that had to run multiple shifts each day and multiple shifts during the school year, alternating on-months and off-months for different cohorts of students



Initiatives to develop teaching quality must consider not only how to identify, reward, and use teachers' skills and abilities, but also how to develop contexts that enable good practice.

is clearly more effective than one who has no access to heart monitors, surgical equipment, defibrillators, or medication. The quality of care is determined equally by the skill of physicians and the resources that are available to them to do their jobs.

Similarly, if one wants to ensure high-quality instruction, it is important to attend to both *teacher* quality and *teaching* quality. Teacher quality might be thought of as the bundle of personal traits, skills, and understanding an individual brings to teaching, including dispositions to behave in certain ways, such as collaborating with colleagues and adapting instruction to help students succeed. Teaching quality, as distinct from teacher quality, refers to strong instruction that enables a wide range of students to learn. Such instruction meets the demands of the discipline, the goals of instruction, and the needs of students in a particular context. Teaching quality is in part a function of teacher quality—teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions—but it is also strongly influenced by the context of instruction, including factors aside from what the teacher knows and can do.

cycling in and out of the building; classrooms with more than 40 students without enough desks, chairs, and textbooks for each student to have one; lack of curriculum materials, science equipment, computers, and libraries; and crumbling facilities featuring leaky ceilings and falling ceiling tiles, sometimes overrun with rodents, and lacking heat and air conditioning. Not surprisingly, these underresourced schools also had high levels of teacher turnover, making it difficult to create a coherent curriculum or develop common practices to support student learning.⁵

These kinds of conditions can undermine the effectiveness of any teacher. Even where teachers have equivalent skills, there is little doubt that the quality of instruction is greater in a school with high-quality and plentiful books, materials, and computers; a coherent, well-designed curriculum; well-lit, properly heated, and generously outfitted classrooms; small class sizes; and instructional specialists, than it is when students must learn in overcrowded, unsafe conditions with insufficient materials, poorly chosen curriculum, large classes, and no instructional supports.⁶

Strong teacher quality may heighten the probability of effective teaching, but it does not guarantee it. Initiatives to develop teaching quality and effectiveness must consider not only how to identify, reward, and use teachers' skills and abilities, but also how to develop teaching contexts that enable good practice. If teaching is to be effective, the policies that construct the learning environment and the teaching context must be addressed along with the qualities of individual teachers.

A Systemic Approach to Evaluating and Supporting Teaching

We need a more systemic approach to building and sustaining teacher effectiveness. Despite the apparent single-minded emphasis on teacher evaluation from some policy quarters, the importance of a more comprehensive approach is gaining currency. For example, a recent task force of the National Association of State Boards of Education emphasized the importance of creating a more aligned system, beginning with recruitment and preparation and continuing through evaluation and career development.⁷

A high-quality teacher evaluation *system* should create a coherent, well-grounded approach to developing teaching, created collectively by state and district leaders with teachers and their representatives. In addition to clear standards for student learning, accompanied by high-quality curriculum materials and assessments, this system should include five elements:

1. Common statewide standards for teaching that are related to meaningful student learning and are shared across the profession;
2. Performance-based assessments, based on these standards, guiding state functions, such as teacher preparation, licensure, and advanced certification;
3. Local evaluation systems aligned to the same standards, for evaluating on-the-job teaching based on multiple measures of teaching practice and student learning;
4. Support structures to ensure properly trained evaluators, mentoring for teachers who need additional assistance, and fair decisions about personnel actions; and

A Glimpse into High-Quality Evaluation

Louisa, a fourth-year science teacher, sits down to discuss her teacher development portfolio with her evaluator. Her portfolio by now contains documentation and analysis of her work from the end of her preservice program through her first three years in the classroom. It also contains records and assessments of professional development projects she has done over the last three years. Louisa and her evaluators had selected these projects at different times in her first years of teaching to help her attend to the needs they identified together.

Susannah, who is Louisa's current evaluator, is a 15-year veteran science teacher at the same school. She is released from her classroom duties for three periods each day to work as a member of the district evaluation team. In that role, Susannah observes her colleagues, prepares written evaluations, meets with teachers to discuss or plan observations, and attends meetings where the district team reviews evaluations and individual professional development plans. The district evaluation team is composed of accomplished classroom teachers, administrators from each school site, and the district Peer Assistance and Review coordinator. The team's job is to review the evaluations of teachers to ensure that each of them is meeting performance expectations, progressing along the teacher development continuum, and receiving good counsel about ways to improve. When there are serious concerns about a teacher's performance, the team sends in another evaluator to validate the concern and help the team recommend a course of action that may range from targeted coaching to dismissal.

Louisa opens her observation notebook to the page that contains notes about the lesson that Susannah observed the previous day. Susannah has already given Louisa a copy of the observation notes she made and questions for Louisa to think about before they meet. Louisa has added some reflections about the lesson and questions she wants to explore with Susannah. Louisa has brought some writing her students did that morning in response to a question she posed when they came into class. Susannah asks Louisa for her own assessment of the lesson and, in particular, how she thinks the discussion went. Louisa is very proud that during the discussion, she had to interject to clarify questions only three times. She points to evidence in the discussion of the content mastery students showed. However, there is a discrepancy between what occurred during the discussion and evidence of content mastery in the students' writing that Louisa has brought along.

In her observation notes, Susannah cites many of the same kinds of evidence that Louisa has discussed. She points out that the students still struggle to explain their thinking clearly. She directs Louisa's attention to the students' use of questions to one another and their limited reference to the informational texts they had read. This is an "aha moment" for Louisa.

"Oh," she says, "this is what we've talked about when we have been trying to figure out why the kids do poorly on comprehension questions on informational texts!" She is referring to the meeting they had after they had looked at some of the school's standardized test data alongside other assessments. Louisa had complained several times about how few

questions her students asked about their reading and how literal their conversations about their reading often were. She suggested that students' lack of questions might well be related to their ability to pose questions about the text as they read.

Susannah reminds Louisa that inquiry in science means being able to ask "why?" at the appropriate times. Louisa knows this and recognizes that posing questions while reading is a way readers probe their own understanding. If students were not doing that during reading, then very likely they would not notice that their own written or verbal explanations did not offer the receiver opportunities for clear understanding.

"What should I do about this?" Louisa asks. Susannah suggests that Louisa and her colleagues, who have been doing some research on students' reading in science, invite one of the English teachers, who has taught reading to English language learners for several years, to come to their next research meeting to help them explore strategies to try with their own students.

Susannah's role will be to focus her observations on helping Louisa reflect on the success of the strategies she uses. As Susannah looks for evidence of teaching standards in Louisa's work this year, they agree that Louisa should focus on the effective teaching skills that she brings to solving this problem. They conclude by filing the observations, the records of their conversations, and agreements in the year 4 section of Louisa's portfolio. Thus begins a new chapter in Louisa's documentation of her professional journey.

5. Aligned professional learning opportunities that support the improvement of teachers and teaching quality.

Each of these five elements should operate within a system that supports effective teaching and learning.

It is easy for procedures to overwhelm purpose in almost any reform, and this is particularly true for teacher evaluation. As states and districts develop new approaches, it will be important for them to think strategically about how to accomplish their goals—putting in place the necessary systems and supports that allow educators to focus productively on improving teaching. As new practices are implemented, districts will also need to study and refine them, always mindful of keeping their eyes on the prize: more responsive and effective teaching in each classroom and across the school as a whole.

This focus on effective instruction has taken on a new sense of urgency as the pressures for improved student achievement have intensified. As a result, many initiatives to measure and improve teaching effectiveness through evaluation have emerged. Such

initiatives will have the greatest payoff if they stimulate practices known to support student learning and are embedded in systems that also *develop* greater teaching competence. Such systems will be based on professional teaching standards and instruction focused on meaningful curriculum content. They will make intense use of coaching and offer extensive opportunities for teachers to help their colleagues and their schools improve. Policies that create increasingly valid measures of teaching effectiveness—and that create innovative systems for recognizing, developing, and utilizing expert teachers—can ultimately help to create a more effective teaching profession.

Several important conditions are necessary to create productive systems: (1) state licensing systems must be coordinated with local evaluation; (2) evidence about teachers' practice must be integrated with appropriate evidence about student learning; and (3) evaluations must be connected with both individual and collective professional learning. Where these elements are in place, the evaluation experience can support the development of sophisticated teaching. (See the sidebar on page 8, which

Louisa's case illustrates the learning that a coordinated evaluation and support system could produce. As a fourth-year teacher, Louisa has been developing her skills and documenting her practice around the same teaching standards from her preservice program throughout her first three years in the classroom. The portfolio

on the same teaching standards that are used to accredit Louisa's preparation program, so her training was organized to ensure that she would master the tested knowledge and skills. The assessment helped strengthen her preparation and her readiness to teach. The coherence of her experience was further enabled by the

entrants meet them—should complement the role of local districts, making it more possible for them to support the ongoing development of teachers who have met that initial bar.

Louisa's case also illustrates how the evaluation process can connect evidence of practice to evidence of student learning in



Support for teacher learning and evaluation needs to be part of an integrated whole that promotes effectiveness during every stage of a teacher's career.

she has maintained began with the performance assessment she completed at the end of preservice preparation to illustrate her ability to plan, teach, and assess students around the state student learning standards—and to reflect on her practice and outcomes in light of the state's standards for teaching.

This seamless experience was facilitated by an overhaul of the state system to require a teacher performance assessment for licensing, raising the bar for entry with a valid and authentic measure of whether new entrants can practice responsibly. The assessment (in this case, the Performance Assessment for California Teachers) is based

extension of these standards into her induction program and later on-the-job evaluation.

Creating coherence from preparation to practice will greatly improve the capacity of the teaching force. States such as Massachusetts, Minnesota, Ohio, and Washington are among those that have taken steps forward to create such coherence, by adopting performance assessments for licensing beginning teachers that are linked to standards for initial induction and ongoing evaluation. The role of the state—to establish professional standards and ensure, through profession-wide assessments for licensing, that all new

ways that move teaching forward. By looking at standardized test data, Louisa's department highlighted some areas for further exploration that might better support achievement. By looking, then, at authentic student work in the context of her current teaching, Louisa was able, with help from her evaluator, to see more clearly how her students were thinking and understanding, and to fine-tune her plans to strengthen their learning.

Source: Accomplished California Teachers, *A Quality Teacher in Every Classroom: Creating a Teacher Evaluation System That Works for California* (Stanford, CA: National Board Resource Center, Stanford University, 2010). As featured in Linda Darling-Hammond, *Getting Teacher Evaluation Right* (2013).

describes how these system elements can work together.) I elaborate on each of these aspects below.

Entering the Profession: Coordinating State Licensing and Local Evaluation

One of the reasons for current concerns about the capability of some members of the teaching force is the public perception that teacher education and licensing systems do not routinely guarantee competence when teachers enter the profession. Furthermore, there is a large disjuncture in most states between the standards used to guide preparation and licensing and those that come into play when teachers are on the job.

Fixing these problems is critical to developing a strong teaching profession. A profession is defined by having all entrants master a common body of knowledge and skills, grounded in research, reflected in professional standards, and used to advance clients' welfare. Professions enforce these standards through

Because teacher licensing tests, which are currently focused largely on basic skills and subject-matter knowledge, have not provided a meaningful assessment of capacity to teach before entry, teaching has lacked this key element of a profession. The lack of a meaningful entry bar also means that the burden has fallen on school districts to figure out whether new teachers have mastered the basics for the classroom.* In teaching, it's time to create performance-based assessments for licensure and then to apply the same professional standards to local evaluation. This approach to assessment has been at the heart of recent recommendations from the two largest national teachers' unions. In *Transforming Teaching*, the National Education Association called for a career continuum based on national professional teaching standards that guide preparation and teacher performance assessments completed before licensure.⁸ In *Raising the Bar*, the American Federation of Teachers called for a "bar exam" for teaching that offers a nationally available performance assess-



For teaching to be comparable to other professions, we need clear professional standards both for state licensing and for on-the-job evaluation.

licensing examinations that measure the capacity to apply knowledge responsibly—such as the bar exam in law, licensing examinations in medicine, and the portfolios required for architectural registration.

Professional licensing and certification assessments are administered outside of the context of preparation or employment, so that they represent the knowledge and skills of the field as a whole, not just the views of a particular institution. They are scored by professionals who are trained to a common standard. The assessments also exert influence over preparation programs, because they help define the curriculum to be taught as they instantiate much of the knowledge and many of the skills candidates are supposed to learn. In the employment context, local institutions, such as hospitals, law firms, and architectural firms, make the judgments of competence, but they use the standards of the profession to establish whether professionals have engaged in appropriate practice or malpractice.

For teaching to be comparable to other professions, we need clear professional standards against which teachers are assessed both for state licensing and for on-the-job evaluation. These should be reflected in a continuum of performance assessments that validly and reliably measure actual teaching performance at key career junctures—initial licensing, the achievement of the professional license, and the designation of accomplished practice—as well as in on-the-job evaluation systems.

ment for licensure, along with evidence of competence in the subject area and strong clinical training.⁹

The InTASC (Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium) standards, adopted by more than 40 states, undergird new performance-based assessments for entry that have been developed by the profession—that is, by teachers and teacher educators across the country. These include, for example, the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT), the Oregon Teacher Work Sampling (TWS) System, and the Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) recently piloted in more than 20 states.

Furthermore, some states have envisioned a continuum in which beginning teachers are evaluated using performance assessments for initial and continuing licensure, and veteran teachers are considered for higher pay and leadership roles based in part on National Board Certification or similar assessments. Massachusetts, Ohio, and Washington are among the states that have created plans for a continuum of performance assessments to guide the teaching career. In 2003, New Mexico created a three-tiered licensure system at the state level, with locally aligned evaluations for on-the-job evaluation. Using a set of portfolios

*For more on entering the teaching profession, see "The Professional Educator: A New Path Forward," by Randi Weingarten, in the Spring 2010 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/spring2010/Weingarten.pdf.

modeled on that of the National Board, teachers must demonstrate increasing competence to progress from Provisional Teacher (the first three years) to Professional Teacher to Master Teacher. Each level is accompanied by increased compensation and responsibilities.¹⁰

Such an aligned system focuses teachers on what their students learn as a result of their teaching decisions, and on how to improve their effectiveness. Teachers feel they are learning as they both develop their own portfolios and score those of other teachers when they are part of the state scoring team. They also learn as they receive feedback on their work from colleagues, made more useful by the common language teachers are developing around their practice. And because yearly district evaluations are based on the same standards as the licensing assessments, teachers can continue to work on their practice coherently throughout their careers.

evaluators see firsthand what students know and can do before, during, and as a result of teaching. This evidence is directly associated with the curriculum and teaching goals, and it can include vivid examples of student thinking, reasoning, and performance on a wide range of knowledge and skills.

Although standardized test scores can give a general idea of the level of student achievement (typically limited to items that ask for recognition of information), the scores they report do not offer detailed insights into what students think or what they know how to do in practice. The scores that result from most current state tests are limited by the inability of the tests to assess achievement that requires communication, research, the production of new ideas, or the application of knowledge to new problems or situations. In addition, value-added measures based on these tests, which are not designed to measure achievement that is well above or below grade level, are both unstable and biased for teachers who serve certain groups of students. Finally, it is nearly impossible to attri-



Evaluations relying on a single test-based metric sitting in isolation alongside a rating based on classroom observations are not particularly helpful in either understanding or improving the quality of teaching, and may be harmful.

On-the-Job Evaluation: Integrating Evidence of Practice with Evidence of Student Learning

On-the-job evaluations should be based on the same teaching standards as performance assessments for entry. Furthermore, they should evaluate teacher effectiveness based on multiple measures of both practice and outcomes that are considered in an *integrated* fashion, including:

- Classroom observations and examination of other classroom evidence (e.g., lesson plans, student assignments, and work samples) using a standards-based instrument that examines planning, instruction, the learning environment, and student assessment;
- Evidence of student learning on a range of valid assessments that appropriately evaluate the curriculum and the students the teacher teaches, including students with special education needs and English language learners; and
- Teachers' contributions to colleagues and to the school. Connected, ongoing, high-quality professional learning opportunities should build strong professional learning communities and enable teachers to meet the standards.

Integrating authentic, rich evidence of student learning with the processes of evaluation—at the stage of goal-setting, throughout the course of the year, and at the end of teaching cycles (a year, a semester, or a unit of study)—can help teachers, mentors, and

bute student gains in test scores to a single teacher or to disentangle them from the many other influences on student learning, as well as the composition of the classroom.

Thus, evaluation systems that rely on a single test-based metric sitting in isolation alongside a rating based on classroom observations are not particularly helpful in either understanding or improving the quality of teaching, and may be harmful. Quite often, the two measures do not agree with one another, and the variations in the value-added metric are more related to changes in classroom composition—which students are assigned—than they are to any specific changes in teaching practice. A single test measure used for all teachers will, in some cases, also be invalid for particular students or a poor measure of the specific curriculum being taught.

To be useful, measures of teaching outcomes must be considered in a more nuanced analysis that is connected to the curriculum and students being taught, as well as to the practice of the teacher being evaluated. These measures may include test scores of various kinds, with greater weight placed on those that are the most direct measures of the content being studied and on those that are most appropriate for the students in the classroom. Measures should also include student work drawn from specific undertakings in the classroom that can be analyzed in terms of teachers' practices focused on particular learning goals. This kind of work can be used to closely evaluate the teaching-learning cycle and transform how

teachers think about and enact their practice. This approach is used in districts like Long Beach and San Mateo, California, and is encouraged in states like Massachusetts, Oregon, and Washington that call for multiple measures of student learning to be combined in a judgment system with evidence of teacher practice.

A recent study from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education describes the importance of connecting information on teacher practice to information on student learning. The study looked at whether instruction and student outcomes would be influenced by having teachers discuss evidence about their practice, derived from classroom observations, along with student

Although it may seem simpler in the short run to make teacher decisions based largely on a single set of student scores, this approach has thus far produced more heat than light in analyses of teaching, often creating greater confusion where more clarity is needed. Unskilled use of this kind of test score data can have damaging ramifications due to the miscalculation and potential loss of good teachers and the incentives for teachers to avoid the neediest students. Although attention to learning outcomes is important, the greatest benefits will be secured where multiple measures of learning are combined with evidence of practice to paint a meaningful picture of how teaching influences student progress.



Multiple measures of learning combined with evidence of practice paint a meaningful picture of how teaching influences student progress.

learning data. Compared with a control group of teachers who only discussed student data, the group that received feedback about their teaching in the same sessions where they discussed student learning data with colleagues exhibited more changes in their later instructional strategies of the kind emphasized in the feedback, and their students experienced significantly greater learning gains.¹¹

In this aspect of evaluation, especially, it is important to keep in mind that our goal is not to rank teachers on a single scale. It is to support high-quality instruction for all students—instruction that is well informed by a sophisticated understanding of what students are learning and how teaching can support their progress.

To accomplish this, we need more than valid instruments and tools to assess teaching. We also need structures that enable fair,

Criteria for an Effective Teacher Evaluation System

1. **Teacher evaluation should be based on professional teaching standards** and should be sophisticated enough to assess teaching quality across the continuum of development, from novice to expert teacher.
2. **Evaluations should include multifaceted evidence of teacher practice, student learning, and professional contributions** that are considered in an integrated fashion, in relation to one another and to the teaching context. Any assessments used to make judgments about students' progress should be appropriate for the specific curriculum and students the teacher teaches.
3. **Evaluators should be knowledgeable about instruction and well trained in the evaluation system**, including the process of how to give productive feedback and how to support ongoing learning for teachers. As often as possible, and always at critical decision-making junctures (e.g., tenure or renewal), the evaluation team should include experts in the specific teaching field.
4. **Evaluation should be accompanied by useful feedback, and connected to professional development opportunities** that are relevant to teachers' goals and needs, including both formal learning opportunities and peer collaboration, observation, and coaching.
5. **The evaluation system should value and encourage teacher collaboration**, both in the standards and criteria that are used to assess teachers' work and in the way results are used to shape professional learning opportunities.
6. **Expert teachers should be part of the assistance and review process** for new teachers and for teachers needing extra assistance. They can provide the additional subject-specific expertise and person-power needed to ensure that intensive and effective assistance is offered and that decisions about tenure and continuation are well grounded.
7. **Panels of teachers and administrators should oversee the evaluation process** to ensure it is thorough and of high quality, as well as fair and reliable. Such panels have been shown to facilitate more timely and well-grounded personnel decisions that avoid grievances and litigation. Teachers and school leaders should be involved in developing, implementing, and monitoring the system to ensure that it reflects good teaching well, that it operates effectively, that it is tied to useful learning opportunities for teachers, and that it produces valid results.

