

# Ending the Battles Over Teaching

by Barnett Berry

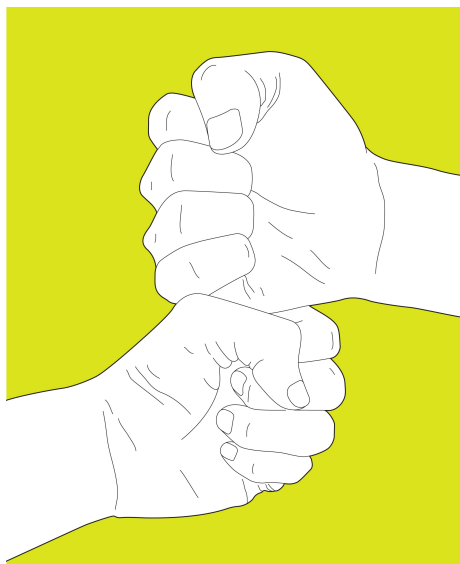
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In the early years of this new century, the fate of teaching in America still appears to be up for grabs. Whether, in grabbing for it, we tear the profession apart remains to be seen.

Over the past two decades, researchers of all ideological stripes and methodological perspectives have converged around a view that teachers are the key to whether or not students achieve. Yet little consensus has been reached on how best to recruit and reward teachers, how much preparation talented candidates need, how to use test-score data in assessing teachers, or how long we should expect to retain recruits in teaching careers.

These disagreements emerge from a larger set of issues debated regularly and vehemently by two opposing camps: those who see teachers as the problem and those who see them as the solution. As an advocate often associated with the latter group, I've given and taken my rhetorical punches over the years. But I'm weary of the squabble. The truth is that no one side seems to have all the answers. Isn't it time we start trying to get along?

Consider the deregulation advocates. They decry long-standing teachers' union support for single-salary schedules, but they're not much concerned by the checkered history of evaluation and compensation policies that informs much of the teacher and union skepticism about flawed merit-pay systems today. On the other side, the advocates of professionalism often criticize shortcut teacher-preparation programs but fail to call as strongly for reforms in cumbersome



state-certification procedures—or take education schools to task when they do not prepare teachers for high-needs schools.

So are we trapped in a not-so-civil policy war, with no possibility of reconciliation? Maybe not. I suggest we begin moving beyond the rancorous rhetoric and imagine a future of teaching in which the following conditions prevail:

- ▶ Teachers are recruited annually from a large pool of talented teacher education students, recent college graduates in other fields, and midcareer job-switchers. Rigorous performance assessments determine when they are allowed to begin full-fledged teaching. To help secure a requisite force of teacher leaders for the future, the most promising recruits are paid to train in a yearlong residency program, one that may be run by education schools, school districts, and/or community-based organizations. (See, for example, Chicago's urban-residency program.)
- ▶ About 10 percent of the teaching force (drawn from the most accomplished and effective teachers) works in classrooms while also supervising associate or adjunct teachers (content experts who may teach for relatively short periods of time) and novices who enter with different levels of preparation. This practical approach helps assure that all students have access to a stable team of teachers, organized and supported to maximize their collective skills and energy.
- ▶ All new teachers have a reduced teaching load in their first two years, with their progress assessed using objective measures of their performance, including all available test data. Schools find ways to ease the entry of novices into teaching by

assuring that every educator (including top administrators) teaches students for some part of the day, week, or year.

- ▶ Web 2.0 tools, mobile devices, and virtual-learning spaces not only facilitate students' abilities to find and use knowledge and to create novel solutions to relevant problems, but also allow teachers to engage in the global trade in pedagogy—offering them entrepreneurial opportunities to sell their expertise in the marketplace.
- ▶ Teacher teams—led by data experts—use a variety of measures (annual standardized tests, benchmark assessments, student work products, and others) to inform a dynamic model of public and professional accountability for results.
- ▶ The best teachers, using an array of new Internet-based and statistical applications, lead efforts to rigorously assess their colleagues. This process transforms evaluation and tenure into powerful tools which ensure that performance and accomplishments, not just teaching experience, matter most in decisions about opportunities and rewards.
- ▶ Schools are redesigned so that teachers have more time to learn from each other, with a majority of teachers having 15 hours a week to work outside their regular classrooms. They may use this time to teach online, tutor, conduct lesson study with colleagues, lead school-community partnership activities, or engage in research and analyses to inform policymakers.
- ▶ Teachers are paid a competitive, professional salary, but incentives allow them to earn more for improving student achievement; increasing and using relevant knowledge and skills; teaching in high-needs schools, subjects, and assignments; and leading reform initiatives. Incentives place a premium on teachers' spreading their expertise to others.

My own commitment to this “third way” for the future of teaching has been strengthened and deepened through years of daily contact with some of the nation’s most accomplished and insightful educators. Recently, online forums have enlarged this interchange. Since 2003, the Center for Teaching Quality, the nonprofit advocacy group that I lead, has supported the Teacher Leaders Network, or TLN, a virtual “think tank” for outstanding teachers to help them transform their profession in order to improve students’ achievement.

Through the network, I have learned much about the potential of teacher-led school reform, not only from

colleagues of my own era—the baby boomers—but also from Generation X network members and so-called Millennials—those who will be teaching for decades to come.

A current TLN project, funded by MetLife Foundation, is called *TeacherSolutions 2030*. It supports a dozen teachers, spanning three generations, as they explore possible futures for the profession. Soon, their work will yield a variety of products, including a book from Teachers College Press, to be published next spring.

The *TeacherSolutions 2030* team has looked deeply into hybrid teaching roles such as those I have described, and the perspective of one of the young participants is instructive. Ariel Sacks is a highly effective fifth-year middle-grades English teacher at a high-needs school in New York City. She recently marked her 30th birthday with an online post on her TLN-sponsored blog, *On the Shoulders of Giants*. It laid out her vision for hybrid teaching roles:

“These roles could vary depending on the needs of my school and/or whoever is paying me. They could include developing curriculum materials for my school, mentoring teachers, or creating partnerships between my school and other organizations. I could also participate in policy work outside my school and/or be a freelance writer, where only half of my salary would be paid by a school..

“The beauty of a hybrid role is that I would always maintain a classroom teaching practice. Teaching is the soul of my work in education. If I lose that, I think I’d feel disconnected from my purpose and passion. At least in my own mind, my work would lose relevance.”

Ariel, a graduate of Brown University and Bank Street College, is one of many bright and dedicated young teachers now entering the profession with strong preparation and a commitment to high-needs schools. She and others like her hold out the promise of a bright future for American public education.

Researchers and policy wonks need to end the bickering and listen carefully to these young professionals eager to make change. If we don’t listen, many of them will leave teaching for other careers where they will have greater potential to grow, contribute, collaborate, and lead.