
Past as Prologue: A Historical Overview of Teaching in America

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The history of the teaching profession in America is stormy and convoluted — and often framed by the struggle to determine who teaches what and how as well as under what conditions they do so and at what cost. Over 200 years ago, America’s teachers were hired to transmit values and to some extent the basic skills of the day. In the many years since, teachers have seen their salaries and working conditions improve, and they are better educated than ever before. Yet today, at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, the inner workings of a teacher’s job have not changed much at all.

Since the late 19th century, teaching has evolved from a short-term occupation for unmarried women who earned very little, to a career for those who are satisfied with stable, middle-class incomes and pensions that guarantee the ability to retire without falling into poverty. Teachers now are expected to teach discrete skills to their students rather than impart societal values and prepare them as citizens. In addition, teachers are expected to help all students to reach high levels of achievement (including special needs and non-English speaking students who were not even educated in the past), but, relative to other professions, teachers still struggle for respect in the eyes of the public.

Indeed, in the minds of some, teachers are not “true” professionals akin to practitioners in the fields of medicine, architecture, and engineering. Most sociologists still refer to teaching as a semi-profession because its knowledge base is not well defined and consistently used, and its members have very little control over who enters the field and how they are judged. Teaching’s occupational history includes longstanding control by laymen, a lack of clarity and rigor in becoming a teacher, and limited prestige and income — restricting the professional possibilities of its members.¹ As a result, teachers have struggled to stave off

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administrative and political demands for them to teach as they are told, while policymakers typically fill classrooms with underprepared teachers during times of shortages.

Sociologist Dan Lorie has documented one of teaching's historical imperatives: its egg-crate structure that isolates teachers from one another, undermining efforts for the most accomplished practitioners to spread their expertise to colleagues.² But there is more: Teaching's enduring legacies also include its egalitarian culture in which it is expected that all teachers are to be treated alike, with no one teacher shining brighter than his or her peers. Teaching's egalitarian culture has surely framed opportunities for teachers to collaborate with each other, as opposed to competing. However, the fact is that without clear signals about who the most effective teachers are, teaching expertise has not spread readily and the knowledge base of the occupation has not been fully codified. And without a codified knowledge base, teaching continues to struggle as a semi-profession.

Additionally, many consider professional preparation programs for teachers to be weak — criticized for their shallow pedagogy and for education school faculty who are far-removed from classroom realities. Finally, and perhaps most notably, teaching has tended to attract many recruits who are comfortable with the long-standing ways in which schools are organized and the subservient roles classroom teachers are expected to play. Such individuals liked school as K-12 students, and were not all that interested in transforming the way teachers teach and students are expected to learn. Many of these patterns prevail today.

Over time, the sheer size of the occupation has helped to entrench teaching's status — making it very difficult to change. Teaching also has been constrained in its development as a profession because teachers are expected to perform a number of custodial responsibilities in the service of children and their families.³ In America, taking care of the young has never generated much prestige for any occupational group. Indeed, the younger the student, the less status his or her teachers hold. Historically, high school teachers have carried more societal clout than their elementary counterparts and once were even paid more.

But most importantly, the standing of teaching in American society has been complicated by the fact that teaching is a very public act. As historian David Labaree has noted, teachers are “way too familiar and too visible, and what they know seems to be all too common.”⁴ The vast majority of Americans have attended public schools and have observed at least 12 years of classroom teaching — making it easy to criticize teachers. In some ways, familiarity with the occupation seems to breed contempt. No one sees the inner workings of being a doctor, engineer, lawyer, or architect in the same way.

And teachers' familiarity with their own childhood teachers has beset efforts to professionalize teaching. Lortie documented the considerable ill effects of the “apprenticeship of observation” in which teachers themselves believe they have little to learn from a smattering of formal, professional coursework when they have witnessed so much teaching in their own lengthy school experience, amounting to 16 years.⁵ University-based teacher education, as a result, has served as a “weak treatment” in terms of reforming teaching practices.

For a very long time, teaching has fallen prey to a range of competing factors, interests, and ideals that have retarded the profession’s growth. For example, teachers are often controlled and regulated but isolated from one another. They are expected to be authoritarians with their students, but always subservient to political, bureaucratic, and school managerial authorities on matters of policy and practice. They are often admired for service by parents, but just as often bear the brunt of disdain when public education is being criticized. And they are typically appreciated for serving children but mocked for their assumed lack of intellectual ability and their perceived inability to compete in the larger labor market. Indeed, our nation has held complicated and contradictory views of the occupation of teaching for centuries — perhaps a reflection of America’s longstanding biases against those who serve children as opposed to those who serve adult enterprises.

These competing factors have framed teaching as an occupation with an uncertain identity and ethos, and one that has had difficulty shedding its historical role as a “woman’s ‘true’ profession” — not unlike nursing. For almost 100 years, women would not only work for much cheaper wages but were also seen as more “naturally” inclined to teach children in a job that was thought not to require a great deal of intelligence. Historically, teachers have been seen as those who are able to nurture students but need to take direction from administrative authorities. In truth, of course, the less teachers are prepared for the realities of teaching, the more their supervisors will *need* to tell them what to do. No wonder George Bernard Shaw’s oft-cited adage has persisted — framing America’s collective mindset about teaching: “He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches.”⁶

In explaining the struggle to professionalize teaching, educational historian Kate Rousmaniere could not have said it more eloquently:

The history of teaching in America is a history rife with political dynamics, social drama, and philosophical debate. It is also a history of a class of workers struggling with economic insecurity and social ambiguity while at the same time striving for their own understanding of professional excellence.⁷

Understanding teaching’s past — and especially the history of its struggle to become a “full” profession — is key to understanding its future.

From Women’s Work to Industrial Age Automatons

The history of today’s public school teacher traces back to colonial times when community leaders turned to those with “good moral character” who could ensure that our nation’s youth could read *The Good Book*. Indeed, as the occupation of teaching began to take shape in America, “teachers were chosen not for any instructional skills, but for their religious background, moral character, and political affinity with the family or community that hired them.”⁸

Up until the mid-1800s, most teachers were young white men who were expected to teach for only a few years, often as they prepared for careers as ministers or lawyers. Teaching was “transient” work, given that it was seasonal and paid very little. Those who stayed for a career were seen as low-status individuals who had limited capacity to be employed in more prestigious and lucrative jobs or professions.⁹ As the industrial age emerged and higher education expanded, new career paths developed and grade-school teaching in America began to lose its appeal to most men, even as the numbers of public school students grew rapidly.