—L.D.H.

effective evaluation by ensuring evaluator training; expert teachers who can provide intensive assistance to teachers in need; governance structures that oversee the process and enable timely, well-grounded personnel decisions; and resources that can support a manageable system. And finally, teachers should participate in developing the system and in the governance structure that supports the ongoing decision-making processes. These conditions address not only evaluation instruments or procedures, but also the policy systems in which they operate and the school-based conditions that are needed to stimulate continuous learning and improvement.

knowledge, build their skills, and improve instruction.¹³ For example, a comprehensive five-year study of 1,500 schools undergoing major reforms found that in schools where teachers formed active professional learning communities, achievement increased significantly in math, science, history, and reading, while student absenteeism and dropout rates were reduced. Further, particular aspects of teachers' professional community—a shared sense of intellectual purpose and a sense of collective responsibility for student learning—were associated with a narrowing of achievement gaps in math and science among low- and middle-income students.¹⁴



Teaching improves most in collegial settings where common goals are set, curriculum is jointly developed, and expertise is shared.

Learning Together: The Critical Importance of a Collective Perspective

I cannot stress enough that teaching improves most in collegial settings where common goals are set, curriculum is jointly developed, and expertise is shared. Although individual teacher evaluation can be a part of an educational improvement strategy, it cannot substitute for ongoing investments in the development and dissemination of profession-wide knowledge through pre-service preparation and work in professional learning communities.

Collegiality is encouraged when teachers' contributions to school improvement and collaboration with peers and parents are valued among the evaluation criteria, and when opportunities for analyzing teaching and learning are taken up by teaching teams and interwoven with opportunities for peer coaching and planning. Productive professional learning and effective coaching require communal engagement in sustained work on instruction over time. Successful practices also engage teams of teachers and administrators in the design and governance of the evaluation system, so that everyone develops shared standards of practice and a collective perspective on how to improve the work.

Research shows that when schools are strategic and persistent in creating productive working relationships within academic departments, across them, or among teachers schoolwide, the benefits can include greater consistency in instruction, more willingness to share practices and try new ways of teaching, and more success in solving problems of practice.¹² Perhaps the simplest way to break down professional isolation is for teachers to observe each other's teaching and to provide constructive feedback. Several large-scale studies have identified specific ways in which professional community-building can deepen teachers'

Strong professional learning communities require leadership that establishes a vision, creates opportunities and expectations for joint work, and finds the resources needed to support the work, including expertise and time to meet.¹⁵ Collaborative teacher teams can improve practice together by:¹⁶

- Examining data on student progress;
- Analyzing student work;
- Determining effective strategies to facilitate learning;
- Designing and critiquing curriculum units and lessons;
- Observing and coaching one another; and
- Developing and scoring common classroom-based assessments to measure progress.

Over time, this work can be more deeply supported if professional learning opportunities are conceptualized as part of a career continuum that encourages teachers to gain and share expertise. Productive career ladders (or lattices) can also create avenues for such sharing to occur, as teachers take on roles as mentor and master teachers, as curriculum and assessment specialists, and as leaders of school-improvement activities.

The lack of time for collaborative planning in most U.S. schools gives teachers few opportunities to develop sophisticated practice, although some restructured schools have redesigned the use of time and resources to support students and teacher learning with longer periods, shared planning time, and extensive ongoing professional development. It is possible to create the context for teachers to become more effective, but it may require thinking differently about some of the traditional "regularities of schooling."¹⁷

(Continued on page 44)

Survey Says

Using Teacher Feedback to Bolster Evaluation



BY ROSS WIENER AND KASIA LUNDY

For teacher evaluation to be “done right”—to lead to actual improvement in teacher effectiveness and therefore in student learning—school districts must pay careful attention to designing and implementing evaluation systems. It is understandable that early efforts to make teacher evaluation more rigorous and meaningful to teachers have been focused on the nuts and bolts of getting evaluations up and running: creating new rubrics, specifying the number of observations conducted, establishing the format of observations, deciding on the length of time between observations and feedback, and providing training for those who conduct observations.

As the more adaptive work of using evaluations to improve performance comes to the fore, it is important to make teacher

voice integral in shaping both the evaluation process and the type of supports that accompany evaluations. Neglecting to include the views of educators in the continuous refinement of evaluations risks imposing a compliance regime that fails to help anyone become a better teacher.

This commonsense notion of soliciting “employee voice” for the purpose of improving fundamental organizational practices has been widely adopted by some of the most successful businesses in the world. Schools are not corporations, of course. Educators seek to maximize student potential, not profits. However, the business world’s practice of soliciting employee feedback is one that school systems could learn from and try to incorporate. Just as successful companies listen to their employees for ways to improve the production of goods and the delivery of services, high-performing schools respect the voices of their employees (teachers) and implement their suggestions to improve instruction and the way schools are run.*

Organizations that solicit and act on employee feedback tend to have higher levels of employee engagement, which, in turn, correlates with larger talent pools, lower turnover, and better

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*For more on the importance of communication between labor and management, see “Strengthening Partnerships” in the Winter 2013–2014 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/winter1314/rubinstein.pdf.

financial performance.¹ Managers in these organizations conduct surveys to gather the thoughtful ideas of their employees and then work with them to solve problems. While school systems differ from corporations in many ways, teacher feedback is equally relevant and useful in the school setting.

The Benefits of Using Surveys

Many of the leading private sector organizations have, for years, embraced a survey approach to improving products, services, and internal policies and processes. Like these successful private sector businesses, school systems can utilize a similar, survey-based approach to improving teacher evaluation. Here are the overarching benefits of thoughtful, intentional use of surveys in the evaluation process:

1. Surveys capture stakeholder feedback in a relatively quick and cost-effective way. Teachers are most likely to be accurate and reliable in assessing principals' performance, at least as it relates to teachers' evaluations. They can confirm if they are receiving feedback, and can assess the quality of feedback, guidance, and support they receive. This makes it more likely that evaluations will lead to improvements in teaching and learning.

2. Surveys can increase teacher engagement in the evaluation process. Clarity as to how decisions are made and the ability to influence the decision-making process (e.g., through providing feedback that is not just heard, but also acted upon) are important drivers of employee engagement.² Engaged teachers who believe their district is willing to learn from them and support them are not only more likely to stay with the district, but also more likely to look for opportunities to improve.

Also, giving teachers a voice in assessing the quality of feedback and supports they receive is likely to deepen teachers' acceptance of evaluations. This may be an especially important incentive to retain talented teachers, who expect to be consulted and to play an active role in constructing a healthy and professional work environment.

3. Surveys allow teacher growth and development to be valued explicitly. Teacher professional growth and development are both commonly cited as critical reasons for establishing new evaluations, but much of the early focus on evaluations was on compliance. Systems are collecting a lot of data to monitor observations (number of observations, range in ratings, correlation with other measures, etc.). This is legitimate administrative data that systems need to monitor to see whether the steps of the evaluation system are being implemented with fidelity. We are now at a critical inflection point. Using evaluation findings to enable teachers' growth and development needs to become an absolute priority equal to ensuring accuracy of observations.

Surveys offer the ability to articulate what is expected to happen during the evaluation and feedback process. Given competing priorities and limited time, what gets measured gets done. If teachers are asked whether strengths have been identified in addition to weaknesses, it creates the expectation that strengths will be identified. It is likely that leveraging strengths to mitigate weaknesses is an important aspect of improving performance. Systems that embrace this approach might want to ask specifi-

cally whether strengths have been identified. Likewise, if surveys ask whether feedback is connected to concrete improvement goals and development activities, it creates or reinforces an expectation that these aspects will be addressed and provides the basis for assessing quality of implementation.

4. Surveys are an important source of information on implementation issues. Data on student achievement will not be able to tell districts what worked or didn't work in the implementation of the evaluation process. Surveys, however, allow district and state administrators to obtain timely information on the quality of implementation, and to identify and address major challenges in implementation efforts. For example, a common implementation challenge cited by districts that have embraced evaluation system reform is the ability of principals to provide



The data generated by surveys must lead to continuous improvement and should not be used in isolation.

clear and actionable guidance to teachers. Since the quality of the guidance is essential to the efficacy of evaluations, it's vital to get information on how the feedback cycle is working so that schools needing additional attention are identified as soon as possible, and appropriate supports are provided to those principals who need them the most.

For context, the initial *Widget Effect* study from the New Teacher Project revealed that 26 percent of all teachers reported having at least one improvement area identified in districts where no meaningful evaluation systems had been put in place.³ When the system is working properly, virtually every teacher should be aware of development areas.

5. Surveys can promote a healthy school culture if used appropriately. When systems take teachers' perspectives into account, issues of school culture and leadership are more likely to be acknowledged and addressed. Teacher surveys can create an

opportunity for school leaders to model the type of openness to feedback and willingness to change that teachers are expected to embrace. Making district leaders, principals, and evaluators—not just teachers—focus on learning signals that everyone is responsible for improvement and balances the overriding focus on teacher accountability that has dominated conversations over the last few years. Holding school leaders accountable for improved results is a crucial part of this process.

It is important to keep in mind that surveys themselves do not solve problems. The data generated by surveys must lead to continuous improvement of the system. If systems administer surveys but the feedback is not incorporated, mistrust and doubt start to grow. Also, survey data should not be used in isolation; leaders need to triangulate the data from other sources and use their judgment. However, gathering input from teachers on their experiences provides direct, detailed, actionable information



Whatever the engagement mechanism, teachers must have authentic opportunities to shape the work.

on what is working, and what isn't, in new evaluation systems. When teacher survey results are shared transparently and used to adjust practice, it sends a clear signal that teachers' input is needed and valued. Taking action on such feedback is not easy, but doing so can yield significant improvements in the evaluation system over time.

In the longer term, some school systems might want to develop a single survey, given once annually, to ask about all aspects of the employee experience, including evaluation and professional development. However, in the short term, given that rigorous evaluation and feedback systems are still in relative infancy, we recommend a laser-like focus on evaluation system implementation and, therefore, a survey that focuses specifically on the implementation and impact of the evaluation process. This kind of survey may need to be administered more frequently, possibly two or three times a year.

Improving the Teacher Evaluation Process with Surveys

In examining the use of surveys in organizations that believe in continuous improvement, we identified several practices critical to effectively surveying employees and utilizing the information to improve individual and organizational performance. What stands out is that the organizations' processes for sharing and acting on

survey data are as important as the collection of the underlying data itself. Organizations that have been most successful in engaging their employees have made a real investment of time and resources into a whole range of internal practices, including human resource solutions (mentorship, skill development, career development, and compensation reform) and engagement mechanisms (ranging from surveys to focus groups to teams focused on designing solutions). None of these organizations collects the information for compliance or public reporting purposes; the information is a vital component of organizational learning, reciprocal accountability, and continuous improvement.

In education, supporting professional growth is not the sole purpose of evaluation, of course; employment and tenure decisions are directly affected, and there are additional implications for compensation, preparation, and recruitment. But even under the most rigorous systems, the overwhelming majority of teachers fall in the middle of evaluation ratings, so the biggest prize lies in leveraging evaluations to improve performance of current teachers.

Achieving this requires bolstering the capacity of district and school leaders to: (1) share developmental information with teachers in constructive ways; (2) design and provide reliable access to professional development that addresses areas of weaker performance; and (3) work with teachers over time to assess the efficacy of improvement efforts. This kind of formative focus would be a significant departure from the way evaluations were conducted prior to the wave of current evaluation reforms, mainly as compliance exercises if they were done at all.

The following are concrete ways for getting the most out of surveys in improving the teacher evaluation process.

Engage Key Stakeholders

Districts can take advantage of existing advisory panels or committees to gather input ahead of creating or launching an important survey. If there are specific groups of teachers the district is trying to retain, they should be consulted in this process. This can also be a good engagement and collaboration opportunity with teachers' unions and associations. Whatever the engagement mechanism, it is important to make sure teachers have authentic opportunities to shape the work and aren't merely asked to watch a presentation about what's already planned.

Decide What You Want to Know and Can Act On

Once districts decide on the purpose of the survey, they can tailor questions accordingly. Surveys signal what the system values, so system leaders should make sure the questions produce information that is important and that the system intends to act on. In the area of teacher evaluations and teacher effectiveness, there are at least four potential topics on which districts could focus: fidelity of implementation, impact of evaluation on teachers, teachers' experience of support and development, and teachers' overall impression of the evaluation system.

Leverage Existing Survey Mechanisms to the Extent Possible

Many districts and schools today administer multiple surveys throughout the year (to varying degrees of effectiveness), including annual climate surveys as well as surveys around professional development, new teacher support, instructional reforms, pilot initiatives, departmental supports, and more. Where possible,

districts should incorporate questions on evaluation and support into existing surveys or online processes. If past surveys haven't been used effectively or seen as important, consider an independent survey administration or other strategies to ensure a fresh start for surveys related to assessing teacher evaluation efforts.

Share Results with Key Stakeholders at the District and School Levels, and Take Action

Districts have a wide variety of options to communicate with their stakeholders, but should first create a clear strategy for communicating survey results to a broad range of stakeholders. Teachers need to see the results as a first step in demonstrating that the system takes survey findings seriously. Principals need to see the results and learn how to analyze them and engage others, including teachers, in establishing action steps. Supervisors of principals need to use the data in supporting and managing principals' performance. Central office administrators, the superintendent, and the school board need to examine the data for patterns, progress, and overall health of the system's culture.

The schedule for sharing data, convening stakeholders to analyze and plan, and exercising oversight from senior management should be established and communicated up front to guard against the results being neglected.

Follow-through determines whether surveys have positive impact. If they are administered but the results never acknowledged publicly, or if results are published but no action is clearly connected to the process, then surveys can reinforce negative impressions of school systems as nonresponsive and the process as nothing more than a waste of time.

Local leaders need to be held accountable for responding to survey results. Processes for engaging employees, developing action plans, and following up to see whether progress was made need to become part of the culture of the organization. Senior managers must model this openness and include these issues into supervisory discussions and performance evaluation ratings.

Ideally, districts should disaggregate survey results by school, and use school-level results and subsequent actions taken by a school leader in assessing the school leader's effectiveness. Districts must encourage and empower school leaders to implement changes and hold them accountable for doing so, while also ensuring that the right supports are in place to make them effective. Tracking principal responses to survey results should be an important responsibility for principal supervisors.

While it is crucial for school leaders to take ownership of issues identified at the school level, some issues cut across many schools and suggest responsibility at the system level. For instance, if a teacher survey were to reveal a common pattern across the district in the quantity and quality of feedback given to teachers, the district would likely need to ramp up its evaluator training and create meaningful accountability regarding quality of feedback provided by evaluators. Similarly, if teachers consistently identify a specific area of weak professional development, the district may need to come up with a system-wide approach to increasing and improving resources in this area.

That said, taking appropriate action is the most critical step for schools and districts to get right. If no action comes out of the survey process, not only will the evaluation system stagnate, but teachers will lose faith and disengage. Responsibilities and timelines for

processing and publishing survey results and following up should be established by the district by the time surveys are launched to encourage feedback and continuous improvement.

Ask about Effectiveness of Solutions over Time

At one leading software company, the human resources department has developed, and continuously improves, a "work health" survey taken by every employee in the organization. The results are aggregated at the team and manager levels, and are made publicly available. Managers can see whether their ratings have improved over time, and there is incentive to improve as the results of the survey are part of the manager's year-end evaluation.

The concept of assessing progress over time is especially important in teacher evaluations because there has been a massive new investment in using evaluations as a lever for teacher and student improvement. It is vital to track whether teachers and others are perceiving improvements in the implementation of evaluation reform. Such a focus will go a long way toward building employee trust in the system and a commitment to making evaluation really work in schools. In the end, continuous improvement of the system itself can communicate the system's values more persuasively than any policy directive.

Preserve Anonymity to Guarantee Honesty

Especially in the current environment around evaluations, anonymous surveys are much more likely to elicit candid responses without fear of individual repercussions. At least in the short to medium term, while this work is nascent, anonymity needs to be preserved to encourage honest feedback that can effectively shape the evaluation and development systems.

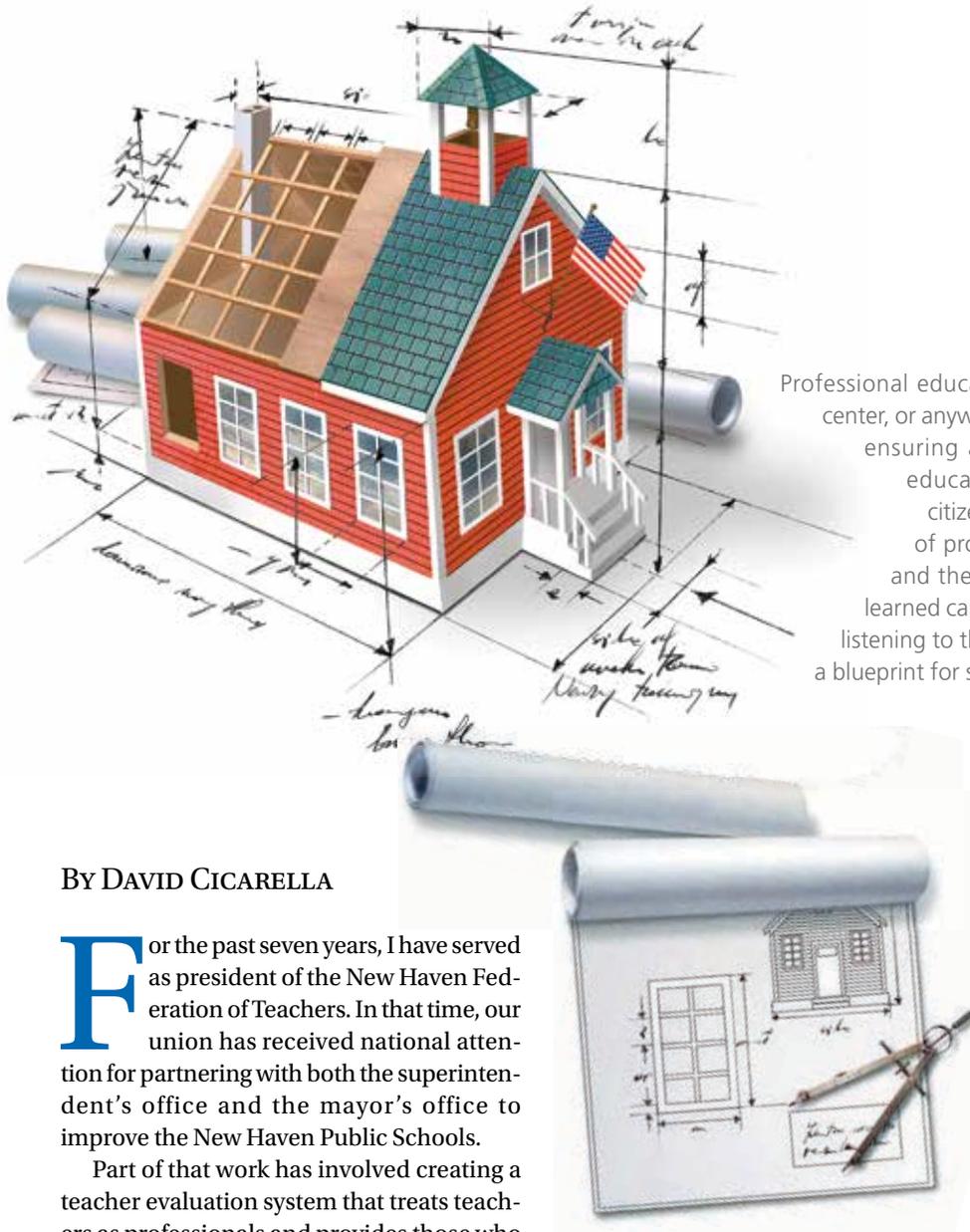
Current evaluation efforts will be for naught unless teachers feel an ownership stake in the effort to define expectations, provide feedback, and continuously improve instruction. Displacing deep-seated cultural norms—such as compliance mentality, unwillingness to acknowledge distinctions in effectiveness, a "this-too-shall-pass" neglect of new policy initiatives—with a culture of openness and continuous improvement will only come about as a result of deliberate focus and strategic implementation.

Surveys can create vital information quickly, reliably, and relatively inexpensively (important in an era of austerity). They provide a tangible vehicle for expressing values and priorities, and assessing leadership quality and organizational health, which is why they are used by so many high-performing organizations in the private, public, and education sectors. Surveys respect teachers' voice, provide diagnostic information regarding principals and schools, and give system leaders an invaluable, authentic lens into implementation.

School systems that establish a culture of openness—by welcoming feedback, sharing survey results publicly, collaborating on action plans, and repeating the cycle to assess progress and identify new challenges—have the best chances of improving. When done well, surveys help turn data into action, reinforce the stated focus on teachers' growth and development, build healthier school cultures, and support continuous improvement at the individual, school, and system level. □

(Endnotes on page 44)

A Fine Balance



Professional educators—in the classroom, library, counseling center, or anywhere in between—share one overarching goal: ensuring all students receive the rich, well-rounded education they need to be productive, engaged citizens. In this regular feature, we explore the work of professional educators—their accomplishments and their challenges—so that the lessons they have learned can benefit students across the country. After all, listening to the professionals who do this work every day is a blueprint for success.

BY DAVID CICARELLA

For the past seven years, I have served as president of the New Haven Federation of Teachers. In that time, our union has received national attention for partnering with both the superintendent's office and the mayor's office to improve the New Haven Public Schools.

Part of that work has involved creating a teacher evaluation system that treats teachers as professionals and provides those who are struggling with support. While many press accounts have described our contract and the teacher evaluation system it established as "groundbreaking," few have

unpacked the details of what makes the system unique. I'd like to share how our union and our members worked with the district to create a teacher evaluation system of which we are all quite proud.

In August 2009, we began negotiating our contract, set to run from September 2010 to June 2014. We had our typical negotiations team of roughly a dozen members. There was a good cross section representing the entire membership: high school, middle school, and elementary school teachers;

a guidance counselor; a social worker; and support staff. We also included teachers at all steps of the salary scale. Everyone was represented.

Back in February 2009, the mayor and superintendent met with me to propose a major school reform effort in New Haven. The focus would be on teacher evaluation, turnaround schools, accountability, tenure, work rule changes, and compensation. This effort was clearly something my union members and I were interested in pursuing, as this was an opportunity for us to have

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real input in improving the school system and to be treated as equal partners in doing so.

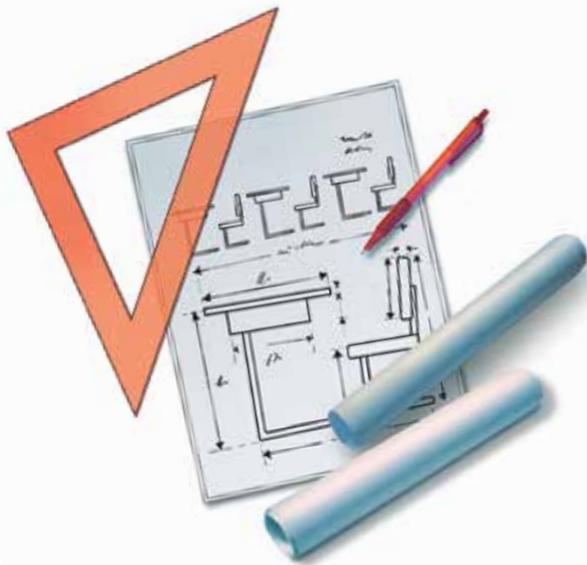
To that end, we created a 12-member Citywide Reform Committee: six members were from management, including representatives from the superintendent's office and the mayor's office, and six members were teacher representatives, including four officials from the New Haven Federation of Teachers (Executive Vice President Tom Burns, Executive Secretary Pat DeLuca, Executive Board Vice President for High Schools David Low, and myself). The other two members of our team were Sharon Palmer, who was president of AFT Connecticut at the time, and Joan Devlin, who was a member of the national AFT's educational issues department at the time.

That summer, the regular negotiations team worked on the salary schedule, medical benefits, class-size issues, and other working conditions, while the Citywide Reform Committee worked on the school reform initiative, including teacher evaluation. We negotiated the contract and school reform initiative simultaneously, because the reality (or fear) was that if we did not come to an agreement on the school reform initiative, we

of the school reform initiative, including a placeholder agreement to work out a new teacher evaluation system over the course of the year. At that time, we created a citywide teacher evaluation committee, made up of teachers and administrators, to create a new teacher evaluation system. We agreed that this evaluation system (known as TEVAL) would be in place by the time the new contract was set to begin in 10 months (September 2010). We then passed the school reform initiative off to the negotiations team.

Building Buy-In

To create buy-in for TEVAL, I communicated regularly with all union members. I wrote an article for each edition of our bimonthly union newsletter, updating our members on the process and progress. Then, as developments continued to occur during the year, I shared this information with the teachers via email. We also provided monthly updates at our stewards' meetings and executive board meetings. We spent an awful lot of time making sure we kept teachers informed every step of the way.



Our union and our members worked with the district to create a teacher evaluation system of which we are all quite proud.

would have trouble getting a contract in place by October as required by Connecticut state law.

I was convinced that for our school reform efforts to have a modicum of success, we needed to abruptly change the content and tone of the discussions concerning the problems with public education. The incessant passing of blame from teachers to administrators to state policymakers put us in a position where public opinion was squarely against all of us in public education—in particular, teachers and their unions. The public was screaming for widespread and repressive changes to teacher contracts and tenure.

To gain a foothold in this debate and reverse the tidal wave of criticism, I publicly said that we, as teachers, must be more receptive to changes in our practice. However, I also said that equally important is top-to-bottom accountability, meaning that all those in public education needed to be more receptive to making profound changes for the good of our students.

By early September 2009, we had hammered out the details

A few months ago, we finished negotiations for our new three-year contract, which runs from September 2014 through June 2017. The focus this time shifted from TEVAL to professional development opportunities for teachers, since the heavy lift for creating the new teacher evaluation system was completed in the prior contract. We do, however, continue to make changes and modifications as necessary each year.

Unquestionably, the most significant part of our work in creating TEVAL was replacing the reliance on high-stakes testing to measure student growth and teacher effectiveness with “multiple measures of assessment.” It is particularly satisfying that our work here in New Haven has created a ripple effect throughout the nation, as other school districts and states are beginning to use multiple measures of assessment in place of standardized testing. We could never support or accept an evaluation system that relied solely on high-stakes testing. We agreed that standardized tests are useful tools to provide data to drive our instruction. But we remained steadfast in our position that they were designed to tell us what students know and don't know. They were never, ever intended to evaluate a teacher's effectiveness.

Student learning growth, based on multiple measures, such as state and district assessments, teacher-created assessments, and student portfolios, accounts for roughly half of a teacher's

evaluation. The other half is based on a combination of instructional practices, such as classroom management, delivery of instruction, and professional values.

For the student learning growth piece of TEVAL, teachers typically write two to four student learning objectives in conjunction with an administrator, referred to as an Instructional Manager (IM). Goals must be mutually agreed upon and data driven. Most often, these goals consist of one mathematics goal and one literacy goal. Having the goals based on student assessment data is essential. However, the student learning objectives are specific to individual classrooms and are not based on district-wide or school-wide data. We set it up this way because no two classes are the same, even within the same school building. For example, in a school with four sixth-grade classes, the data in three of those classes might clearly indicate that improvement in reading comprehension is a priority, while the other class's data might show that reading comprehension is already strong. Therefore, each teacher looks at his or her own students and writes goals based on those students' data.

For the instructional practices piece of the evaluation, which accounts for roughly 40 percent of a teacher's evaluation, we created a rubric for administrators to use when conducting classroom observations. The rubric gives much-needed guidance and provides teachers with clear, objective, and measur-

able performance indicators. Members of the TEVAL committee spent nearly a year crafting this rubric. They did so with lots of input from teachers throughout the district.

To build buy-in, we spent an awful lot of time making sure that we kept teachers informed.

able performance indicators. Members of the TEVAL committee spent nearly a year crafting this rubric. They did so with lots of input from teachers throughout the district.

We publicized the names of the six teachers on this TEVAL committee and encouraged our members to contact them with ideas, concerns, and questions. A "working group" was formed to assist in the writing of this teacher evaluation rubric. Approximately 40 teachers joined the working group, which met at the union office twice a month, every month, for an entire year, with additional meetings in between. The teachers on this working group received feedback from colleagues in their respective school buildings, thereby incorporating the ideas of hundreds of teachers. The working group did the actual writing of the rubric and then handed it off to the TEVAL committee to review.

Administrators use the rubric when they conduct full classroom observations. Under TEVAL, they are required to do so at the beginning, middle, and end of each year. Additionally, they typically conduct several 15- to 20-minute classroom walk-throughs so that by the end of the year, the IM has been to the same classroom on numerous occasions. A fair and comprehensive evaluation requires multiple visits, with timely feedback, occurring at regular intervals throughout the school year.

In an effort to reduce the amount of paperwork a new evalu-

Ensuring a Fair Evaluation

ation system can create, we have moved from generating hard-copy paper forms to putting all evaluation data online. Everything is now in an electronic system whereby teachers and their IMs can simply log in to their accounts. Both can view what information each of them has entered, respond where appropriate, and make any updates as the school year progresses. Now meetings between teachers and IMs are much more productive because information has been shared online prior to their formal sit-downs.

In New Haven, we have principals and assistant principals who are outstanding. They are excellent instructional leaders and run their buildings well. However, as in all districts, we also have building administrators who are less than effective. Given that the continuum of school administrators runs from highly effective to downright ineffective, we wanted to ensure that teachers were being evaluated properly and fairly.

In previous years, teachers very often were not made aware that there was a performance problem until April or May, and then they had only until June to show improvement. Now, TEVAL requires the IM to notify a teacher by November 1 if he or she feels that the teacher may potentially be rated as "needs improvement" at the end of the year. This designation must be



driven by classroom observations conducted in September and October (and perhaps dating back to the previous year). Once the teacher is notified that he or she may potentially be rated as "needs improvement," a plan of improvement with tangible support is written. Examples of support may include having the teacher watch an instructional coach model a lesson, attend a professional development workshop targeted to his or her particular need, or observe the classroom of an exemplary teacher.

Additionally, we needed to guard against poor evaluations from IMs who may be unskilled in evaluations. We also needed to prevent unsatisfactory evaluations due to personal problems that may have occurred between a teacher and an IM, as well as problems that might arise from individual biases. These con-

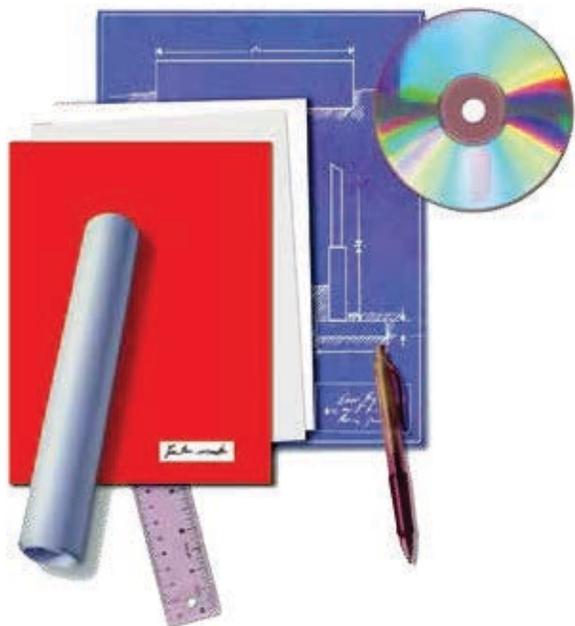
cerns have been addressed by a unique system of third-party validators: educators from outside our school district. They are principals, superintendents, and instructional coaches who have resumé's indicating outstanding abilities and experiences in the area of teacher evaluation.

Today, the district has approximately 15 validators on contract who have been hired through an interview process conducted by our union and the school district's central office. Both our union and the central office had to mutually agree on all the validators who were hired, and I personally sat in on each and every validator's interview.

Each validator observes three lessons spaced throughout the year with an IM. Both the validator and IM use the same rubric and forms when conducting the observation. The validator does not share his or her report with the IM. At the end of the year, if the IM rates a teacher as "needs improvement," a central office administrator and I review the validator's report to determine if it confirms or refutes the IM's observations.

At the same time, tenured teachers retain all of their rights and protections as provided by state law. Perhaps the most significant part of our evaluation system is that all teachers, tenured and nontenured, are evaluated under the same system and in the same way. What the validator does is provide an important check on arbitrary decisions made by IMs. This safeguard in the teacher evaluation process has provided my colleagues in the union leadership, as well as myself, much needed peace of mind.

After three years of TEVAL, slightly less than 2 percent of teachers have left the system each year due to performance issues and a lack of sufficient improvement. None of our cases have had to go to arbitration. Throughout this process, both the school district's central office and our union have acted with a great deal of integrity. The district leadership has agreed to reverse the nonrenewals of teachers improperly evaluated for one reason or another. And for our part, we have engaged in the difficult conversations with colleagues who, despite having been



Everyone is evaluated the same way, under the same system, whether nontenured or tenured.

In the three years the evaluation system has been in place, we have had more than 40 teacher nonrenewals and potential terminations reversed, in large part, by the validator's report. It has proven to be a very powerful tool in protecting our teachers, and it also protects the school district from losing good teachers. It is difficult for urban school districts to attract and retain good teachers, and the validation system serves both purposes.

Also, some of our teachers had their nonrenewals reversed because the district did not provide the necessary supports to help them improve. As I explained earlier, our new evaluation system requires the district to support struggling teachers.

As it turns out, quite a few of those 40-plus teachers were nontenured. In Connecticut, teachers earn tenure after four years of successfully teaching. Elsewhere in our state, a teacher without tenure would have no legal recourse to being nonrenewed for a negative evaluation, as a nonrenewal is at the superintendent's discretion.

fairly evaluated and properly supported, did not improve sufficiently to remain in the classroom.

It is important to remember that the authors of TEVAL did not design the evaluation system for only the teachers at the "needs improvement" end of the rating scale. Our union and the school district's central office were cognizant that all teachers have areas in which they can improve. As a result, "teacher development plans" are created on an as-needed basis. These plans often focus on one or two specific areas, such as preparing data and classroom management. The authors of TEVAL recognize that *all* teachers, even those most skilled, must be evaluated in the same, thorough manner so that the system can identify and support potential areas where teachers need to improve.

Reflections

As I look back on the past three and a half years, two things in particular strike me as crucial to the successes we have enjoyed to this point. One is the time we invested in this process and how we included all our partners. It was not, nor could it have ever been, accomplished in a hurried manner. Even so, we were all keenly aware of the urgency of the task before us, and we set timetables that we all adhered to.

The second crucial element, of course, is teacher buy-in. While we acknowledge that plenty of hard work remains ahead of us, we feel very good about our collective efforts. We do in fact believe it is "our" system. □

The Mind Shift in Teacher Evaluation

Where We Stand—and Where We Need to Go



BY ANGELA MINNICI

The teaching profession today is full of contradictions: Teach the whole child, but focus on specific needs. Integrate 21st-century technology, yet get back to the basics. While often cited as one of the most rewarding professions, teaching is demanding, technically challenging, and more closely scrutinized by the public than ever. Although we better understand how children learn and how to support and develop educators, teachers today report more dissatisfaction with their jobs¹ and are less likely to stay in the profession beyond five years.²

The past decade has confirmed what we intuitively know—

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teachers are the most important in-school factor that influences student achievement.³ Yet, at the same time, recent years have illuminated the field's struggle to unpack the nuances of teaching practices that have the greatest potential for improving student achievement. So how do we ensure *all* students are college- and career-ready in an era that is constantly evolving and in flux? How can we foster student achievement in all our schools? And how do we know what effective instruction looks like for each learner? These questions have prompted recent changes in federal policy and state legislation.

While much of the policy conversation about teachers over the last decade has focused on accountability, teaching quality is fundamentally an equity issue. Currently, federal, state, and local policymakers have advocated teacher evaluation systems as the solution to improving teaching quality and ultimately to addressing equity issues. But can teacher evaluation systems, as currently designed and implemented, improve teaching practices?⁴ Can they help all teachers grow throughout their careers? What lessons learned must we incorporate to make these systems successful?

This article takes stock of teacher evaluation by exploring the successes and challenges of implementing evaluation systems. It also offers recommendations that my colleagues and I at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) have gleaned from our work with states and districts in designing and implementing systems that support and develop teachers.

Across the educator career continuum, AIR is conducting and applying high-quality, relevant research to support states, districts, and educators in promoting and sustaining teaching quality. For example, in one state, our team worked with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on all aspects of designing and implementing the state's model evaluation system, including training, developing tools and materials, and incorporating measures of student learning into evaluation. In another example, we collaborated with one district to create a new principal evaluation system that relies on multiple measures of performance and helps educators grow professionally through clear feedback and reflective dialogue. The new principal evaluation system included a standards-aligned and research-based evaluation framework, tools for principal supervisors to conduct observations of principals providing instructional feedback, and a school working-conditions survey on staff perceptions of school climate. In another district, our team enhanced educator support by integrating a redesigned career ladder with teacher leadership opportunities.

AIR is the lead partner in several federally funded content and regional technical assistance centers, which are a part of the Comprehensive Centers Program, that support states in their efforts to implement education reforms.* For example, the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders is dedicated to helping states grow, respect, and support great teachers and leaders for all students. Through our work in the center, we provide content-specific knowledge, expertise, and analyses to states and serve as a national resource on effective policies and practices to strengthen the quality of teaching and leading—especially in high-poverty, low-performing, and hard-to-staff schools.

In addition to helping states and districts implement programs, policies, and practices designed to improve teaching and leading, our team also designs and conducts implementation studies of educator evaluation, teacher and leader professional development, and mentoring and induction programs. At AIR, we believe in ensuring that rigorous research and evidence are used to address educational problems, and that policy decisions, in turn, are based on what is learned from research and evidence.

Early Successes

State teacher evaluation policies underwent sweeping changes in 2008 with the advent of federal competitive funding opportunities (e.g., Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation) in an economically challenging time. State legislative reforms continued as state leaders were offered the opportunity to obtain waivers from the No Child Left Behind Act in exchange for agreeing to reform how teachers and leaders are evaluated.⁵ Currently, 49 states and the District of Columbia have changed their teacher evaluation legislation or guidance to reflect a fairly consistent vision of high-quality educator evaluation systems.⁶ During the

past five years, states and districts have worked, sometimes at a feverish pace, to implement these changes, and tangible lessons have been learned.⁷ We have worked with states and districts as they have created solutions to the dozens of technical and practical aspects of implementing evaluation systems. Yet, the most important lessons learned focus less on the technical aspects of the work and more on the fundamental mind shifts that have occurred and that ultimately have laid the foundation for this effort's success. These mind shifts, which have resulted in significant success in the field, are discussed below.