By the 1840s, fueled by new theories of childrearing, women began filling the ranks of teaching. Feminine dispositions seemed more in sync with the expectation that students needed nurturing as well as salvation. In fact, some historical accounts claim that teaching was a substitute for marriage, and in most cases, one of the best employment opportunities for women.¹⁰ If a woman did not choose to teach, her alternatives were typically becoming a domestic servant or mill worker. The “feminization of teaching” took hold — and by the early 20th century, almost four out of five teachers were women.¹¹ And since the time when women began to dominate the teaching workforce some 150 years ago, the occupation’s “image, status, and desirability” has been suspect.¹²

Historian Diane Ravitch has described what it was like to be a teacher and a woman in the early 20th century:

Then there was Bridget Pexitto, a veteran teacher of 18 years in the Bronx. She took advantage of the new right to get married without losing her job. But then she got pregnant. That was a mistake. The Board of Education fired her on charges of ‘gross negligence by being absent to have a baby.’ Not only that, the Board ordered the superintendent of schools to discover whether there were any other pregnant teachers in the city’s schools. He somehow did a visual inspection of the city’s teachers and found 14 of them, and they were promptly suspended from teaching.¹³

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Other historical patterns have framed teaching’s past and current status. Teachers often came from provincial backgrounds and only in the 1950s and 1960s did most states actually require a college degree for someone to teach elementary school. Even then, teachers usually were the first children in their families to attend and graduate from college (J. Fraser, personal communication, February 7, 2010). Few were selected for their intellectual attributes. Indeed, since America’s colonial beginnings, its people have not viewed teaching as a knowledge-based profession. Dave Angus and Jeffrey Mirel have described:

The task of schooling children in the rudiments of reading and ciphering was seen as something that many adults could do, if some more effectively than others. The idea was widespread that even this difference was more a matter of innate talent than of training.¹⁴

Perhaps this is why yet another popular adage has endured — undermining efforts to make serious investments in teacher education: “Teachers are born, not made.”

By the early 20th century, teaching was known as “women’s work.” As industrial and business employment became commonplace, the custodial responsibilities of schools grew and the occupation was labeled as “social housekeeping.”¹⁵ Scholars have long traced the connections between a female teaching workforce and top-down curricular mandates — in part because women were not seen to be intellectually strong enough to lead learning.¹⁶ Female teachers were expected to move in and out of teaching as they established their own households and focused on rearing their own children. They did — with consequences that have lasted well into the 21st century. As Geraldine Clifford has noted:

The perceptions that teachers were ‘mothering’ or that women teachers were only marking time until marriage, had unfortunate effects for the image of professionalism.... Other professions gained control by laying claim to specific bodies of knowledge, [but] what has characterized a professional teacher was altruistic service, natural ability, and virtuous womanhood.¹⁷

The Common School movement of the mid- to late-1800s increasingly focused on systematizing public education with the tools of “scientific management,” designed to respond to America’s newly developed industrial age. Age-grading and a rigid curriculum framed the what and how of teaching as the public schools began to serve an increasingly diverse set of immigrant children. As one historian documented, 19th-century teaching and learning became “preeminently fitted to deaden the soul and convert human beings into automatons.”¹⁸ Indeed, early in the modern history of teaching, the teacher was expected to serve as an “automaton, a mere factory hand.”¹⁹ There was no reason to invest in extensive, formal pre-service preparation because teachers were not expected to teach for very long and were supposed to follow a scripted course of study.

Demands on teachers mounted, as did the stress of their jobs. Yet the National Education Association, which was founded in the mid-19th century, initially organized male education leaders, primarily superintendents and college professors, and did not focus on teacher working conditions at all. In fact, education historian James W. Fraser relates that in the early 1900s when classroom activist Margaret Haley led a demonstration at a NEA national convention on teachers’ economic conditions, she was viewed as an “unwelcome guest.” (J. Fraser, personal communication, February 7, 2010).

Under Haley’s leadership, teachers as a collective began to call attention not only to low and inequitable salaries, but also overcrowded classrooms, overwhelming workloads, and overly

rigid rules for how teachers were expected to teach. Haley forged a number of alliances with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), rather than the more conservative and still administrator-focused NEA, to fight off unfair teacher evaluation systems and push for teachers to have a voice in matters of school policy.²⁰ In 1916, the AFT, working closely with American Federation of Labor president Samuel Gompers, signed on eight locals, and quickly grew to 174 by 1920. The union fought to support many female teachers who were forced to work under “contracts which still stipulated that an employed teacher must wear skirts of certain lengths, keep her galoshes buckled, not receive gentleman callers more than three times a week, and teach a Sunday School class.”²¹

In 1921, Denver and Des Moines were the first cities to offer single salary schedules so that teachers would no longer be paid on the basis of gender, administrative caprice or unreliable merit pay measures, but on years of experience and academic preparation. Teachers’ rights began to resonate with the public, although black educators, who were barred from joining the NEA, continued to be paid far less (about 33-50 percent) than their white counterparts. By 1925, the NEA was reaching out to teachers and had grown to 150,000 members, but in its early days still shunned the militant action of other blue-collar labor unions. By 1939 the AFT had grown to 32,000 members, and due to its activism found it necessary to fight off allegations of communism within its ranks. After World War II, the AFT became deeply involved in the civil rights movement, filing a brief in the 1954 Supreme Court desegregation case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* — and “expelling locals that had not followed an earlier mandate to desegregate.”²²

Dewey vs. Thorndike: The Early Struggle

In the mid-1800s, many high schools created “normal” departments to train teachers for the common schools, where growing numbers of children were being prepared to work in America’s industrializing economy. Horace Mann, then secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Public Schools, is often called the “father of the common school.” Mann was also the “father of the normal school.”²³ Mann believed that more formal teacher education was key to more efficient and effective public education. In 1839, the first state-supported normal school opened in Lexington, Massachusetts. By 1870, forty state normal schools were operating across the nation. Angus and Mirel have noted:

The New England version of normal schools enrolled mainly young women who had no prior teaching experience. It tended to limit its offerings to ‘short’ courses in educational methods, principles, and techniques and aimed at supplying teachers for elementary schools. The students entering other versions (or ‘western normals’) were older and more likely to be male. The western normal school curriculum included both academic and professional courses of varying duration (1-4 years). They were designed to prepare young women to secure teaching jobs in towns and cities and young men to enter the growing ranks of administrators as school organizations became more hierarchical and bureaucratic. It was this ‘collegiate’ orientation of the western normal

schools that led the transformation of normal schools into teachers colleges after the turn of the century.²⁴

But most importantly, local school board members could manage the teacher workforce by increasing or lowering entrance requirements. They did so regularly and the normal schools never arrived at a firm determination about who should or should not teach. Their haphazard methods at recruiting and training candidates served as legacy for today’s bifurcated policy approaches to teaching quality and effectiveness. In another prelude to today’s policy debates, the Horace Mann-inspired normal schools were thought by some to waste too much time on teacher preparation. Some local education agencies created teacher institutes, which offered a much more truncated way to prepare for teaching. The curriculum varied widely, most notably covering the subject matter taught in the local schools and “a few lectures on principles and methods of good teaching given by successful teachers.” The institutes were a much more inexpensive way to train teachers and for the most part “respond[ed] to the practical exigencies of rural life.”²⁵ Angus and Mirel described a situation familiar to education reformers in the early 21st century—the struggle over the merits of university-based teacher education versus short-cut alternative certification programs:

Professional educators despised these institutes, partly because they didn't control them and were seldom invited to participate, but also because they threatened the image of professionalism that the educators were attempting to promote for teaching.... [The institutes] reflected the dominant view of the rural population that good teachers were born not made, hence need[ing] only a modicum of training to sharpen and refine their natural abilities.²⁶

As the Common School movement dramatically increased students’ enrollments, attention to teacher qualifications wavered. In the early 1920s, about 25 percent of the nation’s primary school teachers had yet to earn a high school diploma while fewer than half had completed two years of college.²⁷ At the same time, teaching’s split personality began to show. Beginning in the early teens and well into the 1940s, progressive educators, drawing on notable intellectuals such as John Dewey, made an “explicit attempt to change the core of schooling from a teacher-centered, fact-centered, recitation-based pedagogy to a pedagogy based on an understanding of children's thought processes and their capacities to learn and use ideas in the context of real-life problems.”²⁸ University lab schools — like those launched at venerable institutions such as the University of Chicago and Teachers College in New York City —

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became hotbeds of progressive ideas and reformers. Teachers were not just expected to deliver information but to guide students' opportunities to explore, discover, construct, and create knowledge.

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But during the same time period, Fredrick Taylor's theories of scientific management were beginning to exert even tighter control over teaching. Taylor, an efficiency expert whose ideas were used to jumpstart output in American factories, led many educators to treat students like assembly-line workers. John Franklin Bobbitt, a traditionalist educator who drew upon Taylor's theories, maintained that student learning should be calculated like products in a steel plant, such as "add[ing] at a speed of 65 combinations per minute, with an accuracy of 94 percent."²⁹ These rigid theories of learning were intensified by Edward Thorndike, who in the early to mid-20th century laid the scientific foundations for modern educational psychology. Thorndike believed that students had limits on what they could learn, and that learning was incremental and linear. He took a narrow view of student achievement, with school outcomes focused on results of standardized tests. He believed that *only some* humans had a significant capacity for learning.

Education's cult of efficiency quickly took hold³⁰ — with heavy influence in the early 20th century from Lewis Terman and the growing popularity of standardized tests that were designed to sort and label students on the basis of their "native" intelligence.³¹ For Terman, differences in students' intelligence were primarily due to heredity, and school administrators were expected to recognize the wide differences in "original mental endowment" and design a differentiated curriculum for those with academic gifts and those without. In the period before and during World War I, Terman developed and administered English tests to Spanish-speakers and unschooled African-Americans, and concluded:

Their dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they come.... Children of this group should be segregated into separate classes.... They cannot master abstractions but they can often be made into efficient workers.³²

Despite the atmosphere established by the work of Taylor, Thorndike, and Terman, a number of cities, including Denver, launched substantial curriculum reform efforts requiring teacher leadership and creativity. In the 1930s, researcher and reformer Ralph Tyler led the well-documented (but rarely heeded) Eight-Year Study that found that students from "Dewey-like"

progressive schools, compared to their counterparts in Thorndike-like traditional schools, fared far better academically and socially over time. The progressive schools connected the curriculum to community needs and students' curiosities and concerns. Their teachers were better prepared, and they were far more creative in their teaching. The study revealed both the importance of teacher learning and potential of classroom practitioners to engage in shared leadership with school administrators and college faculty and initially drove school reforms that made a difference for students' lifelong success.³³ However, the study, which actually was undertaken between 1930-42, had little long-term impact.

As Larry Cuban has carefully documented, large-scale progressive curriculum reforms never went very deep (no matter the era), and "seldom appeared in more than one-fourth of the classrooms" in any school system that systematically tried to make these changes in teaching and learning:³⁴

Elementary and secondary teachers persisted in teaching from the front of the room, deciding what was to be learned, in what manner, and under what conditions. The primary means of grouping for instruction was the entire class. The major daily classroom activities continued with a teacher telling, explaining, and questioning students while the students listened, answered, read, and wrote. Seatwork or supervised study was an extension of these activities.³⁵

The "grammar of schooling" and its normative practices and working conditions consistently stifled teaching and learning practices that were more progressive.³⁶

Richard Elmore has described how the progressive movement "was increasingly portrayed by a skeptical public and press in terms of its most extreme manifestations — watered-down content, a focus on children's psychological adjustment at the expense of learning, and a preoccupation with self-expression rather than learning."³⁷ Trailblazing developers of progressive pedagogy became "increasingly isolated" from their less ambitious colleagues as well as the public, and thus became "increasingly vulnerable to attack from traditionalists."³⁸ Lawrence Cremin argues that "progressive education... demanded infinitely skilled teachers, and it failed because such teachers could not be recruited in sufficient numbers."³⁹

In fact, as findings from the Eight-Year Study were surfacing, World War II was depleting the ranks of qualified teachers even further, and district administrators were able to downgrade hiring standards accordingly in order to fill classrooms. As late as the 1950s, about 50 percent of the nation's teachers still did not possess a college degree⁴⁰ — in part because policymakers and administrators did not think it was necessary and/or that if entrance requirements were raised, higher salary costs would follow.