A common understanding about effective practice is the basis for high-quality evaluation systems that can drive professional growth.

First, among several critical components for effective implementation and sustainability of teacher evaluation systems, is the need to define and agree on what good teaching is. Teachers and administrators need a common language and vision about what constitutes effective practice. Clearly articulating these practices allows administrators to assess teachers and provide them with feedback on their strengths and areas for growth. It also encourages teachers and administrators to engage in professional conversations that make the critical link between teaching and the supports that teachers need to improve and hone their skills. This common understanding is the basis for high-quality evaluation systems that can drive professional growth.

Implicitly related to defining good teaching is defining the evidence and measures that are used to assess practice. Although more work is needed—particularly in ensuring a more balanced and evidence-based approach to combining and weighting measures⁸—states and districts have made considerable progress in identifying and employing measures that are more consistent and accurate. The conversation in many places has begun

*For more information about the Comprehensive Centers Program, see www2.ed.gov/programs/newccp/index.html.

to shift from ensuring only the validity and reliability of measures to a more nuanced conversation about the need for a variety of measures for a variety of reasons. For example, educators are asking questions about what measures and evidence will truly help them improve instruction, by providing them with information about teaching practices strongly linked to positive student outcomes.

It's also important to keep in mind that teacher engagement throughout the design and development process is not merely beneficial but critical to success. Teachers, as the experts in their craft, have much to contribute to the design and implementation of teacher evaluation systems. Their engagement throughout the process promotes ownership and efficacy of the system. These



Teachers, as experts in their craft, have much to contribute to the design and implementation of teacher evaluation systems.

systems are more likely to produce the results we desire—improved teaching quality and increased student learning—when teachers believe the systems and approaches will help them be more effective with their students.

Additionally, changes in evaluation processes and outcomes require not just new tools and procedures but significant changes in norms and beliefs. Teacher evaluation in most districts prior to 2008 was perfunctory and did little to help teachers improve.⁹ In the early stages of this work, when state- and district-level committees were focused on designing teacher evaluation systems with all the necessary components, not enough thought and time was given (sometimes because of accelerated timelines) to the necessary culture shifts and new knowledge and skills at the district and school levels required to do this work.

These systems require teachers and administrators to think and act very differently in the evaluation process. It requires

them to make the shift from *sorting* to *supporting*. For example, new systems often ask administrators (and in some districts, teacher leaders) to hold evidence-driven conversations with teachers about instruction and student learning and to connect that evidence to district and school supports that will drive individual and school-wide improvement. Although states and districts are beginning to focus their attention and resources on these kinds of implementation challenges, much work remains in changing norms and beliefs.

Common Misteps to Avoid

To guide states and districts in designing and implementing effective evaluation systems, I've compiled a top 10 list of missteps to avoid, in order of importance. (For more specific examples of such missteps and how one school district avoided them, see the article on page 18.)

- 1. Thinking teacher evaluation alone is the silver bullet.** Teacher evaluation systems alone are insufficient to improve instructional quality and increase student achievement. To be successful, reform efforts need to be coherent and aligned across the educator career continuum, beginning with recruitment and preparation, and extending to support, evaluation, and compensation.
- 2. Excluding educators from the work.** Educators need to be extensively involved. This does not mean that only a handful of teachers on a state or district committee will suffice. Involvement must be broad and deep.
- 3. Dismissing the importance of building trust.** Teachers need to believe that these systems will help support them and achieve success with their students. In many schools across the country, mistrust among educators exists for many reasons. The lack of trust at the district and school levels will likely affect the success of these systems, so take steps to begin rebuilding trust. The first step is ensuring that teachers and their unions are substantively involved in the design and implementation process.
- 4. Failing to communicate frequently.** Regular communication is critical to the successful implementation of teacher evaluation systems. States and districts must develop communication plans that outline multiple ways to reach educators, parents, the community, and other important stakeholders about the effort. Communication also must be designed specifically to inform educators throughout the implementation process.
- 5. Relying on principals to do all the work.** The role of the evaluator in these systems requires new skills and more time, and many principals have not received adequate training to carry out this new role. These systems will require new approaches to implementation, such as redistributing administrators' current work or rethinking staffing roles, including the role of teacher leaders in the evaluation process.
- 6. Inadvertently decoupling teacher evaluation from professional learning.** This misstep occurs both in the

design and implementation phases. First, teacher evaluation systems have little chance of improving teaching if they do not include varied measures that can yield rich and relevant information about teacher practice.¹⁰ Second, when teacher evaluation systems are implemented, administrators need to intentionally make the connections between evaluation information and professional learning opportunities.¹¹ Teachers need specific recommendations about and access to professional learning opportunities linked to evaluation outcomes.

7. **Underestimating time and resources.** Getting teacher evaluation right is a continuous process, not a one-time activity or event. It will require a significant investment of time and resources, particularly to identify evidence and measures of student learning to incorporate into the process that will help teachers improve their practice and to build the knowledge and skills of teachers and administrators. Make sure to lay the foundation for this work as a process of continuous improvement.
8. **Communicating the wrong message.** The wrong message about this work can derail well-intentioned efforts. Teachers and administrators are unlikely to want to put in the time and energy necessary to make these systems work if they think this effort is unimportant, unproven, and compliance driven.
9. **Not connecting the dots.** Do district policies feel like random acts of improvement? Many programs can support and guide high-quality instruction, such as mentoring and induction programs, instructional coaching, and professional learning communities. Take the time to figure out how all of these efforts can work together.
10. **Going it alone.** Considerable progress has been made in teacher evaluation design and implementation. States and districts do not have to reinvent the wheel as they begin this work. They should leverage their resources by partnering with other states and districts or using free resources such as those found on the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders website (www.gtlcenter.org), the Everyone at the Table website (www.everyoneatthetable.org), and NYSUT's Teacher Evaluation and Development website (www.nysut.org/resources/special-resources/sites/ted).

Despite making significant progress, states and districts still face challenges that could threaten the ultimate success of these systems. At AIR, we anticipate two major ones:

Inability to stay the course. Changes take time to implement. In education, we rarely allocate sufficient time for the implementation and careful study of any major policy change. We often rush to proclaim an effort unsuccessful and then quickly move on to usher in another one. Lessons learned from the early adopters in the field (e.g., Denver Public Schools, New Haven Public Schools, and Tennessee) suggest that we need at least five to seven years of implementation before we begin to assess the effectiveness of such efforts. And, given the sweeping changes occurring in many states and districts regarding the implementation of the Common

Core State Standards, we might need even more time to decide whether to continue a particular teacher evaluation effort.

New ideas and processes require system change. Creating systems that can improve instructional quality will require changes in the way we organize and deliver schooling. For example, teachers will need more time to collaborate with peers and to study and reflect on their practice if we want them to develop and improve at all stages of their careers. Principals will need more time in classrooms to have conversations with teachers about effective practice. Principals and teachers will need the right set of supports (professional development and beyond) to deepen their knowledge about effective practice. We are designing new systems and ways of doing business regarding teacher evaluation, yet we continue to try to fit those new approaches into the traditional model of schooling. If we are to observe real improvements in teaching and learning, then we will likely need to restructure the school day and reallocate existing resources so that teachers have more time for studying and improving their practice with colleagues. School days must be designed with teacher collaboration in mind, instead of trying to cram collaboration into the school day.

As we look at how far we have come and how far we need to go in teacher evaluation implementation, states and districts can take a few key steps to increase the likelihood that teacher evaluation systems will help improve instructional quality on a broad and deep scale.

Real improvements in teaching and learning come when teachers have more time for studying and improving their practice with colleagues.



Do not rush these reforms. Balance the political need to move forward and show progress with the pragmatic consideration of making sure these systems are doing what they are intended to do—support and develop educators so that their students are academically, socially, and emotionally successful. Too much time, effort, and resources have already been spent on teacher evaluation to let these systems fail because we do not have the patience to see these efforts through. Teachers and administrators need time to learn these new systems and to gain the trust and confidence that they will actually support rather than merely sort teachers. Finally, expecting to observe real outcomes in student learning that can be attributed to teacher evaluation systems will take time and close study of the ways in which these systems are improving instructional quality.



Teacher evaluation by itself is inefficient for improving the quality of all teachers.

Keep educators substantively engaged. Implementation is messy, and no state or district gets this correct right out of the gate. If educators are not substantively involved in the design and implementation of these systems, or they do not believe these systems will actually support them, then they are less likely to want to stay the course and invest the time and effort needed to fix the problems that will most definitely occur during implementation. Disinvestment and mistrust of educators in this work will crumble the system's foundation quickly.

Put together all the pieces of the puzzle. As the article on page 4 makes clear, teacher evaluation is only one component of a systems approach to supporting, developing, and improving teaching quality in a state or district. Work with a broad group

of stakeholders to map out how other important initiatives (e.g., induction and mentoring programs, peer assistance and review, lesson study, professional learning communities, and response to intervention) also support the goal of high-quality teaching for all students. Help educators see clearly how these programs and initiatives all work together to support high-quality instruction.

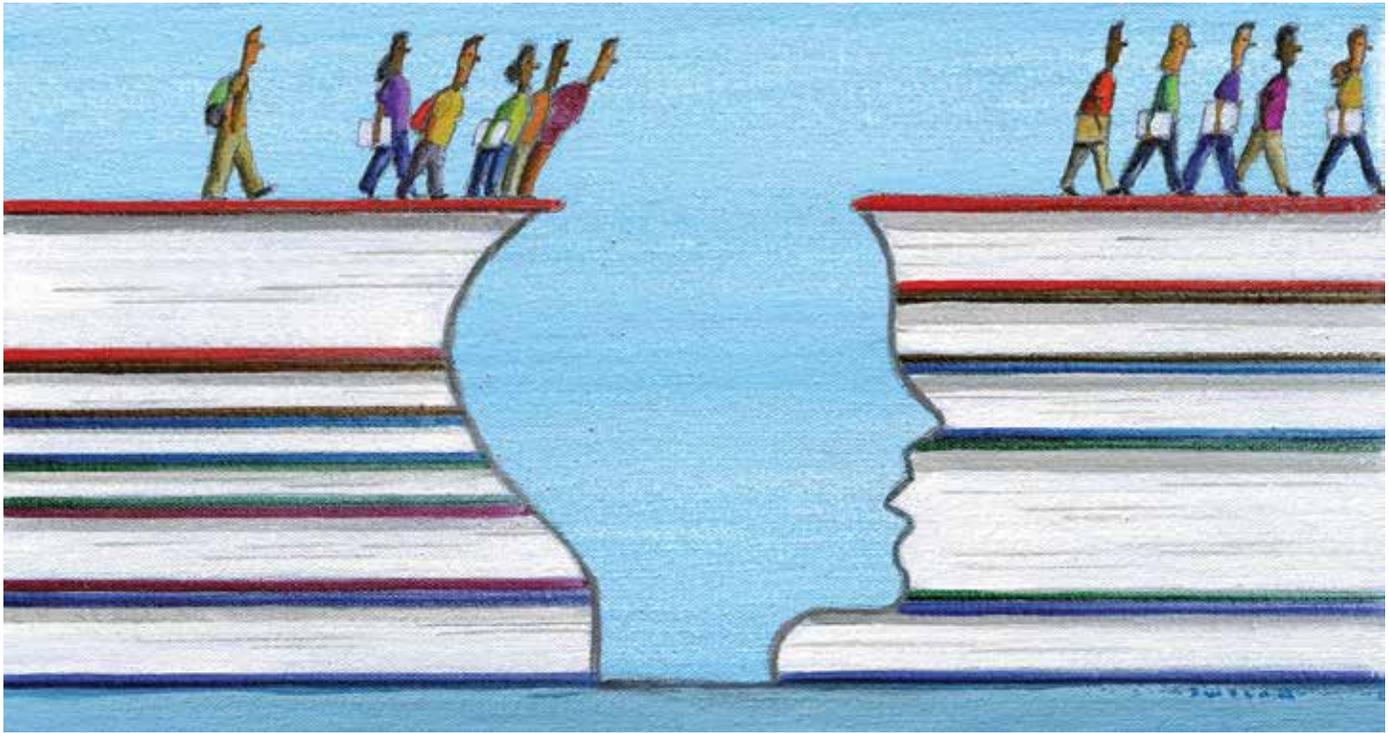
Although much of this article has focused on teacher evaluation and its promise to improve teaching quality, it is important to point out that teacher evaluation by itself is an inefficient approach to significantly improving the quality of all teachers. Who we recruit into the profession and how we prepare them are just as essential as how we develop, support, and retain them once they enter the classroom. States and districts need to develop a coherent, comprehensive, and coordinated approach to improving teaching quality. To ensure educational equity, such an approach must include teacher evaluation systems designed to help all teachers develop and improve throughout their careers. □

Endnotes

1. *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership* (New York: MetLife, 2012), www.metlife.com/assets/cao/foundation/MetLife-Teacher-Survey-2012.pdf.
2. Richard M. Ingersoll and Lisa Merrill, *Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force*, updated October 2013 (Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 2013), www.cpre.org/sites/default/files/workingpapers/1506_seventrendsupdatedoctober2013.pdf.
3. Barbara Nye, Spyros Konstantopoulos, and Larry V. Hedges, "How Large Are Teacher Effects?" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 26 (2004): 237–257.
4. Sixteen states have passed legislation explicitly stating that the purpose of teacher evaluations is to improve teacher practice and/or promote professional growth. Forty-two states have guidance documents explicitly stating that the purpose of teacher evaluations is to improve teacher practice and/or promote professional growth. See Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, *Databases on State Teacher and Principal Evaluation Policies* (2013), <http://resource.tqsource.org/stateevaldb>.
5. To date, 42 states and the District of Columbia have been approved for ESEA flexibility. See U.S. Department of Education, "ESEA Flexibility," updated on December 13, 2013, www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-flexibility/index.html.
6. Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, *Database on State Teacher and Principal Evaluation Policies*.
7. See, for example, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, *Ensuring Fair and Reliable Measures of Effective Teaching: Culminating Findings from the MET Project's Three-Year Study* (Seattle: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013); Corinne Herlihy, Ezra Karger, Cynthia Pollard, Heather C. Hill, Matthew A. Kraft, Megan Williams, and Sarah Howard, "State and Local Efforts to Investigate the Validity and Reliability of Scores from Teacher Evaluation Systems," *Teachers College Record* 116, no. 1 (2014); and Heather C. Hill and Pam Grossman, "Learning from Teacher Observations: Challenges and Opportunities Posed by New Teacher Evaluation Systems," *Harvard Educational Review* 82 (2013): 371–384.
8. Recent research shows that including multiple measures of teaching practice and employing a balanced approach to weighting measures produces more-reliable teacher effectiveness ratings. See Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, *Ensuring Fair and Reliable Measures*.
9. Daniel Weisberg, Susan Sexton, Jennifer Mulhern, and David Keeling, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness* (Brooklyn, NY: The New Teacher Project, 2009).
10. According to Goe, Holdheide, and Miller, "Although evidence of teacher effectiveness can be demonstrated, in part, through student growth measures, such measures are limited in distinguishing evidence of instructional quality." Laura Goe, Lynn Holdheide, and Tricia Miller, *A Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Teacher Evaluation Systems* (Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2011), 20. The authors recommend including measures such as observation instruments, performance rubrics, portfolios, evidence binders, teacher self-assessments, and parent and student surveys in teacher evaluation systems designed to help teachers improve their practice.
11. According to Coggshall et al., based on what we know about teacher learning and evaluation, teacher evaluation systems when implemented should "help teachers and school leaders develop a common understanding of the contours of effective practice," "provide evidence-based feedback to teachers to help them reflect on and improve their practice," and "measure and account for teachers' learning and collaboration." Jane G. Coggshall, Claudette Rasmussen, Amy Colton, Jessica Milton, and Catherine Jacques, *Generating Teacher Effectiveness: The Role of Job-Embedded Professional Learning in Teacher Evaluation* (Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2012), 6.

Minding the Knowledge Gap

The Importance of Content in Student Learning



BY DAISY CHRISTODOULOU

In 2007, I trained as a teacher and started teaching English in a secondary school in Southeast London that enrolls students between the ages of 11 and 18. One of the first things that struck me when I was teaching was that my pupils seemed to know so little. Even the bright and hard-working pupils seemed to me to have big gaps in their knowledge.

Before I became a teacher, I'd read newspaper articles about pupils lacking knowledge, but I had always assumed these reports had been exaggerated by the media. I wondered if my experiences were unusual, but the experiences of colleagues at other schools seemed similar to mine. Pupils who didn't know where milk came from, who didn't know the name of the British prime minister, who could barely name any foreign countries, and who had no idea of when important world-changing technologies had been invented.

I started researching the issue, and I found that my experiences weren't atypical. I also found that many American teachers had the same experiences. For example, there's a study showing that two-thirds of Americans can't name the three branches of the United States government.¹ In the United Kingdom, there's a study showing that a third of pupils think the House of Lords is elected.²

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It isn't—I know this tends to surprise a lot of Americans and others from more democratic countries, but it shouldn't really come as a shock to U.K. citizens!

In a lot of the training material I read, these knowledge gaps were given very little attention. Generally, the word “knowledge” was used in a very pejorative way. The idea was that you were supposed to focus on skills like analysis, evaluation, synthesis, and so forth. Knowledge was the poor relation of these skills. Of course, I wanted my pupils to be able to analyze and evaluate, but it seemed to me that a pupil needed to know something to be able to analyze it. If a pupil doesn't know that the House of Lords isn't elected, how can you get him to have a debate or write an essay analyzing proposals for its reform? Likewise, if a pupil doesn't know what the three branches of government are in the United States, how can she understand debates in the papers about the Supreme Court striking down one of Congress's laws?

I was also influenced here by my own background. I was born in East London to a working-class family. My father's parents were immigrants from Italy and Cyprus. My father said that when he was in school as a child in England, he very often felt as though he was on the outside of a conversation. He didn't know what the conversations were about, and he couldn't go home and ask his parents because they didn't know either. He was very determined that I wouldn't have that experience, and I didn't want my pupils to have that experience. Middle-class children pick up a lot of knowledge from home, from books, from programs on the radio, and so forth. Working-class children and the children of immi-

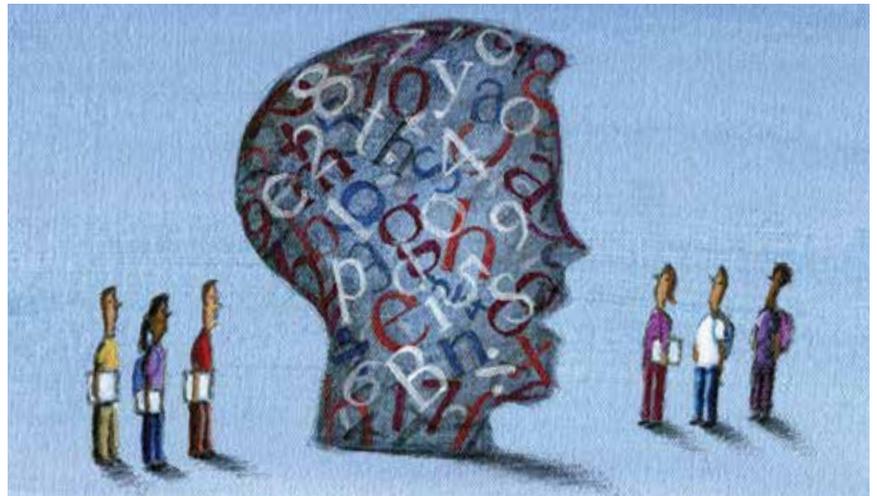
grants don't always get those advantages. A lot of the pupils I taught were just as bright and hard-working as the pupils at private schools, but they lacked crucial knowledge, and this deficit held them back in their studies.