Even so, in some quarters the press continued to prepare and certify more teachers at the college level. University presidents demanded that education schools produce more teachers as cheaply as possible. Education professors turned to a more lock-step training regime of a "courses and hours approach" and then a mere "rubber-stamping" of those who would be

deemed qualified.⁴¹ The rapid expansion of normal schools into colleges of education also contributed to the low status and even ridicule of the education professor — who was described by one historian this way:

[The teacher education professor is] a gentle, unintellectual, saccharine, and well-meaning... bumbling doctor of undiagnosable ills, harmless if morosely defensive. He is either a mechanic... or he is the flatulent promoter of irrelevant trivia.⁴²

Ironically, this image emerged during the same period of time when teacher training was supposed to matter even more, when normal schools began to evolve into state teachers colleges and all new recruits were expected to graduate from a state-approved teacher education program. In 1946, the National Education Association created the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards (TEPS) to provide classroom teachers more voice in rulemaking in their profession and more control over teacher education. But they never really achieved that goal.

What counted were the courses one took in the schools of education — which were increasingly isolated from the arts and sciences — creating what historian James Fraser has called an “awkward fit” for teacher education within universities.⁴³ Fraser notes how scholars of the time (e.g. James Koerner and James Bryant Conant) pointed to the growing gulf between education professors who felt their liberal arts counterparts had “little interest in school problems” and arts and sciences faculty who were certain that education courses were worthless.⁴⁴ Sixty years ago, the debate raged over whether teachers needed to be prepared in pedagogical or subject matter — a debate that continues well into the early decades of the 21st century.

By the end of World War II, many normal schools had morphed in favor of four-year teachers colleges, which continued to emphasize quantity over quality. While states began administering the National Teacher Examination in 1940, shortages during the war undermined policymakers’ resolve to enforce higher standards. Weak preparatory programs became the basis for credentialing, rather than testing.⁴⁵ Granted, the tests of that era were not very rigorous.⁴⁶ But in their place, teachers would take a smattering of disconnected courses in methods, the history of education, educational psychology, classroom management, and the like. Elementary teachers did not have to specialize in any specific subject matter.

By the end of World War II, normal schools had pretty much morphed in favor of four-year teachers colleges, which continued to emphasize quantity over quality. While states began administering the National Teacher Examination in 1940, shortages during the war undermined policymakers’ resolve to enforce higher standards.

Throughout the 1950s, criticisms of education schools continued to abound. As one critic claimed, the preparation of elementary school teachers was trite, at best:

[They are prepared with] a dismal array of one-, two-, and three-hour courses in art for the artless, biology for babes, chemistry for kiddies, math and music for moppets, along with such academic fantasies as ‘Creative Experiences with Materials’... cutting and pasting for college credit.”⁴⁷

Education schools were portrayed in unflattering terms, as “puerile, repetitious, dull, and ambiguous.”⁴⁸ But higher education funding formulas and university presidents’ proclivities to treat education schools as “cash cows” meant large numbers of teachers needed to be prepared as cheaply as possible. During this time many states began to abandon the use of written teacher examinations altogether and award certificates solely on the evidence of university-based professional coursework, despite the lack of coherence between what was offered from one training institute to another. However, specialized certificates did begin to emerge as education schools attempted to gain status within the university.

In 1954, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) was created to address the “hodgepodge” of training programs that were proliferating across the country, with the expectation that all programs would come to meet common standards.⁴⁹ However, the process remained voluntary for the 1,000-plus colleges and universities that prepared teachers. In its early days, fewer than 300 higher education institutions were willing to have NCATE judge the quality of their programs, and as a consequence the bar for passing muster on teacher education standards was set quite low.

In 1957, the Russians launched Sputnik — which quickly became a symbol of America’s weakening position in science and technology, as well as education. Sputnik was seen as a threat to the nation’s military superiority and to political freedom. The resulting near-hysteria provided an opportunity for school reformers to “bang the drum” for more investments in both education programs and new approaches to teaching and learning.⁵⁰ One year later, Congress approved \$1 billion for the National Defense Education Act, or NDEA, with an ensuing array of alphabet soup programs to replace textbook teaching (especially in math and science) — and a more activity-oriented pedagogy so students would not just memorize facts, but learn the structures and procedures of the subject matter discipline. NDEA also spurred new investments in public school teachers, with federal funding for college scholarships to prepare teachers in high need fields, and fellowships for prospective teacher educators to prepare new recruits for public school teaching.

But just as before, the aspiration for a more ambitious pedagogy waned, as talented teachers were in short supply, preparation and support did not keep up with the curricular demands, and more traditional educators and policymakers maintained their stranglehold on the scientific management of teaching and learning. As historian Ellen Condliffe Lagemann noted:

One cannot understand the history of education [and the teaching profession] in the United States during the twentieth century unless one realizes that Edward Thorndike won and John Dewey lost.⁵¹

The Pendulum Continues to Swing

The pendulum of school reform — and efforts to professionalize teaching — continued to swing back and forth in the decades that followed. President Kennedy’s vision for America (and the sympathy for his ideas after his assassination in 1963) translated into a wave of social reforms, including not just the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but also new investments to improve life in urban America, combat poverty, and improve public education. President Johnson’s plan for “the Great Society” led to a spate of federal interventions into the teaching profession. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided the first federal dollars for pre-collegiate education, with a laser like focus on high poverty schools. The Higher Education Act provided new funding programs to prepare teachers for such schools, perhaps most notably the Teacher Corps.