As I researched these issues, I stumbled across this publication, *American Educator*, the quarterly journal of the American Federation of Teachers. Two articles in particular resonated with me at this point—one by Gilbert Sewall and one by Vincent Ruggiero.* Sewall's article detailed lots of examples of lessons that focused on trivial activities. I had seen lessons exactly like these in English classes, and in fact I'd taught some like that myself, with predictably underwhelming results. Ruggiero's article was more about

whole range of people from different classes and cultures, and if they belong to anyone, they belong to humanity. Teaching these insights to children isn't elitist—not teaching them is!

From my research, I think the U.K. and U.S. systems have a number of things in common. Pupils in both countries lack knowledge of important fundamentals. Both education establishments downplay the importance of knowledge. There is general academic underachievement despite a multiplicity of reform efforts and relatively generous funding. Attention is paid to school structures over classroom practice. And the high-stakes, test-based accountability systems in both countries have, by and large, failed. Let me be clear about this final point,

The aim of fact learning is to learn several hundred facts, which taken together form a schema for understanding the world.



discipline, but it was also making what I felt was a very important point about the transmission of knowledge.

It was thanks to *American Educator* that I heard of E. D. Hirsch Jr. and Daniel T. Willingham.† I would never have heard of them otherwise. I studied some American education scholars in my training course, so it wasn't that my training course was parochial. But certain ideas and people were just not taught. It was a great relief to read Hirsch and Willingham and to realize that the intuitions I'd had about the importance of knowledge were backed up by solid evidence. But it was also extremely frustrating, because I just couldn't believe that all this vitally important evidence about how pupils learn hadn't been taught to me when I was training to be a teacher.

Unfortunately, there is an unhelpful ideological component to these debates in the United Kingdom. Too often, people think that teaching knowledge is somehow right wing and elitist. But this isn't the case. The kind of powerful knowledge that's in the Core Knowledge‡ curriculum in the United States doesn't "belong" to any class or culture. The great breakthroughs of civilization were made by a

because when I advocate teaching knowledge, people assume I'm advocating high-stakes tests. That isn't at all the case. In fact, I'd argue that a lot of the damaging test preparation we see in both systems is the result of the misconception that skills can be developed in the abstract.

I read a lot of books when I was training to be a teacher that seemed to me to be fairly abstruse. I was never quite sure how their theoretical insights were meant to transfer to classroom practice. Likewise, I would read a lot of theoretical articles that would say things like, "Of course this isn't to say that we shouldn't teach knowledge." But then you would finally work out what they were recommending in practice and see that, in fact, it did involve not teaching knowledge. So in my work, I always try to relate everything back to practice in the hope that this will make my argument clearer. I also hope that this will make my observations relevant to classroom teachers from any country, even if they end up disagreeing with the argument.

Last September, after teaching English in two different secondary schools, I started working at ARK (Absolute Return for Kids) Schools, which runs a network of high-performing schools in disadvantaged areas. I work on curriculum and assessment research. I left the classroom because I really wanted to focus on creating curricula and assessments that would help pupils learn, and ARK was the best place for me to do this. There isn't anything like Core Knowledge in the United Kingdom, and we are only just beginning to realize the importance of knowledge and to design curricula that take this into account. ARK Schools is pioneering a really innovative and thoughtful approach to curriculum

*For more about these articles by Gilbert Sewall and Vincent Ruggiero, see *American Educator's* Summer 2000 issue at www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/summer2000.

†For more on E. D. Hirsch Jr.'s and Daniel T. Willingham's work, see *American Educator's* authors index at www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/author.cfm.

‡For more on Core Knowledge, see "Informative, Not Scripted: Core Knowledge Shows How Clear, Specific Content Supports Good Instruction" in the Spring 2008 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/spring2008/coreknowledge.pdf, and "More Than Words: An Early Grades Reading Program Builds Skills and Knowledge" in the Fall 2012 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2012/dubin.pdf.

design, and it is also backing it up with excellent teacher training and professional development. ARK is very much focused on improving classroom practice, using data and assessments intelligently, and learning from the best school systems from around the world. The ARK network has a lot of people who have taught in challenging schools working on these projects, so the lessons are designed with real pupils and teachers in mind. It has already created an excellent mathematics curriculum, called Mathematics Mastery, which is based on Singapore Math and is being taught by lots of schools outside the ARK network. I am working on a new English curriculum for ARK Schools, as well as a new assessment system. I do plan to return to teaching so I can use these curricula and assessments myself.

In the meantime, I've written a book, from which this article is drawn, about all that I've learned from my research. In my book, I focus on what I identify as seven myths, or widely held beliefs, that dominate our educational practice. I start with the myth that teaching facts prevents understanding, because this (along with my second myth, that teacher-led instruction is passive) is the foundation of all the other myths I discuss. These myths have a long pedigree and provide the theoretical justification for so much of what goes on in schools. Taken together, all seven myths actually damage the education of our pupils. But here, let's focus on facts and the role knowledge has in our understanding.

Myth: Facts Prevent Understanding

Perhaps the earliest expression of the idea that learning facts will not bring true understanding came from the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century. In *Émile, or On Education*, he advises that you should "give your scholar no verbal lessons; he should be taught by experience alone."³ The reason for this, he wrote, is that learning facts is ineffective: "What is the use of inscribing on their brains a list of symbols which mean nothing to them?"⁴ Pupils might be able to repeat exactly what you have told them, Rousseau said, but they will not be able to use the facts they have been told or understand how those facts can be deployed in different ways.⁵

You tell me they acquire some rudiments of geometry, and you think you prove your case; not so, it is mine you prove; you show that far from being able to reason themselves, children are unable to retain the reasoning of others; for if you follow the method of these little geometricians you will see they only retain the exact impression of the figure and the terms of the demonstration. They cannot meet the slightest new objection; if the figure is reversed they can do nothing.

Rousseau thought that such fact learning was not only ineffective but also immoral. In rendering pupils passive, he wrote, it not only ensures they are not learning, it ensures they are having all the joy and excitement of childhood knocked out of them.⁶

No, if nature has given the child this plasticity of brain which fits him to receive every kind of impression, it was not that you should imprint on it the names and dates of kings, the jargon of heraldry, the globe and geography, all those words without present meaning or future use for the child, which flood of words overwhelms his sad and barren childhood.

In the late 19th century, John Dewey also emphasized the importance of learning through experience. Rousseau thought the child "should be taught by experience alone"; the phrase most commonly associated with Dewey is "learning by doing." For Dewey, the problem with many of the schools in his time was that the pupils were not active:⁷

The child is thrown into a passive, receptive or absorbing attitude. The conditions are such that he is not permitted to follow the law of his nature; the result is friction and waste.

We see it again: teaching facts makes pupils passive; making pupils passive means they must ignore their natural inclinations; ignoring their natural inclinations makes them unhappy and does not help them learn. And again, the problem is with teaching facts to pupils:⁸

We present the child with arbitrary symbols. Symbols are a necessity in mental development, but they have their place as tools for economising effort; presented by themselves they are a mass of meaningless and arbitrary ideas imposed from without.

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator whose most famous book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was written in 1968. Like Dewey, his theories have enjoyed great influence: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has sold more than one million copies worldwide.⁹ It was undoubtedly more popular in its 1970s heyday, but a measure of its continuing influence is revealed by the fact that it came in 10th in a 2007 survey to find the most inspirational education

Teaching facts and subject content are part of the true aim of education, not in opposition to it.

books.¹⁰ In his book, Freire criticizes how facts prevent pupils from truly understanding the reality around them:¹¹

The teacher ... expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to "fill" the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance.

He developed his famous "banking" concept of education, illustrating how facts prevent understanding:¹²

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive,

memorise, and repeat. This is the “banking” concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system.

All these metaphors should remind us of another famous writer on education, Charles Dickens. Although Dickens was a novelist, not an education expert, his works and characters are so famous and influential that they merit mention here. His depiction of Thomas Gradgrind’s school at the start of *Hard Times* is a literary masterpiece:¹³

Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir! ...

The speaker, and the schoolmaster, and the third grown person present, all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim.

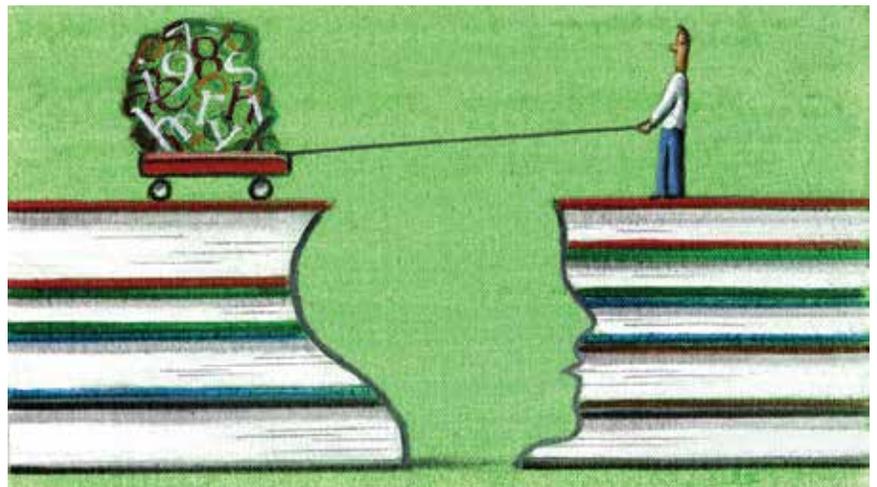
a teacher or anyone involved in education to Gradgrind is an insult, suggesting that the teacher is both emotionally stunted and doing great emotional damage to his or her pupils.

One common trope is seen in all of these writers. They all set up polar opposites between facts, which are generally seen as bad, and something else, which is generally seen as good. Facts are opposed with meaning, understanding, reasoning, significance, and, in Dickens’s case, fancy, or what we might today call imagination or creativity. If you want pupils to understand the true meaning of something, to be able to reason, and to be creative and imaginative, then facts are not the way to achieve such an aim.

Why Is It a Myth?

My aim here is not to criticize true conceptual understanding, genuine appreciation of significance, or higher-order skill development. All of these things are indeed the true aim of education. My argument is that facts and subject content are not opposed to such aims; instead, they are part of it. Rousseau, Dewey, and Freire were wrong to see facts as the enemy of understanding. All the scientific research of the last half-century proves them wrong. The modern bureaucrats and education experts who base policy and practice on their thinking are wrong too, and with less excuse, as they have been alive when evidence that refutes these ideas has been discovered. Rousseau was writing in the 18th century; Dewey at the turn of the 20th; Freire in the 1970s. Research from the second half of the 20th century tells us that their analyses of

Factual knowledge is closely integrated with creativity, problem solving, and analysis. It allows these skills to happen.



As we can see, the metaphor at the end has very much in common with those metaphors used by Rousseau, Freire, and Dewey. Dickens criticizes those people who would view children as passive receptacles to be filled with facts. The rest of the novel makes it clear what happens to children subjected to Gradgrind’s methods. They turn into emotionally stunted and broken adults, like his daughter Louisa, or into emotionless, heartless snitches like Bitzer. *Hard Times*, incidentally, ranked seventh in the poll previously mentioned on inspirational education books. It is also striking to note how often the name Gradgrind is mentioned in serious discussions on education. The United Kingdom’s current affairs program “Newsnight” recently used a lengthy clip of a TV version of *Hard Times* to illustrate a feature on exam reform.¹⁴ Comparing

factual learning are based on fundamentally faulty premises.

Much of the modern research into human intelligence was inspired and informed by research into artificial intelligence. To construct a machine that could think, scientists needed a better understanding of how humans actually thought.¹⁵ One of the pioneers in this field, Herbert Simon, gained much of his insight into how humans think through his attempts to construct a thinking machine.¹⁶ In the 1960s and 1970s, researchers agreed on a basic mental model of cognition that has been refined and honed since then.¹⁷ What this model shows is that the facts we have in long-term memory are vitally important for cognition.

By understanding how the brain works, we can understand why this is so. When we encounter a problem we want to solve,

we can use working memory and long-term memory to solve it. “Working memory can be equated with consciousness. Humans are conscious of and can monitor only the contents of working memory. All other cognitive functioning is hidden from view unless and until it can be brought into working memory.”¹⁸ So when we want to solve a problem, we hold all the information relating to the problem in working memory. Unfortunately, working memory is highly limited.

There is some debate in the literature about exactly how limited working memory is, but some of the most recent research suggests that it may be limited to as few as three or four items.¹⁹ That is, we can hold only three or four new items in working

memory at any one time. This places a huge limit on our ability to solve problems. You can see this by increasing the length of a range of multiplication problems. If you are asked to solve the problem 46×7 mentally, then it is possible for you to succeed, because doing so does not require you to hold too much new information in your working memory at once. But there is still a chance you will make errors, because you do have to use your working memory to remember a few things.

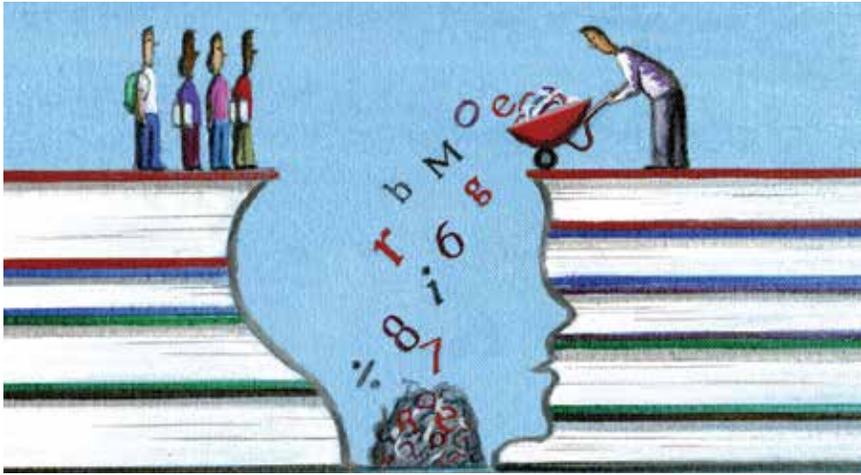
16 digits for five seconds and then ask you to try to reproduce them, you will probably fail:

4871947503858604

But if I show you the following 16 letters for five seconds, you will probably be able to reproduce them all exactly:²⁰

The cat is on the mat.

This is because you have been able to chunk the 16 letters into individual and meaningful words, and then into one individual phrase or sentence. That chunking is dependent on your background knowledge, stored in your long-term memory, of the way



When the knowledge base is not in place, pupils struggle to develop understanding of a topic.

You can solve this problem in a couple of ways, but whichever calculation method you use, you have to hold one piece of information in your working memory while you work out the next piece. Then you have to remember the first piece of information because you need to do something that involves using it and the second piece together. It is typical when solving problems like this to forget the result of the first calculation by the time you have got to the end of the last calculation. Multiplying a three-digit number by a one-digit number would test working memory even further. It is not that you do not know how to solve the problem; it is that solving it involves you holding far too many new pieces of information in your working memory at once.

Although working memory is limited, it is possible to cheat its constraints. Our long-term memory does not have the same limitations as working memory. It is capable of storing thousands of pieces of information. We can summon up the information from long-term memory to working memory without imposing a cognitive load. This allows us to cheat the limitations of working memory in lots of ways. For example, we can use the knowledge stored in long-term memory to chunk. If I show you

that letters form words, the meaning of each individual word, and the typical structure of a sentence.

We can also store rules or processes in long-term memory. These help us to know how to solve a problem. The only reason it is possible for us to solve a problem like 46×7 mentally is that we have certain pieces of knowledge stored in memory that help us tackle the problem. We know the process of multiplying a double-digit number with a single-digit number, and we have the relevant knowledge securely committed to long-term memory. Pupils who have not committed the multiplication table to memory cannot solve a problem like that mentally, even if they understand conceptually how multiplication works.

So, when we commit facts to long-term memory, they actually become part of our thinking apparatus and have the ability to expand one of the biggest limitations of human cognition. Professor John Anderson puts it thus:²¹

All that there is to intelligence is the simple accrual and tuning of many small units of knowledge that in total produce complex cognition. The whole is no more than the sum of its parts, but it has a lot of parts.

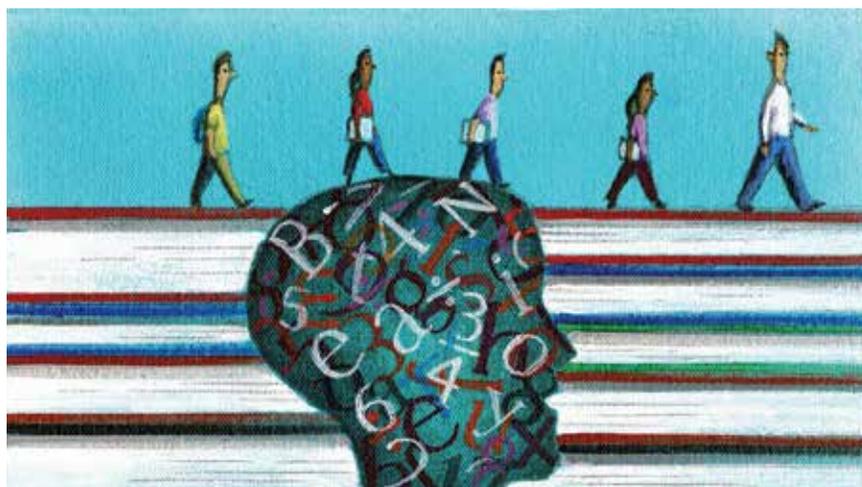
Long-term memory is capable of storing thousands of facts, and when we have memorized thousands of facts on a specific topic, these facts together form what is known as a “schema.” When we think about that topic, we use that schema. When we meet new facts about that topic, we assimilate them into that schema—and if we already have a lot of facts in that particular schema, it is much easier for us to learn new facts about that topic.²²

Critics of fact learning will often pull out a completely random

fact and say something like, “Who needs to know the date of the Battle of Waterloo? Why does it matter?” Of course, using one fact like this on its own would be rather odd. But the aim of fact learning is not to learn just one fact—it is to learn several hundred, which taken together form a schema that helps you to understand the world. Thus, just learning the date of the Battle of Waterloo will be of limited use. But learning the dates of 150 historical events from 3000 BC to the present day, and learning a couple of key facts about why each event was important, will be of immense use, because it will form the fundamental chronological schema that is the basis of all historical understanding. Just learning that 4×4 is 16 will be of limited use. But learning the multiplication table, and learning it so securely that we can hardly not think of the answer when the problem is presented, is the basis of mathematical understanding. If we want pupils to have good concep-

are higher-order skills. The metaphor of lower and higher skills leads to two false conclusions. First, it suggests that the skills are somehow separate from knowledge. Second, it suggests that knowledge is somehow less worthy and important. A better metaphor than this is one that is used by Hirsch. He sees the relationship between knowledge and skills as being like a scrambled egg.²⁴ You cannot unscramble an egg, and you cannot unscramble knowledge and skills. I also like the metaphor suggested by my colleague Joe Kirby, a secondary school English teacher in London, that knowledge and skills are like a double helix, progressing in tandem from surface learning to deep learning. Rather than characterizing fact learning as passive surface learning, and active skill practice as deep learning, we should understand that knowledge and skills are intertwined, and that skill progression depends upon knowledge accumulation.

If we fail to teach knowledge, pupils fail to learn.



tual understanding, they need more facts, not fewer.

For Rousseau, Dewey, and Freire, factual knowledge is seen in opposition to the kinds of abilities and thinking they want to develop. They all identify that teaching facts without meaning is unhelpful. But they all make a further assumption: that teaching facts is therefore opposed to teaching meaning. And this is not true. Factual knowledge is not in opposition to creativity, problem solving, and analysis. Factual knowledge is closely integrated with these important skills. It allows these skills to happen. In a sense, these important skills are the functions of large bodies of knowledge that have been securely committed to memory.

If we want pupils to develop the skills of analysis and evaluation, they need to know things. Willingham puts it this way:²³

Data from the last thirty years lead to a conclusion that is not scientifically challengeable: thinking well requires knowing facts, and that's true not just because you need something to think about. The very processes that teachers care about most—critical thinking processes such as reasoning and problem solving—are intimately intertwined with factual knowledge that is stored in long-term memory (not just found in the environment).

Many teachers in the United Kingdom and the United States are familiar with the popular Bloom's taxonomy, which suggests that knowing is a lower-order skill, while analyzing and evaluating

Perhaps the most fundamental, practical example of how this works is learning the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they make. The letters of the alphabet are, in a sense, completely arbitrary. There is no good reason why the squiggle “a” should form the vowel sound that we all associate it with. Yet we accept that pupils have to learn the relationship between these arbitrary squiggles and sounds as a precursor to being able to make meaning from them. Learning such facts does not preclude meaning: it allows meaning. As the pupils commit these facts to memory, they are expanding their long-term memories, improving their ability to communicate, and developing a more sophisticated mental apparatus.

By neglecting to focus on knowledge accumulation, therefore, and assuming that you can just focus on developing conceptual understanding, today's common yet misguided educational practice ensures not only that pupils' knowledge will remain limited, but also that their conceptual understanding, notwithstanding all the apparent focus on it, will not develop either. By assuming that pupils can develop chronological awareness, write creatively, or think like a scientist without learning any facts, we are guaranteeing that they will not develop any of those skills. As Willingham and others have pointed out, knowledge builds to allow sophisticated higher-order responses. When the knowledge base is not in place, pupils struggle to develop understanding of a topic.

Throughout this article, I have tried to stress that I share the aims of many of the people whose methods I disagree with. I agree that education should aim to produce confident, creative, and problem-solving critical thinkers. I agree that we should prepare pupils for the 21st century. I agree that we should design our education system to suit everyone, not just the high achievers. I agree that education should be concerned with democracy and equality. I agree that pupils should be active learners and that lessons should be engaging. It is because I believe all of these things that I am so concerned about the current education system. The methods we are currently using to achieve these aims simply do not work.

The main reason they do not work is because of a misguided, outdated, and pseudoscientific stigma against the teaching of knowledge. The evidence for the importance of knowledge is clear. We have a strong theoretical model that explains why knowledge is at the heart of cognition. We have strong empirical evidence about the success of curricula that teach knowledge. And we have strong empirical evidence about the success of pedagogy that promotes the effective transmission of knowledge. If we fail to teach knowledge, pupils fail to learn.

But very little of this evidence is known or taught within our education systems in the United Kingdom and the United States. The fundamental ideas of both systems are flawed. When one looks at the scientific evidence about how the brain learns and at the design of our education systems, one is forced to conclude that the systems actively impede education. If our curriculum were to promote learning, then it would specify a core, coherent, and sequenced body of knowledge. Instead, it specifies no knowledge and suggests that the knowledge that is taught is unimportant in comparison to skills. If our pedagogy were to promote learning, then it would recognize the importance of teacher-led instruction and guided practice. Instead, teachers are advised not to direct their pupils and are encouraged to facilitate unguided projects. If our schools wanted to ensure that all pupils could read effectively by the time they were 16, then they would focus on gradually building up the amount of important cultural knowledge pupils needed to learn. Instead, schools teach random and often trivial bits of information, many of which the pupils already know.

In my time as a teacher, I followed education policy closely, but I never encountered any of the evidence about knowledge I speak of here until I researched the issue, nor did I actually hear anyone advocate the importance of knowledge. I struggled to improve my pupils' education without ever knowing that I could be using hugely more effective methods. I would spend entire lessons quietly observing my pupils chatting away in groups about complete mis-

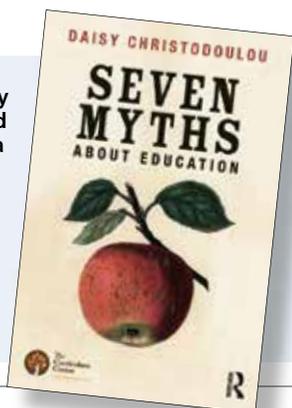
conceptions, and I would think that the problem in the lesson was that I had been too prescriptive. We need to reform teacher training programs in both the United Kingdom and the United States so that they stop promoting completely discredited ideas and give more space to theories with much greater scientific backing.

However, at its heart, this is a problem of ideas, not institutions. While some institutional and structural reform may be valuable, what needs to change most of all is our reliance on defunct ideas. At stake is the education of all our pupils, and particularly the education of our least advantaged pupils. Unless we place the powerful and liberating force of knowledge at the heart of our education system, it will continue to fail our pupils and to deepen inequality. □

Endnotes

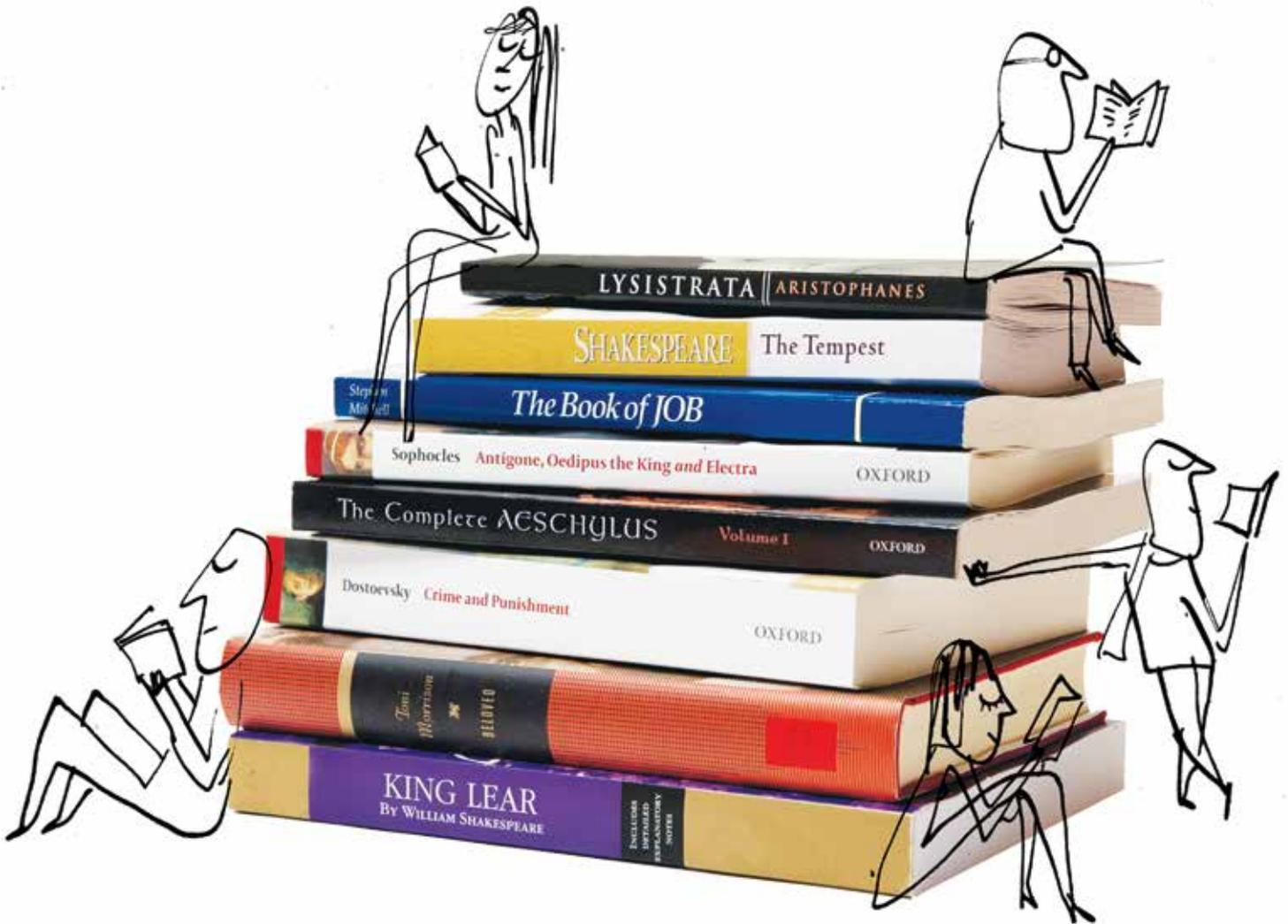
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Promethean Summer

Professional Development Boldly Focuses on the Classics



BY JENNIFER DUBIN

On July 8, 2013, Keith Black set his alarm for the first time that summer. The high school English teacher in Dallas, Texas, usually liked to spend his break between school years tweaking his lesson plans and reading for pleasure. But for three weeks last July, he had little time for leisure.

Black had voluntarily enrolled in the Sue Rose Summer Institute for Teachers at the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.* He had first learned of the program from colleagues who told him it would reinvigorate his teaching and renew his passion for lifelong learning, and on both counts it did. Throughout

the three-week institute, he did not hear the terms “21st-century skills,” “high-stakes testing,” or “value-added assessment,”¹ among other education buzzwords that too often fail to develop teachers and students in thoughtful ways.

Instead of being subjected to what he disparagingly calls “PowerPoint drudgery,” Black spent eight hours each day discussing classic works of literature, 17 in all, that he had read the previous three months on his own: *Prometheus Bound*, *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, *The Eumenides*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Peace*, *Lysistrata*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Blood Wedding*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Beloved*.

Each morning, he attended lectures on these works given by the Dallas Institute’s faculty members, who hold PhDs in literature. Afterward, he discussed the texts with teachers just like

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*To learn more about the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, visit www.dallasinstitute.org.

himself in small faculty-led seminars. In the afternoons, he sometimes watched a film relating to the literature studied that day or attended another discussion or lecture. Then he wrote a response to a tightly focused question posed by the faculty to demonstrate what he had learned. “It’s divine,” says Black, summing up the experience three days before it ended. “I’m surrounded by intelligent people talking about intelligent books, intelligently.”

For 30 years, the Dallas Institute has treated teachers as intellectuals. To that end, the nonprofit educational organization, founded by former faculty members at the University of Dallas, offers teachers from all grade levels and all disciplines—not just English—an experience that either reacquaints them with or introduces them to the literature of Western civilization. The classic works studied are taught at the level of a graduate-school course and do not at all resemble typical professional development. Educators who attend this program rise to the challenge of engaging in insightful discussions about these complicated texts. In fact, they hunger to do so.

“Teachers work with human material, and the best way traditionally to gain access to human things is through the humanities, which are the foundation of a liberal arts education,” says Claudia Allums, who directs the Summer Institute. But a liberal arts education encompasses more than literature or philosophy or history courses, she says. It’s a particular spirit with which one approaches any discipline. “If a teacher has a broad, strong liberal arts education, then he or she is going to have a broad, strong foundation in human sensibilities. That’s the foundation we believe is important for any teacher’s wisdom.”

Today, that belief is not widely shared. With the overwhelming focus on testing and measuring, it’s rare to hear words such as “wisdom,” “humanities,” and “human sensibilities” in relation to public education. Occasionally, reports like *The Heart of the Matter: The Humanities and Social Sciences for a Vibrant, Competitive, and Secure Nation*,² published last year by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, will decry the narrowing of the curriculum and call for a renewed emphasis on the liberal arts and their importance. But in the end, often little will be done to act on these ideas, however noble.

Given that in the 1980s, the test-based accountability that has failed to strengthen public education first got its start in Texas, it’s ironic that a small Dallas nonprofit offers a meaningful alternative to supporting teachers in such a test-obsessed environment.

The Summer Institute provides “a learning experience that helps remind us of the joy of learning, the joy that must be present if we are to have any hope of leading students to a love of learning,” says Allums. “The institute is where you recover what it means to be a teacher.”

For many years, the Dallas Institute has encouraged teachers to read, understand, and enjoy the classics. In doing so, it is powerfully connecting teachers with great literature to make teachers aware of their own greatness at a time when many of them feel powerless to help students like never before.

Hope in the Humanities

The Dallas Institute was established in 1980 to further the intellectual life of the city by featuring speakers, showing films, and organizing book discussions. Among the founders were Donald

and Louise Cowan (see the sidebar on page 38). Donald was a former president of the University of Dallas and a professor of physics, while Louise had been a chair of the English department and dean of graduate studies there. Both left the university to help start the Dallas Institute. Donald Cowan died in 2002.

In response to the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, which criticized the state of public education, Louise Cowan decided to create a literature-based summer seminar for high school English teachers. That same year, she applied to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to fund her program, which it did for four years. “Although the program makes no attempt to change the English curriculum in the secondary schools,” she wrote in her grant application, “its effect through the participants will be to introduce into the body of the educational process a self generat-

The Summer Institute provides
“a learning experience that helps
remind us of the joy of learning.”

—Claudia Allums

ing source of cohesion and understanding that will permeate all its parts. This is the essential element in any reform the humanities can effect, perhaps the only way in which the ‘rising tide of mediocrity’ in our schools may be stemmed.”

In her proposal, Cowan conceived of a four-week program in which the same works would be studied every other summer. In even-numbered years, the seminar would be called “The Epic Tradition,” and teachers would study the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, the *Divine Comedy*, *Moby-Dick*, Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the West African *Mwindo Epic*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and the book of Genesis, as well as excerpts from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” In odd-numbered years, the seminar would be called “Tragedy and Comedy,” and would include many of the same works that Keith Black would read nearly 30 years later. The first Summer Institute, “The Epic Tradition,” was held in 1984.

Louise Cowan wrote the syllabus for the seminars, officially called the Sue Rose Summer Institutes for Teachers (renamed in 2008 for a faithful volunteer with the program). Cowan selected the works for their universal appeal and timelessness. Over the years, the list of texts studied each summer has remained largely unchanged. She based the teaching of the classics on her literary genre theory, a lens through which to interpret literature. Her theory operates on the premise that literature

consists of four distinct, yet sometimes overlapping, parts: epic, lyric, tragic, and comic. Thus, the Summer Institute's focus reflects Cowan's life's work.

In June 2013, to round out its offerings, the Dallas Institute began a weeklong institute titled "Lyric Tradition I," in honor of the fourth piece of Cowan's genre theory. Like "The Epic Tradition" and the "Tragedy and Comedy" institutes, "Lyric Tradition I" focuses on the same works every other summer. It includes Old Testament Psalms; Shakespearean sonnets; and works of the meta-physical poets John Donne, Andrew Marvell, and George Herbert, romantics such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and John Keats, as well as Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Gerard Manley Hopkins, A. E. Housman, and William Butler Yeats. "Lyric Tradition II," to be offered beginning in summer 2014, will feature 20th-century works, including those of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and the contemporary poets. Though Cowan no longer teaches during the Summer Institute, she still keeps a hand in it and gives new lectures every summer. At 96, she wrote the syllabi for the new lyric institutes.

In 30 years, even in the midst of great change within the broader field of education, few things about the Summer Institute have changed. It originally lasted four weeks, but in the mid-1990s, as area school districts lengthened the school year, the founders of the Dallas Institute shortened the program to three weeks. Also, though the institutes were originally for high school English teachers, teachers from other disciplines and grade levels heard about them a few years after they started and asked to attend. Now teachers from all academic disciplines, as well as art, music, physical education, and special education, and from all grade levels, preK-12, can and do participate.

With its initial grant from the NEH, the Summer Institute enrolled 45 teachers each summer during the program's first four years. But when Cowan wanted to increase the number of participants, the Dallas Institute's founders began to seek funds from donors instead of relying on grants. Today, anywhere from 45 to 60 teachers attend each summer. To this day, the Dallas Institute continues its fundraising efforts to help defray the costs of running all its programming, including the Summer Institute. According to the NEH, the summer program is the only one of

its kind in the country. In 2008, an NEH official, speaking in honor of the Summer Institute's 25th anniversary, lauded the program as a "model for the nation."

The cost for an individual teacher to attend the Summer Institute is \$300, which covers books and some food. Usually, schools or districts pay this amount. Sometimes, though, district administrators don't see the value in the program or simply don't have the funds and can't pay for the course, so teachers must pay themselves. Those who attend mostly come from Dallas-area public schools and a few private schools. Often, an out-of-state teacher who has heard about the Summer Institute will enroll, but he or she must find and pay for lodging. Last summer, one teacher came from Arizona. She stayed with a Dallas teacher who was also participating. Because she couldn't afford the airfare, she drove 17 hours to attend.

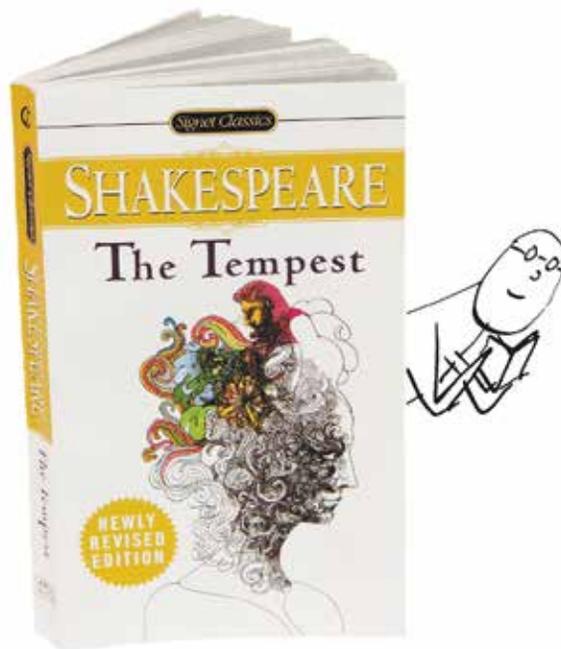
Besides paying the fee, teachers must submit a typed, two-page paper chronicling their "intellectual journey" to explain why they wish to enroll. They must also agree to 10 "statements of commitment," in which they promise to attend all 15 days of class, to read and prepare for at least half the assigned readings before class begins, and to turn off any technology, including smartphones, during class.

Each year, some teachers take the course to earn professional development credits from their district (some districts accept credit and some do not), while others take it for graduate credit toward a master's of humanities degree offered by the University of Dallas. Those pursuing the master's degree must write a 10- to 15-page paper, grounded in literary criticism, on a topic of their

choice, and submit it two weeks after the institute.

Each day, all teachers write in a journal to reflect on a question posed by a faculty member. On Fridays, everyone is given two hours in the afternoon to write an essay on a prompt assigned to the whole class. Though the papers are not graded, even for those taking the course for graduate credit, faculty members do read them and mark them with comments.

Typically, four full-time faculty members and one junior faculty member teach the Summer Institute. Guest lecturers also speak during the three weeks. Last summer's full-time faculty members included Claudia Allums, who directs the summer



COVER ART BY MILTON GLASER, THE TEMPEST, BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, PUBLISHED BY SIGNET CLASSICS.

"Teachers are the heart of any educational system. They represent content more than method. Their method is their own. But the content is shared."

—Louise Cowan

program; Larry Allums, her husband, who directs the Dallas Institute; Glenn Arbery, a former director of the Summer Institute; Diana Senechal,³ a writer and public school teacher in New York City; and Elizabeth Reyes, last summer's junior faculty member who teaches at Thomas Aquinas College in California.

Teachers enrolled in the "Tragedy and Comedy" institute meet with both Larry and Claudia Allums in the spring when they attend an hourlong orientation. There, they receive their books and a messenger bag for carrying them. Years when "Tragedy and Comedy" takes place, the orientation occurs in April. In years when "The Epic Tradition" is offered, the orientation takes place in March to give teachers more of a head start on reading. They must read about 1,700 pages for "Tragedy and Comedy" compared with more than 3,000 pages for "The Epic Tradition." At both orientations, however, Claudia Allums encourages everyone to begin reading as soon as they can. Many teachers take her up on that by reading before the school year ends.