Launched in 1966, the Teacher Corps borrowed from the Peace Corps model, placing idealistic, young college graduates into urban (and some rural) schools. Many of the new recruits came from elite universities, whose cultural experiences were quite different from the students they were serving. With only two months of training, teams of interns, supported by a master teacher, taught in high-poverty schools while working toward their certification and an advanced degree in education. The Corps members were expected to not only teach but also work in the surrounding community. The program grew, with over 100 universities and 250 school districts participating. Often, as historian Jim Fraser has noted, the Corps members clashed with education school professors whose theories and methods did not match up well with the challenges they faced with students from high-poverty communities.⁵² While a large number of these idealistic young adults stayed in teaching, many were marginalized. As Gary Sykes, in a fifty-year retrospective on the federal role in teacher quality, noted:

The Teacher Corps was successful in recruiting ‘mavericks’ to the field, teachers interested in becoming agents of change. With the passage of time, the new recruits tended to become disillusioned, to fall back on more custodial, less student-centered forms of teaching, and either to become assimilated to prevailing routines and sentiments, to withdraw into their classrooms, or to leave teaching.⁵³

Sykes’ review of the Teacher Corps’ history revealed that “enduring” partnerships among universities, schools, and communities “failed to materialize” while university faculty remained “too remote” from the schools.⁵⁴ After about a decade, the program began unraveling, as Vietnam and later Watergate increased public distrust of government and further undermined many of the Great Society efforts to improve the teaching profession in high needs schools, including the idealist notion that bright young people could be recruited and prepared to teach in such challenging environments.⁵⁵

About the same time, new research findings began to undermine efforts to invest in teaching as a means to improve society. In 1966, sociologist James Coleman released his influential report “Equality of Educational Opportunity” suggesting that school funding and other inputs like teacher quality had little effect on student achievement.⁵⁶ Socio-economic class and family background mattered much more, he proposed, implying that investments in teaching and learning had severe limitations.

Later analyses revealed that Coleman’s statistical models did not account for the strong correlations between students’ backgrounds and their schools’ resources, thereby making it difficult to detect an independent effect of schooling (and teacher quality) on achievement.⁵⁷ In fact, a re-analysis of the original data set used by Coleman and his colleagues found that going to a high-poverty school, or a highly segregated African-American school, had a profound effect on a student’s achievement outcomes, *irrespective* of their individual poverty or minority status.⁵⁸ At the time, however, Coleman’s report, with its “no effects” finding, created huge policy ripples and gave fuel to critics of public education and the teaching profession who were already promoting the idea that schools and teachers had little effect on student achievement. The impact of this report on subsequent events in American education cannot be underestimated, and its legacy remains today.

As some researchers and policymakers questioned the role that schools and teachers could play in overcoming the ill effects of poverty on student achievement, teacher unions were beginning to mobilize and take action at unprecedented levels. America’s blue-collar workforce was starting to show some decline, and the AFL-CIO, which had been losing members, launched an effort to organize white-collar, public employees, particularly teachers.⁵⁹

In 1962, about one-half of New York City teachers, under the leadership of Albert Shanker, went on strike. Shanker, longtime head of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in New York City (1964-86) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) nationally (1974-97), has been called by some the George Washington of the teaching profession. He believed that teachers should firmly establish and enforce standards among their ranks.⁶⁰ However, the son of a seamstress and a member of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, Shanker was also motivated to organize teachers in a true union because of poor salaries, autocratic administrators, and working conditions that undermined the profession and the capacity to serve students and families effectively.⁶¹

Since the 1960s union leaders and administrators have engaged in industrial-style, adversarial, collective bargaining, resulting in periodic labor-management tensions but also standardized work rules. Collective bargaining worked well for union leaders who wanted equal treatment of teachers who have varying degrees of skill and marketability, as well as administrators who sought uniform rules for their growing school bureaucracies.

Since the 1960s union leaders and administrators have engaged in industrial-style, adversarial, collective bargaining, resulting in periodic labor-management tensions but also standardized work rules. Collective bargaining has worked well for union leaders who wanted equal treatment of teachers who have varying degrees of skill and marketability, as well as administrators who sought uniform rules for their growing school bureaucracies. For a host of economic and political reasons, unions have focused their bargaining efforts on teachers as industrial or craft workers, not professionals who enforced standards among their own ranks.⁶² While teachers during this era did not trust administrators to evaluate them fairly, they also wanted “no part of judging their fellow union members.”⁶³ And it suited many administrators for teachers to remain in a subservient position to them, with top-down evaluation assuring that the “hired hands” would do their bidding in order to keep their jobs.⁶⁴

Unions have often been characterized as focusing on their adult issues, and not on the needs of students. However, even in its early, militant days, the unions sought to change the conditions that undermined their ability to teach effectively. In fact, in the early 1960s, under Shanker’s leadership, union leaders argued that school conditions were demoralizing teachers. They pointed to non-teaching chores, inadequate textbook supplies, and rote lesson plans prepared for visiting administrators as extra burdens that got in their way and could easily be eliminated. But overzealous supervision was their chief grievance: “Staff conferences often find principals lecturing to teachers dogmatically on organizational details rather than encouraging the kind of academic exchange of views that marks faculty meetings at colleges.”⁶⁵ It was clear, of course, that school administrators did not want teachers to act like independent-minded and autonomous university faculty. They wanted employees to do what they were told without debate—an attitude that, over time, generated more and more support among teachers for union representation.

In the meantime, the NEA and AFT began fighting over who represented whom—furthering splintering an already fragmented semi-profession. While in its early years the NEA was very reluctant to engage in collective bargaining, it ultimately had to do so in order to compete with the AFT for members. By 1975, about 22 percent of all public school teachers were covered by collective bargaining agreements,⁶⁶ and 241 teacher strikes took place nationwide.⁶⁷ Researchers cite several reasons why collective bargaining began to grow in the 1970s, including escalating inflation that eroded teachers’ salaries, burgeoning school bureaucracies that undermined teachers’ decision-making, and changing social conditions that made teaching a more challenging job.⁶⁸

In the 1970s, a number of union leaders sought to transcend traditional labor-management issues and create a more professionalized teacher workforce. However, a Supreme Court ruling in 1980 (the Yeshiva Decision) appeared to have a “chilling effect” on such an effort—holding that teachers who take on any managerial authority (e.g., evaluation of peers) may not be eligible for collective bargaining (J. Koppich, personal communication, February 21, 2010). While the Yeshiva Decision was (and still is) limited to private institutions, the end conclusion was that the “more self-governance and economic decision-making that is given to faculty the less likely that a collective bargaining unit can be certified by the National Labor

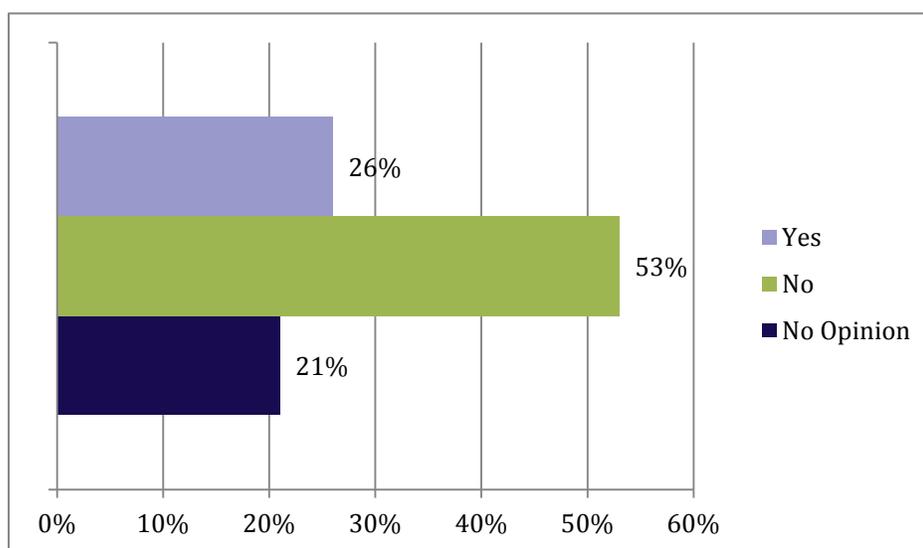
Relations Board.”⁶⁹ This ruling and continuing pressures and perceived abuses from administrators discouraged unions and their members from moving toward a more professionalized approach — and in particular, an approach in which they would take on more responsibility for establishing and enforcing professional standards within their ranks.

By 1980, the percentage of teachers under collective bargaining agreements grew to 45 percent, then to 60 percent by the mid-1980s.⁷⁰ In the early 21st century, unions represent about two-thirds of the nation’s three million-plus teachers, a percentage that has been stable for some time now, with most of the non-unionized public school teachers residing in so-called “right to work” states.

With the growing influence and visibility of teachers’ unions, the tenuous bond between teachers and administrators began to unravel even more. Angus and Mirel have claimed that rising “teacher militancy and aggressiveness” began to trump the professional standards movement.⁷¹ However, tough-minded union leaders had reason to fight for workplace prerogatives, like tenure — which was often bargained in order to make a low paying career more job-secure as well as to “protect teachers from the whims of autocratic principals and patronage allocating administrators.”⁷² Before tenure, teachers “could be fired for speaking up, questioning educational practices, or merely because an administrator wished to give the job to someone else for political reasons or nepotism.”⁷³

Public Opinion of Teacher Unions, 1970

Have teacher organizations gained too much power over their own salaries and working conditions?



Source: Phi Delta Kappan (1970). PDK/Gallup poll. *Phi Delta Kappan* 52, 1-10.

In 1970, fewer than 27 percent of the American people believed that the teacher unions had too much power.⁷⁴ That outlook has shifted over the decades since, as the popular press increasingly cast teacher unions as protecting its members at the expense of a much-needed focus on student achievement. As one analyst noted in 1999, “Many Americans [became] uncomfortable with militant, striking teachers, and remain so today, eroding public sympathy

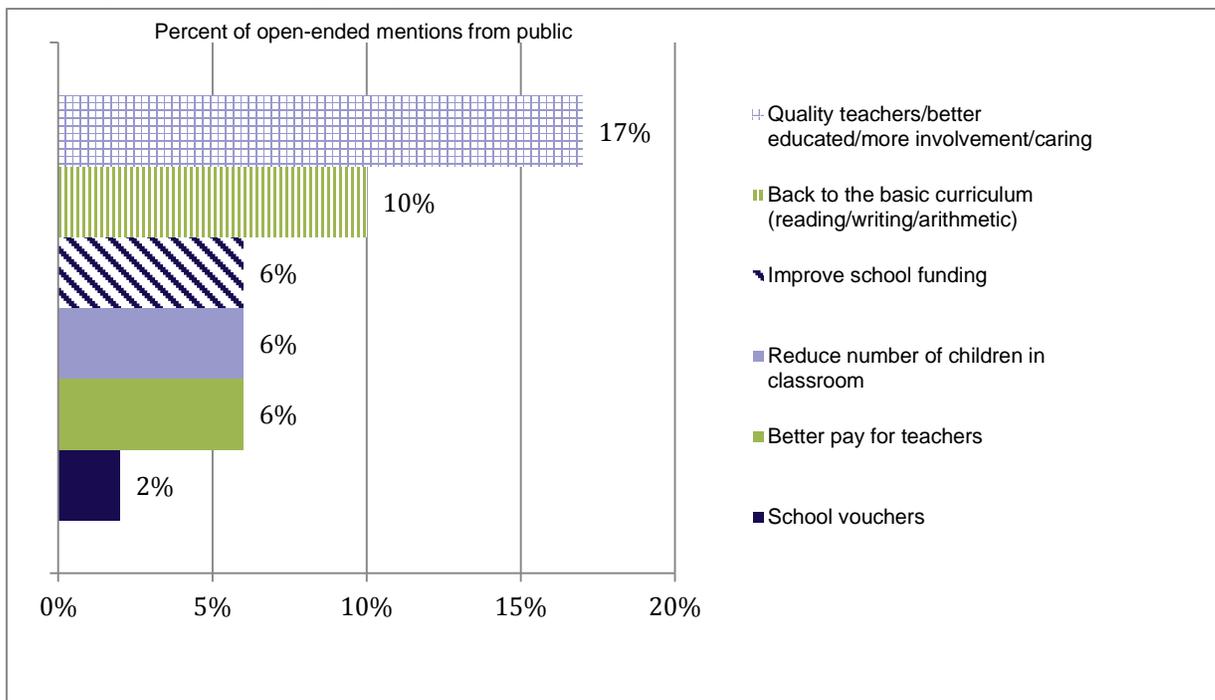
for teachers.”⁷⁵ More recently, a researcher noted that unions are generally viewed as “stand[ing] in the way of reforms needed to attract new teachers, compete successfully with charter schools, and meet state and federal accountability demands.”⁷⁶