For those feeling overwhelmed at the amount of work, Allums offers Louise Cowan's advice: read fiction as quickly as possible and resist the urge to look up words. Allums admits this is difficult to do. "What we're looking for is just a general feel, a sense of the thing," Allums tells them during last April's orientation. She suggests that they mark in their books as they read. "It will make you feel better when you go back to read again," she says to nervous laughter. By the time the Summer Institute starts in July, they may think, "I don't remember any of this, but I was here," and that's all right, she tells them.

After all, Allums knows how they feel. "I sat where you're sitting in 1989 when I came here for my first Summer Institute," she says. The experience "transformed me." Allums had been teaching high school English for 10 years and was ready to quit when a mentor told her about the program. She so enjoyed the academic discussions of meaningful content that she went on to earn a PhD in humanities from the University of Dallas and came to work for the Dallas Institute in 2004.

During the orientation, Allums explains that the Summer Institute is based on great works of literature that help all teachers understand the complexities of human nature so they can better understand themselves, their students, and how to help them thrive in the world. "This is not a class about pedagogy or methodology," she continues. "Until a character or a theme in one of the works we're reading calls it to mind, we don't discuss formally teaching at all, or teachers. It's not our conversation."

A Conversation about Content

On July 8 at 8 a.m., 52 teachers arrive at the Dallas Institute to participate in this unique experience. The very setting of the Summer Institute—its location, and the relaxed pace of what takes place here—greatly differs from the hustle and bustle of the school day. The Dallas Institute sits on a quiet street in the uptown part of the city, an area known for its upscale shops and restaurants. It's housed in a two-story brick home built in 1907 that features a generous front porch with tables and chairs, where teachers write in the afternoons as ceiling fans whir overhead.

Inside, the front of the house, with its hardwood floors and wood trim, looks very much as it did at the turn of the 20th century. Parlor rooms once used for family private time are now devoted to teacher discussions of literature. On this morning,

one of those rooms is where educators help themselves to breakfast; lunch is also provided. Toward the back of the house is a large room with windows and high ceilings that was part of a renovation. At 8:45 a.m., the teachers take their seats here, as they will each day, for a morning lecture.

The first speaker is Claudia Allums, who welcomes them to the 30th Summer Institute and reads them a poem, "The World Is Too Much With Us," by William Wordsworth:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

Allums says that the above first few lines, which lament the wasting of time and talent on trivial pursuits, speak, for her, to why the teachers have gathered here this summer and the work they will do. She then discusses some of the literary terms from Aristotle's *Poetics*—such as "mimesis," meaning imitation, in the sense of making a representation, and "praxis," meaning action, in the sense of doing—that they will be referencing in their seminars. After briefly explaining what tragedy is—imitations of human actions—and what it is not—imitations of people, Allums introduces Louise Cowan, who slowly makes her way to the lectern.

A tiny woman, whose eyesight and hearing are both fading, Cowan is 96 and her mind is still sharp. In a talk that spans nearly an hour, she tells them that the Summer Institute "endows teachers with their literary heritage."

Though half of the teachers do not even teach literature, studying these works enables them to pass on universal truths to their students.

"For teachers are the heart of any educational system," she continues a few minutes later. "They represent content more than method. Their method is their own. But the content is shared."

For 30 years, Cowan has delivered the opening lecture of every Summer Institute. On this morning, she focuses much of her talk on *Prometheus Bound*, the 2,500-year-old play by Aeschylus, which they will discuss in their seminars later this morning. Cowan explains that Prometheus, a god, has stolen fire for mankind, and in so doing has given mankind the means with which to reason, to understand, and to judge, which before only the gods could do. To punish Prometheus, Zeus has him pinned to a rock where a vulture perpetually pecks away at his liver. The tension in the play is that Prometheus simultaneously represents

the figure of the martyr, the rebel, the prophet, the thief, and the teacher, and so deserves both blame and praise. It is this ambiguity that defines tragedy. “If Prometheus were mere victim, the work would not produce the effect of tragedy,” Cowan says, as the teachers furiously take notes. “But he has crossed over the line, committing what the Greeks considered hubris, and that’s overweening pride. And though he’s to be admired for his valor and his generosity, he’s at the same time to be feared for his boldness. For in Greek thought at this time, the chasm between humanity and the gods was considered to be unbridgeable.”

Although this play represents part of our ancient literary heritage, it’s too often not taught in our schools, Cowan says. The

poem, based on a myth, speaks to the fundamental qualities of our civilization, “our idealism, our greatness of soul, our capacity for sacrifice,” she says. If we do not teach it and other classics, Cowan warns, our children will grow up to be “mythless,” meaning they will fail to understand their civilization’s greatness and in turn their own. That’s where these teachers come in. Though they cannot always choose the curricula they teach, and almost half of them do not even teach literature, studying these works enables them to understand universal truths of human existence, truths that they, by virtue of being educators, can pass on to their students in one way or another.

After Cowan receives a standing ovation, Allums returns to the

Teaching and Its Spiritual Power

BY LOUISE COWAN

Though the official authority of teachers has been greatly diminished in the past century, their moral and spiritual authority is indestructible. And by spiritual authority, I’m not referring to anything connected with religion. I mean the ability to testify to the full dimensions of reality, to the enduring vitality of our myths and our mysteries.

The Greeks had a word for that region of memory where great heroes and great events reside. They called it *kleos*, something that is timeless, a dimension of memory and mystery attached to human events and just as real as empirical data. A people without access to this realm is badly hampered on its quest for greatness. And teachers are the “high priests” of this region of communal memory. Without teachers, only bits and pieces of it can emerge to ordinary life, and perhaps in distorted form.

Because I’ve spent a long lifetime of teaching and, from the vantage point of universities, viewed with frustration what has been happening in public schooling during that lifetime, I write without caution. I write of this realm of mystery surrounding our ordinary lives, the ignoring of which is having deleterious effects on our national destiny.

This realm is what Keats discovered in the “Ode to a Nightingale,” in which the poet, after following his aching heart in drowsy numbness, enters the dark wood where he hears the nightingale sing. The bird carries

within its voice the living past. And through the untroubled song of the nightingale, Keats can commune with that past.

Only the teacher as “shaman,” as a kind of nightingale, can guide his or her pupils toward the dark wood of shared human memory. Having said this, however, we must admit that in our time, a teacher’s ability to be a conduit for the past is insufficiently recognized. The world wants teachers to instruct students in practical matters, how to be adept in current procedures, so that the next generation can take over in processes that already exist. Thus, the task of the teacher is seen to be a work of relevancy, instruction, and skills necessary to maintain the status quo. The teacher’s traditional role of spiritual guide, then, already shaken in the past by dubious education theory, has in our time been all but demolished.

This determination to reduce learning to practical skills is likely to raise questions concerning the necessity of having teachers at all, except to handle electronic media, making their role that of manipulator rather than teacher. The increased emphasis on standardized testing also poses the danger of reducing the instructional role even further to educational clerk or drill master.

But despite all the misunderstanding of the role of teachers, to ask what authority they have is a little like asking the same question about mothers or fathers. The teacher’s authority is one of those ancient immemorial verities, like a parent’s, that we ought to take for granted, trusting that it’s simply in the nature of things. Poets over the centuries have given us images of the teacher’s stature: the Titan Prometheus; the centaur Chiron; the goddess Athena; the archetypal wise Old Man in so many myths and legends, from Merlin, the wizard of ethereal legends, on up to Prospero in *The*

Tempest. And in all of these, the teacher is connected with a kind of magic or at least some sort of occult powers. This “sorcery” is an important symbol, for it signifies the ability to enchant and hence points to another dimension found in the ordinary.

Yet ours is an age of unbelief in mystery. Teachers have to find an equivalent for this magic that can enable the young to pull swords from stones. For Father Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, this magic is “active love,” which transforms the painful events of the world. For some of us, it’s the great books whose spells are just as potent today as ever.

Though teachers are increasingly prevented from exercising their full “magical” powers in our schools, we can say at the outset that they are not and cannot be considered mere educational tools or equipment. Teachers bear a responsibility to the human race that is neither mechanical nor biological. Thus, it might best be said that teachers provide a way to rise above fate. And in the same way, they’re not part of the political establishment. Their work is to impart not official knowledge, subject to the politics of the day, but a timeless heritage, a body of wisdom belonging to the human race that teachers alone transmit.

Teachers represent—I’m not saying they possess—an entire body of knowledge. Through their very dedication to the task of learning, they have a bridge to another world, we might say, which, like magic, they use for the purpose of transporting others. So it’s not facts or any sort of ready-made knowledge that makes the effective teacher. Mechanical means can possibly handle better the transmission of facts. It’s a commitment to and a faith in intangibles, qualities, moral and spiritual values that ride on the back of the information being taught. It’s these signals of transcendence

Louise Cowan is a founder of the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture and a former chair of the English department and dean of graduate studies at the University of Dallas. A recipient of the National Humanities Medal from the National Endowment for the Humanities, she has written widely on the American South, Faulkner, and the Russian novel. This article is excerpted from a lecture she gave at the Dallas Institute in 2010.

lectern. She asks the teachers to wear their nametags throughout the day, especially in the seminar groups to which they've been assigned. That way, they can get to know each other and build on one another's thoughts, the point of the seminars. She also reminds them to keep the discussion centered in the text. "What we're trying to do in the seminars is to explore the content of the play," she says.

After a short break, the teachers meet in their randomly assigned groups. Faculty member Glenn Arbery begins his seminar by asking the 11 teachers sitting around the table if they have any comments or questions. Michael says he didn't catch what Cowan said after "myth is a way of seeing." The other teachers

search their notes. "Myth is not a conduit but a way of seeing," says Donna, finding the quote.

Arbery asks, "So what does that mean?"

"A way of seeing all dimensions," says Maria.

"Really, a way of framing an issue or knowledge," says Melody.

"How is it a way of seeing something?" Arbery asks. When no one responds, he explains that through Prometheus's action we learn about ourselves.

Prometheus's crime was stealing fire, he continues. "Why fire?"

Maria says that fire symbolizes knowledge, which is what the gods possess. Another teacher adds that "knowledge is power. It's really about not wanting to share power."

that the teacher gives out, an awareness of an arena of spiritual wisdom.

The spiritual perception is necessary to the body politic. In fact, it's irreplaceable in producing free persons. And though this depository of wisdom to which teachers bear witness is referred to in books or manuscripts, accessible to private individuals, it is through teachers that this wisdom is preserved and confidently explored. Only the teacher approaches this wisdom, not to possess it but to point toward it, to profess that it exists.

I don't mean to argue that teachers have, or even should have, encyclopedic knowledge. I'm suggesting that, as teachers, they have faith in the transforming power of the realm of intangibles to which they bear witness, for they are members of a profession and a calling that guards a cumulative body of knowledge. Just as we accept the fact that doctors' authority stems from their representing the whole history of medicine, and that lawyers' authority stems from the great tradition of law, so it is with teachers—wisdom, knowledge, invisible presences stand behind them. The discipline represented by the teacher is the tradition of learning that has the power to transform those who encounter it. And so, when we use the word transformation, we're speaking of a kind of magic work by teachers, which satisfies an essential need in society.

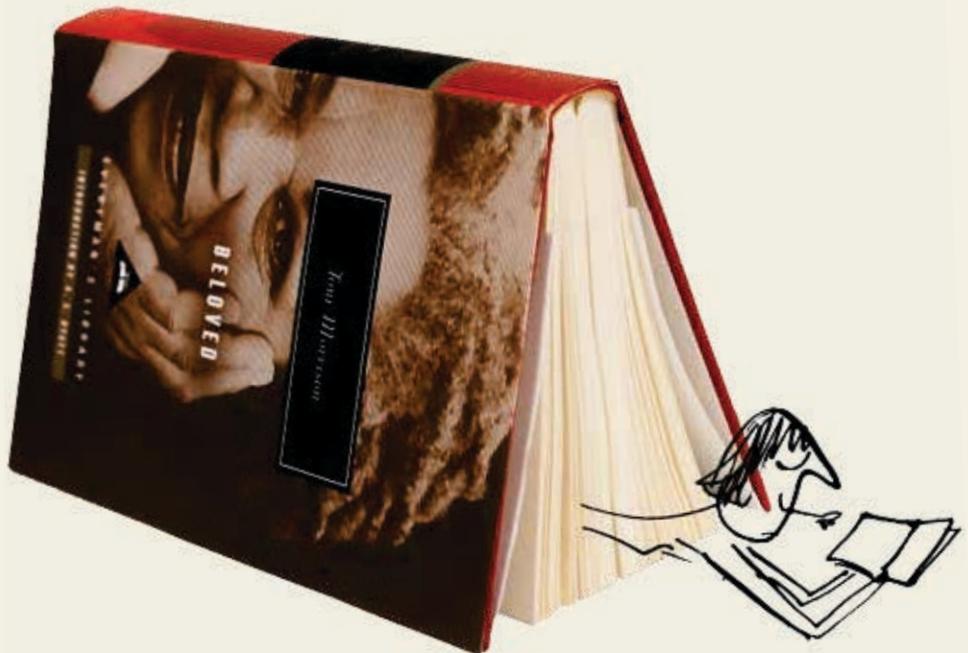
The practical world depends on the professions. Without lawyers, a society would have to try to arbitrate to make just rulings, as it would have to make medical diagnoses without doctors. But those decisions would be erratic and difficult, some brilliant and some misguided. And the same may be said of the teaching profession. People can learn without teachers, and certainly will nowadays from the Internet, but without a teacher, their learning is likely to be erratic, some of it enlightening, but a great deal of it misleading and even dangerous.

Teachers are members of a heretofore respected profession, and their concern for learning is a concern for others and hence a service to the community. Society can't do without them, and what they profess apart from the specifics of their teaching is the moral and spiritual wisdom necessary for the survival of our civilization. Individuals can no doubt make contact with this vast reservoir of achieved knowledge on their own. But its full volume and, in a sense, its public dimension are lost if we ignore those who take as their life work its dissemination.

Teachers guard, interpret, and transmit the treasures of their discipline. Without the

teaching profession, we would lose general literacy not only in the verbal but also in the mathematical realm. The authority of teachers comes not from their having an extraordinarily large body of information themselves but from a commitment to the preservation of their discipline, to putting information in perspective, consenting to be its medium, and using whatever spiritual powers are available to effect its transmission. Teachers are the bearers of something they consider more significant than themselves, more important than any method, something of enormous value to the culture. □

Teachers are members of a heretofore respected profession, and their concern for learning is a concern for others and hence a service to the community.



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Daniel says that with knowledge man can now navigate the elements and forge metal, which allows him to control nature.

Arbery moves the discussion along by directing them to a line on page 28 of their texts, in which Prometheus says, "I caused men no longer to foresee their death." He explains that Prometheus gave man the gift of not dwelling on his ultimate demise. "Seriously, if you can't get past the idea that you're going to die, you can't get yourself to do anything," Arbery says. "Prometheus's gift is to take that away."

A few minutes later, he asks them to explain the action of this play, given that not much happens with Prometheus pinned to a rock.

over the question.

Suddenly, another teacher named Heather looks up from her book and says Prometheus's motive is to teach.

Arbery nods. Prometheus's only motive is foresight, he says. "He looks past what they are now and sees what they're going to be."

"It's a choice to side with cunning over force," says Michael, quoting the word "cunning" from the text. "Wherever he finds it, he sides with it."

Arbery asks them to define cunning.

"In our world, it has a negative connotation," says Keith. Andrea says it means "by reasoning or figuring out," while Heather says it means "outsmarting."

Arbery then asks if they can imagine as teachers ever giving somebody reason.

They shake their heads no.

"Somehow the gift of fire is also the gift of the mind," he says. "There's some way that you awaken somebody's mind. You show them a possibility they didn't see. There's a kind of gift in that, isn't there?"

The teachers agree.

True to Allums's word, this discussion is one of the few times in the entire three weeks that the word "teaching" arises in relation to the text. For the two-hour seminar, the teachers follow her instructions to keep their talk focused on the literature. The discourse is thoughtful and engaging and does not resemble a typical book-club discussion or group therapy. No one says, "This reminds me of when I was ..." or "Just the other day, I was thinking about ..." Instead, they truly immerse themselves in the content and what they can glean from it.

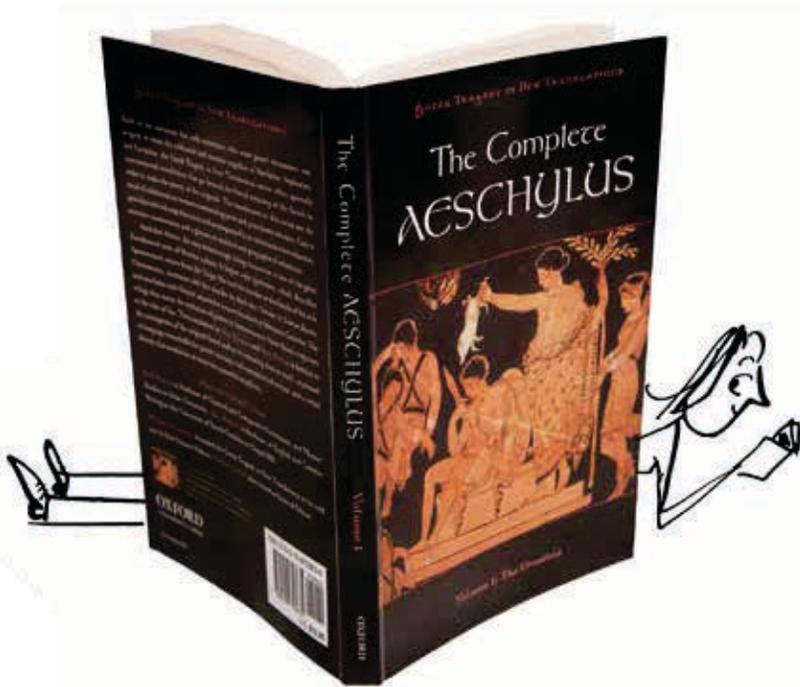
The same holds true when the teachers discuss films they watch in the afternoon or engage in discussions after guest lectures. Because of the absence of personal information shared during class, it's difficult to tell which subject and grade level these individuals teach. The literature so fascinates them that insightful comments come from all teachers. No one has trouble staying grounded in the text.

Teachers as Learners

Gail Rothstein initially wondered how much of the literature she would comprehend. The high school science teacher at Townview Magnet Center in Dallas studied music and science in college. She spends her days with scientific concepts, formulas, and facts. But a colleague who had previously attended the Summer Institute told her it would renew her desire to be a teacher. Rothstein, who has taught for 17 years, says that she has loved to read ever since she was young; she would finish books she received in school before the teacher even began to teach them. "The program sounded like some sort of heaven to me," she says.

Much to her surprise, she ended up grasping the concepts immediately and gaining an in-depth understanding of the texts. "For example," she says, "in *Prometheus Bound*, the struggle that goes through your mind is: Should I keep teaching students when some of them don't pay attention and don't seem interested? To me, Aeschylus, the author, answered my question. You accept that you must make the sacrifice."

Although Rothstein teaches pre-AP physics and earth and



The literature so fascinates them that insightful comments come from all teachers. No one has trouble staying grounded in the text.