In the last decade or so, much of the criticism of teacher unions has come from those who seek to promote the privatization of public education in one form or another. For example, Terry Moe, in framing the problems with unions, asserts:

Unions tend to oppose anything that induces competition among schools. The union ideal is that all schools be regulated the same and that all be guaranteed their ‘fair share’ of students and money.... Unions tend to oppose any contracting-out of educational functions that involves a shift of jobs and resources from public to private. This is true even if privatization may provide better services at lower cost. The goal is to keep public employment and spending as high as possible.⁷⁷

Other critics of public schooling often associate the collective action of unions with on-going efforts to professionalize teaching, giving voice to millions of classroom teachers.⁷⁸ While recent polls show that Americans have unfavorable opinions of teacher unions, they hold teachers themselves in high regard⁷⁹, do not support the privatization of public schooling⁸⁰, and say they are willing to invest more in teaching as a profession⁸¹. These are issues we will return to later.

Public Opinion on Best Way to Improve K-12 Education



Source: Gallup (2009). Work and education poll. Retrieved January 10, 2010, from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/122504/public-says-better-teachers-key-improved-education.aspx>

Late 20th Century Efforts — and the Pendulum Swings Farther

Just as unions were making more of a mark on school policy, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, working under the auspices of President Reagan, issued a landmark report criticizing the public schools — and, in particular, university preparation programs, the academic ability of the recruits they train, and how teachers were paid.⁸² “A Nation at Risk,” released in 1983, repeated the clarion call to arms first heard after Sputnik, with even stronger language suggesting “if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.” The report called for less pedagogical preparation (and more subject matter coursework for prospective teachers), as well as merit pay that would financially reward individual teachers for improving test score performance. It also called for dismantling the sacred single salary schedule for teachers, based on credentials and experience, which ensured uniformity and reified the egalitarian culture of teaching. The recommendations about compensation were intended to raise the ire of teacher unions. They did. Over the next several years, states intensified efforts to measure schools and teachers, using standardized tests, and to implement a new generation of merit pay plans.

By the mid-1980s, teachers were readily seen as a problem to be fixed — not as a source of solutions to what ailed public education. The decline in teacher reputation contributed to a 71 percent decline in the proportion of freshmen planning to pursue elementary or secondary teaching careers — from 21.7 percent in 1966 to 6.2 percent in 1985.⁸³ While some part of the decline certainly had to do with the opening of a larger labor market for women and minorities, it is also true that runaway inflation in the 1970s cut deeply into teachers’ capacity to make a decent living, and in the 1980s teacher bashing reared up once again.

The education community responded to “A Nation At Risk” with rhetoric of its own and ideas about how to improve teaching and teacher education. In 1986, Carnegie Corporation of New York released “A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century,” which recognized the important issues at hand, but pushed on the idea that teachers were more of the solution and less the problem. “A Nation Prepared” claimed that the teaching profession was America’s “best hope” for its students to achieve high academic standards, called for more rigor in teacher education, and also for the establishment of a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), mirroring both the substance and procedures of more established professions like medicine and architecture. Carnegie also called on schools to be restructured so that those teachers who passed muster on advanced certification exams would have opportunities to lead their colleagues and earn salaries, at least for the most accomplished practitioners, that were competitive and on par with other professionals.

In 1987, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was created, fueled by support from Carnegie and growing numbers of foundations, businesses, and the government. After years of development, in 1993-94 the NBPTS offered and granted its first advanced certification, using “state-of-the-art” assessment tools that “go far beyond multiple choice examinations” used by many states and “take into account the accumulated wisdom of

teachers.”⁸⁴ The assessments, designed for 24 different subjects and student grade levels, were built from content-specific and student development-specific teaching standards, mirroring the rigors of an Architect Registration Examination.

As the new system rolled out, it became possible in many states and districts for NBCTs to earn substantially more salary (e.g., 12 percent more in North Carolina), albeit not on par with other professionals. Teachers who seek National Board Certification almost uniformly voice that the process is the best professional development they have ever experienced. This sentiment holds for teachers who successfully certify, as well as for those who do not. For many educators who chose to certify in states that did not provide salary supplements, this has seemed to be a sufficient return on investment — especially given the poor quality or limited relevance of the professional development and university-based graduate programs often made available to teachers.⁸⁵

In the late 1980s, the Holmes Group, an alliance of education school deans, responded to criticisms of pre-service programs with their own reform agenda. Drawing on a trilogy of reports, they claimed the nation’s most prestigious universities must take teacher preparation seriously, a familiar refrain. In 1986, “Tomorrow’s Teachers” posed a vision to make teaching intellectually sound and prepare newly minted recruits to integrate research findings about learning and teaching while giving them realistic, demanding, well-coached internships.⁸⁶ In 1990, “Tomorrow’s Schools” framed the design of a Professional Development School, where all students were expected to be active learners and teachers were part of a learning community so “ambitious teaching takes place in a sustained way for large numbers of children.”⁸⁷ Research into teaching and learning would be undertaken by both K-12 and university faculty while master teachers would have new status and rewards that promoted their expertise and leadership. “Tomorrow’s Schools of Education,” published in 1995, called for universities to understand the business of preparing teachers very differently in terms of what is taught to teacher candidates and who teaches it and how. As others had in the past, the Holmes Group called for university faculty to be judged and rewarded based on set criteria that favored those who would promote their work in K-12 schools and form true partnerships with classroom teachers. Clinical professors of pedagogy would emerge as boundary spanners, with one foot equally in the world of K-12 and the university, and they would be expected to “practice what they preached.”⁸⁸