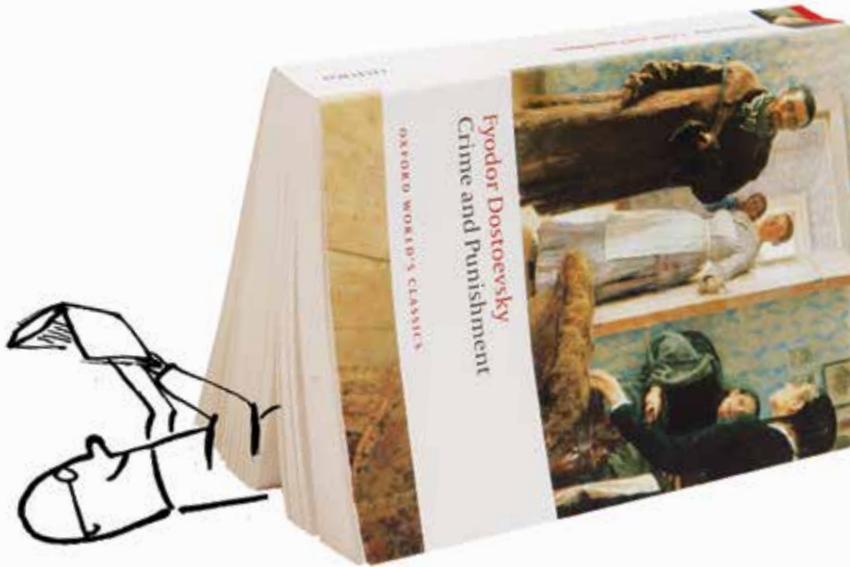
"Isn't the action the motive?" asks Heather, and Arbery nods.

"If you're faced with an action in which some choice is involved, character helps determine what choice you make," he says. "What's the choice Prometheus makes?"

To side with Zeus, the king of the gods, or to challenge him, Daniel says.

"What's Prometheus's motive?" asks Andrea, who furrows her brow and seems to pose the question as much to herself as to the rest of the class.

Arbery hints at an answer. He says Prometheus's motive is the same when he sides with Zeus and when he defies him to give man fire. The room falls silent as the group continues to puzzle



The Impact of the Sue Rose Summer Institute for Teachers

- ✓ Approximately 1,500 schoolteachers have participated since 1984.
- ✓ Typically, teachers teach 100 students each year.
- ✓ On average, teachers teach 15 years after attending the program.
- ✓ To date, participants have taught or will have taught more than 2,250,000 students.
- ✓ In a survey of participants from 2008 to 2013, nearly 70 percent said the program transformed the way they think about the teaching profession.

space sciences, she says that the classics do relate to her courses. “Our scientific method is based on Greek logic and philosophy,” she says. “Geometry was written in 350 BC by Euclid. I use that.” She also incorporates Greek mythology in her lessons. For instance, she tells students that Jupiter has four moons, named for the lovers of the god Jupiter, for whom the planet is named. Teaching such myths brings science to life; her students find them riveting.

She is pleasantly surprised at the way this program differs from other professional development courses, which often direct her to websites and resources that suggest ways to help her students pass standardized tests. Sometimes such courses offer “all these gizmos and gadgets” that claim to promote student learning, she says. Unlike most professional development she has experienced, the Summer Institute is not computer-based. “That’s what I like about this. It’s a wonderful chance to reconnect with other people and the world of ideas.”

For Maria Valencia Peña, a fifth-grade bilingual teacher at Wilmer-Hutchins Elementary School in Dallas, the Summer Institute has reminded her to try to instill a love of reading in her students; she realizes that sometimes reading instruction can detract from students’ enjoyment of a text.⁴ During the orientation, when Allums encouraged the teachers to read the assigned works for pleasure, Valencia Peña took those words to heart. “In the classroom, we tend to analyze everything that we read because we have to cover the main idea, what the topic is,” she says. “We are so focused on analyzing the text that sometimes we forget that the reading has to be for the enjoyment of reading.”

Tyler Woods wants her students to love literature, too. She believes they would enjoy reading *Prometheus Bound* as much as she did. The seventh-grade English teacher at Highland Park Middle School in Dallas has always taught simplified retellings of the myth. After this summer, however, she’s considering teaching students the same text she studied. “First of all, it’s short,” only about 30 pages, she says. “It doesn’t look intimidating.” With the right amount of support and background knowledge, she says her students would find it empowering to read an ancient work that hasn’t been watered down.

But the Summer Institute offers more than the occasional instructional idea for those who teach English. After Keith Black attended “The Epic Tradition” in 2012, he felt reinvigorated in the classroom. “I’m not saying I was losing steam as a teacher, but after a while the battery does lose a little charge,” he says. “But after coming here, I was amazed at the freshness with which I looked at the material I taught.” Black teaches AP English and an IB Theory of Knowledge course at Woodrow Wilson High School in Dallas. Each Summer Institute has shown him that overarching themes such as hubris and the fallibility of man run throughout the literature he has studied here and the various works he teaches during the year. Because of this overlap, he has developed a greater appreciation for the classics. He better understands how all of humanity is connected through them.

Just as important, the program allows Black to show his students that he continues to see himself as a student, too. As he wrote his “intellectual journey” essay for his application, he shared it with his students as they struggled to write their college essays. “Sometimes it’s not easy, but to be a thoughtful, engaged member of society, you have to do certain things,” he says. “And I choose this.” In choosing to attend the Summer Institute, Black is teaching his students one of the most valuable lessons of all—that learning never really ends. □

Endnotes

1. For more on the faddish ideas behind reforms pushing 21st-century skills, see “The Most Daring Education Reform of All” in the Spring 2010 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/spring2010/Senechal.pdf. To read about the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing, see “Unintended Consequences” in the Summer 2010 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/summer2010/Perlstein.pdf. For more on the problems with value-added models, see “A Measured Approach” in the Fall 2008 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2008/koretz.pdf.
2. *The Heart of the Matter* is available at www.humanitiescommission.org/_pdf/hss_report.pdf.
3. Diana Senechal is the author of *Republic of Noise: The Loss of Solitude in Schools and Culture*, an excerpt of which was published in the Winter 2011–2012 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/winter1112/Senechal.pdf.
4. For more on how teachers can move ideas back to the center of English language arts instruction, see “Letting the Text Take Center Stage” in the Fall 2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2013/Shanahan.pdf.

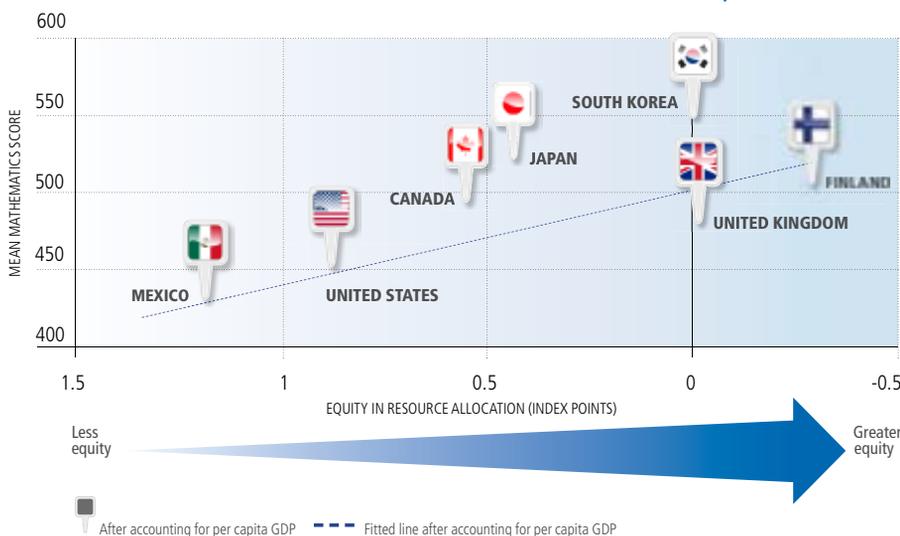
PARSING PISA

When the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released its Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results in December, standings for U.S. students remained relatively unchanged. This test of 15-year-olds in developed nations showed that U.S. students ranked slightly above average in reading, about average in science, and below average in mathematics. The results differed little from prior PISA surveys, prompting questions about whether the most important lessons contained in the PISA comparison are being heeded at home.

PISA leaves no doubt that poverty matters. U.S. schools perform near the top when compared with schools with similar poverty rates in other countries. However, the United States has a much higher child poverty rate than other developed nations. PISA also offers evidence that some of the most common school reforms, such as longer instructional days, a teacher corps drawn from only the top third of college graduates, and union-free school systems, are not found in high-achieving nations.

After the 2009 PISA results, AFT leaders visited high-performing countries and examined OECD recommendations. Today, those recommendations inform two AFT initiatives: the Quality Education Agenda and Reclaiming the Promise of Public Education. “The crucial question we face now is whether we have the political will to move away from failed policies and embrace what works in high-performing countries,” says AFT President Randi Weingarten. For important lessons from PISA, see the AFT’s video “What Does the PISA Report Tell Us about U.S. Education?,” available at www.bit.ly/1eQiOeJ.

Allocation of educational resources and mathematics performance



SOURCE: PISA 2012 RESULTS IN FOCUS, PAGE 28, WWW.OECD.ORG/PISA/KEYFINDINGS/PISA-2012-RESULTS-OVERVIEW.PDF.

DISRUPTING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

In January, the Albert Shanker Institute and the AFT held a public conversation in Washington, D.C., to explore how school discipline policies like “zero tolerance,” often working in tandem with test-driven sanctions against schools, perpetuate a national school-to-prison pipeline that steals educational opportunity from students, particularly children of color. Joining AFT President Randi Weingarten on the panel of speakers were Rep. Keith

Ellison (D-MN) and Yale Law School professor James Forman Jr.

The event took place only hours after the Obama administration issued new guidance on school discipline policies. As a result, much of the discussion at the event focused on the need for the federal government to support the guidelines it had just released, such as hiring more school counselors and providing wraparound services for students and families. A video of the conversation is available at www.bit.ly/LUKXEC.

TEACHER EVALUATION AND SUPPORT

A partnership of the AFT, the New York State United Teachers, and the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals enters its fourth year of helping teams in 12 school districts design and implement teacher development and evaluation systems. Supported by a federal Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) grant, the partnership promotes evaluation systems that ensure teachers receive a career-long continuum of evaluation, feedback, and support. Districts involved have created the Educator Evaluation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Consortium, which has developed an electronic platform to support effective evaluation systems. The AFT has provided funding and guidance for this work, featured at www.bit.ly/1cwp8lN.

THE PROBLEM WITH VAM

Late last year, the District of Columbia Public Schools announced that teachers had received incorrect value-added modeling (VAM) scores in their evaluations. This technical glitch disrupted the lives of dozens of D.C. educators. Although the school district

dismissed the event as minor, AFT President Randi Weingarten said the controversy points to the dangers that arise when decision makers “reduce everything about students, educators, and schools to a nameless, faceless algorithm and test score.” In a recent column in the *Huffington Post*, available at www.huff.to/KOscIQ, and in her “Where We Stand” column on page 1 of this issue of *American Educator*, Weingarten calls out this skewed approach, which undermines school improvement.

TAKING ON “SCHOOL DEFORM”

Diane Ravitch, a one-time believer in market forces to improve public education, visited Capitol Hill in February to lobby against destructive practices that pass as school reform but are, in fact, examples of “school deform.” After meeting with lawmakers, Ravitch addressed an audience at the AFT. At the event, she returned to many of the criticisms in her latest book, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the*

Danger to America’s Public Schools.

The influential education historian pointed to Philadelphia, where administrators are cutting budgets, closing schools, firing teachers, and increasing class sizes while the governor gives corporations big tax cuts. “I think it’s a disgrace when we can afford so much as a society but can’t afford to give the children of Detroit, Philadelphia, St. Louis, or Indianapolis the schools they deserve.” For more on Ravitch’s remarks, visit www.bit.ly/Mcot2w.

A Video Series on Mathematical Reasoning

The Common Core State Standards for Mathematical Practice require students to learn mathematics content, as well as to reason quantitatively and abstractly, to construct viable arguments, and to critique the reasoning of others. Working with Teaching Channel, AFT math teachers have tried to capture how students grow in these areas throughout their school careers. To that end, they have created “Mathematical Reasoning through the Grades,” a video series that records the dramatic changes that take place in student understanding of mathematical concepts—from a kindergartner’s first attempts to connect bits of information, to an intermediate student’s wrestling with fractions, to a high school student’s application of trigonometry in understanding how to build and fly drones. The video series begins in kindergarten with an explanation of numbers and ends in grade 11 with trigonometry. Videos and corresponding lesson plans with handouts are available for free at www.bit.ly/1bvt5g1. The following are moments from each lesson that demonstrate mathematical reasoning.



ELEMENTARY VIDEOS

First-Grade Lesson: Leprechaun Traps

In this video, a first-grader identifies a mystery number located in the third row and third column of a 100-square grid as 33. He is then asked how many numbers to the next “friendly” number (a multiple of 10), and he identifies the friendly number as 40 “because it goes 3, 4.” His answer shows he is building on his knowledge of the structure of the number system. The teacher scaffolds the language and also clarifies this student’s thinking of 3 tens and 4 tens for other children. www.bit.ly/1hiXOyY

Fourth-Grade Lesson: Multiplying Whole Numbers and Fractions

In the intermediate grades, it is much easier to identify students’ reasoning. Children now have a better vocabulary and more mathematical knowledge. They are beginning to use words such as “because” and “since” and “so” to help them explain why they have drawn certain conclusions. In this lesson, fourth-graders demonstrate their knowledge of yards and fractions. www.bit.ly/1jFlv4U

Fifth-Grade Lesson: A Passion for Fractions

In fifth grade, students multiply two fractions with different denominators, a more complex operation than multiplying a whole number and a fraction. Their reasoning revolves around representations of a situational problem. They must explain which representations are correct, and which are incorrect. www.bit.ly/1g4G7hl

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL VIDEOS

Eighth-Grade Lesson: Conjecturing about Functions

This lesson enables students to look at sets of functions and draw conclusions that hold true for all functions of that type. The video captures the first day of the lesson, during which students are making observations that will help them make conjectures.

As the video shows clearly, students are beginning to extend their thinking—with the help of targeted questions the teacher poses—beyond the specific problem they are solving. www.bit.ly/1jFhIKh

Eleventh-Grade Lesson:

Sine and Cosine—Trigonometry in Flight

In this class, perhaps the most commonly used word to help students learn how to build quadcopters (multicopters propelled by four rotors) is “why.” Why must the propellers turn in opposite directions? Why is amplitude the constant in all the graphs? Why calculate the longest distance? Why not just use the Pythagorean theorem? When a student displays a graph that depicts a quadcopter’s left turn, and explains that its right propeller is going fast (high frequency) and then slows down to match the frequency of the left

propeller, the teacher asks him why. All answers to the teacher’s questions are content-based and involve students justifying their answers. www.bit.ly/1ov6jHY



SOURCE: SHARE MY LESSON, FOURTH-GRADE LESSON: MULTIPLYING WHOLE NUMBERS AND FRACTIONS, WWW.BIT.LY/1JFLV4U.

THE TEACHER’S ROLE

In each instance, teachers prod and probe to help students better articulate what is important mathematically. Teachers help them recognize the underlying concepts that are broader than particular problems or examples. Mrs. Wright, the first-grade teacher, reiterates much of

what children say, and provides specific models from which they can learn. Mrs. Spies and Mrs. Pittard provide examples for their fourth- and fifth-graders to consider and discuss. They also offer clues within questions to help students along the way.

In her lesson with eighth-graders, Mrs. McPhillips encourages the use of color and precisely defined variables with labels to help students recognize key patterns and make their justifications clear to others. Eleventh-grade teachers Mrs. Brookins and Mr. James push students to connect mathematics and physics principles to an ambitious long-term, real-world task. At every level, these teachers use the guidance provided by the Common Core State Standards for Mathematical Practice to direct their questions to the content students are learning and to the usefulness of mathematics in real life.

—FROM THE AFT’S EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT

One Piece of the Whole

(Continued from page 13)

Comprehensive, coherent systems of teacher development and evaluation are needed to meet our goals of a high-quality education for all students. The key features of such systems (see the box on page 12) do exist in many schools and districts, although few places have stitched together all the components in a single tapestry. That is the critical work ahead. □

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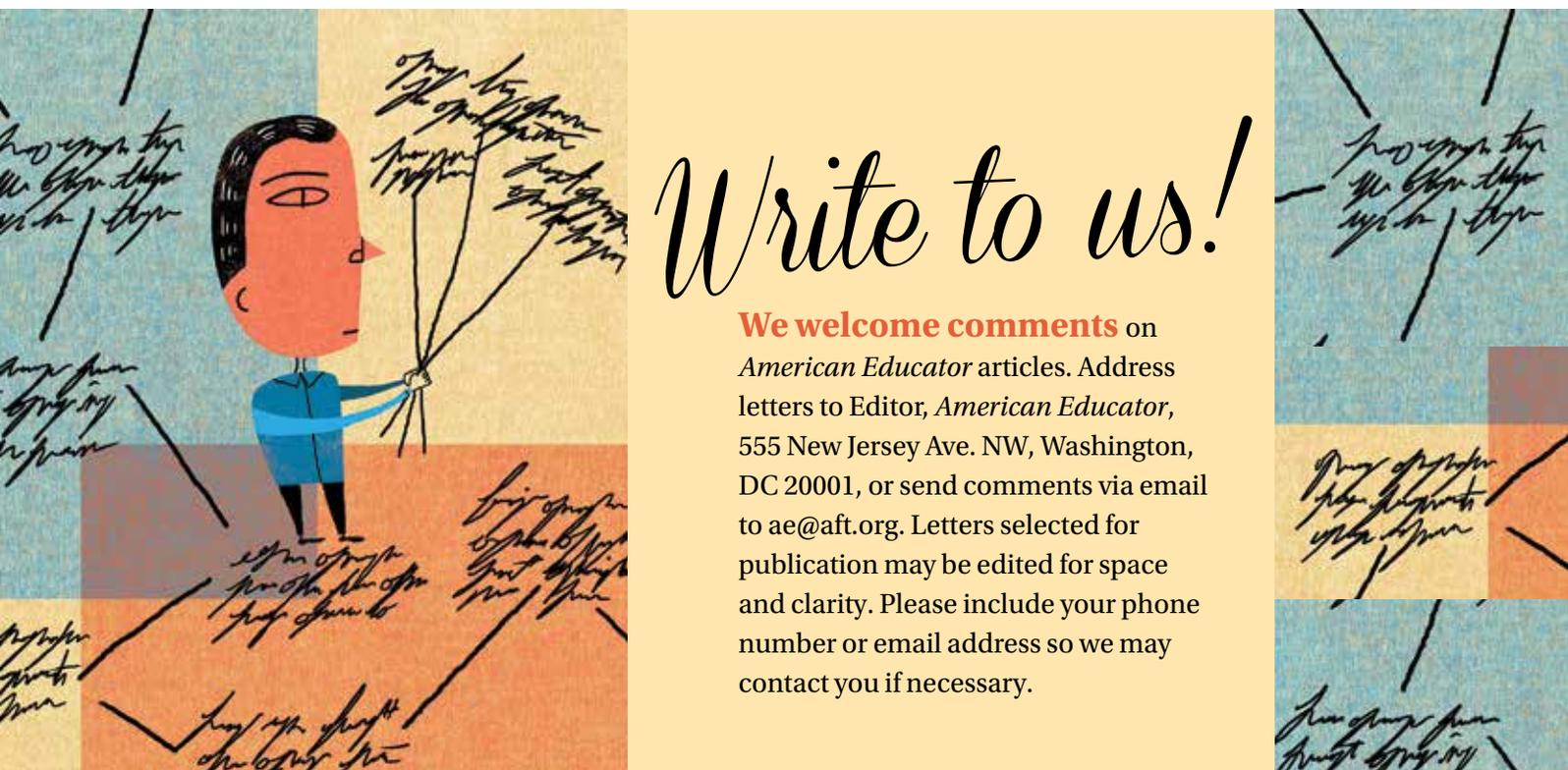
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Survey Says

(Continued from page 17)

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