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Despite its sound thinking, the Holmes Group never got very far. Its efforts were undermined by the lack of strong partnerships fueled by public policy supports and the lack of sustained funding. There was no great rush toward creating new roles for university faculty and teacher

leaders. In many research universities, changes did occur for the better, but mostly at the margins. The Holmes Group, which supported a five-year teacher preparation program, also produced a rift within the educational community. Most teacher candidates could not afford to spend the money it cost for an extra year of training, and most education schools did not have the financial wherewithal to deliver the more labor-intensive and expensive clinical training called for. In addition, while the idea of Professional Development Schools sounded good in theory, most of such institutions ended up driven more by of the “proprietary interest of university faculty” than “strong local teacher participation.”⁸⁹ Few PDSs had the look and feel of what was outlined in “Tomorrow’s Schools” and often universities treated its K-12 schools as “trophies,” not partners.⁹⁰ The mindset of research universities and the high value they placed on traditional academic scholarship undermined the time and effort needed for faculty to fully engage with the public schools — a longstanding tension. Education historian David Labaree claimed in *The Trouble with Ed Schools*:

A professional school cut off from the profession, offering only a pale reflection of disciplinary scholarship, provides no rationale for its continued existence, which is one reason that high-end education schools are the most frequent to bite the dust. And an education school that pursues the professional role, while taking on a bit of research and doctoral study ends up coming off as lowbrow to the university and as pretentious to the profession.⁹¹

By the mid-1990s little had changed.

Another Shot at Professionalizing Teaching

In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future (NCTAF) — a blue-ribbon panel of policymakers, business and civic leaders, top-teacher union officials, accomplished teachers, and other key education stakeholders — issued a major report that galvanized national attention around the importance of teachers in raising student achievement. Chaired by then-Governor James B. Hunt of North Carolina (who was also the founding chair of the NBPTS) and led by education scholar Linda Darling-Hammond, NCTAF assembled new evidence on the teaching quality and student learning debate, pointed clearly to promising policies and practices, and assembled state and local partners to begin putting together a comprehensive approach to teacher development.

NCTAF’s blueprint for change argued that an impasse had been reached in school reform: Most schools and teachers could not achieve the goals articulated by new student standards, not because they were unwilling to change, but because they did not know how—and because the systems they worked in did not support them in learning to do so.

The report, “What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future,” proposed a set of five interlocking recommendations:

- Get serious about standards for both students and teachers by creating performance-based systems of teacher licensing, advanced certification, and education program accreditation that are linked to new student standards, connected to one another, and based on current knowledge about effective teaching.
- Reinvent teacher preparation and professional development by creating extended preparation programs that include a year-long internship in a professional development school, ensuring mentoring for beginning teachers, and developing sustained, content-based professional development for veteran teachers.
- Fix teacher recruitment and put qualified teachers in every classroom by streamlining hiring procedures, eliminating barriers to mobility, providing incentives for teaching in shortage areas and fields, and creating high-quality pathways into teaching for mid-career entrants.
- Encourage and reward teacher knowledge and skills by creating evaluation and compensation systems that reward expert teachers, remove incompetent teachers, and allow teachers to share their skills without leaving the classroom.
- Create schools that are organized for student and teacher success by flattening hierarchies, reallocating resources to teaching and technology, redesigning roles and schedules, and rewarding schools that improve learning.

Two critical facts were made clear: First, *teachers must be seen as solutions, not problems*. Reform must be accomplished in concert with teacher unions, not in opposition to them. Second, many good ideas such as PDSs, performance-based licensing, peer review, and paying master teachers (like NBCTs) more than others, were being implemented somewhere, in some form. But *no state or school district had put together all the pieces of the teacher development puzzle* in ways that ensured that every student had access to competent, caring, and qualified teachers.⁹²

While many reform commissions disbanded after issuing their reports, NCTAF was prompted by several of its original funders to continue its work—both to build public support for its recommendations and to assist states and localities in implementation. While NCTAF forged strong bipartisan support, its approach was also elevated by the priorities of President Clinton and his Secretary of Education Richard Riley. NCTAF received additional support from the federal government (primarily through additional investments in teaching quality research) and numerous foundations. Within months of the release of the report, 12 states had agreed to join in the NCTAF partnership to implement its policy recommendations. Several more followed. As the 20th century drew to a close, American teacher professionalism — at long last — seemed to be on the rise.

However, much like other reforms, the NCTAF movement stalled – in part due to the departure of Darling-Hammond in 2002, which left the organization without its founding executive director at a time when the federal No Child Left Behind legislation was beginning to take education reform’s center stage.

By the early 2000s some partner states were implementing a wide range of teacher education reforms, including more clinical training for their candidates. However, few, if any, of the higher education systems changed their funding formula so the reforms could be fully supported, giving education schools the resources needed to spend more time in more costly school-based training efforts. Other states were on the “cutting edge of developing new performance assessments” and much-improved induction and professional development programs. However, both of these elements were uneven, and in some cases, quickly abandoned when a leading advocate left her post or soft funding dried up. In some states (e.g., Maryland, North Carolina, and Ohio), teachers were required to make individual professional development plans that were tied to license renewal. But these efforts often swan-dived into bureaucratic credit-counting and rarely connected to student learning. Most professional development continued to be accomplished outside the salaried workday.

Recruitment and retention practices differed widely across and within states — with a number of initiatives launched. But few states collected good data on which programs worked and why — and policymakers had little evidence upon which to make future funding decisions. Many efforts to recruit talented teachers to high-needs schools came and withered or just vanished. Few states took seriously the changes needed in school designs so teachers could learn from one another. Improving the right working conditions that mattered for teacher retention and student achievement never made it to the policy table. Outside the NCTAF state partnerships, a number of powerful ideas — such as Denver’s new professional compensation system — did begin to crop up. Some districts, for example, started taking the mentoring of new teachers more seriously, and many more teachers were identified and used as instructional coaches, especially in the areas of math and literacy.

Peer review, where teacher leaders (and their unions) evaluate their colleagues and remove them if necessary, was one of the most powerful change proposals in NCTAF’s “What Matters Most” report. The nation’s first peer review program in Toledo, launched in the early 1980s, remains an exemplar and serves as proof of the concept that teachers can enforce standards of teaching excellence far better than when administrators go it alone. But despite NCTAF’s efforts to push out this big idea, of the 14,000 school districts in America, the number of well-functioning peer review programs remains in the small double digits. Some administrators resist them because of their expense; they require teams of teachers to have release time from classroom teaching to conduct the reviews. Other administrators may have resisted simply because they do not want to give up their historical role in controlling the evaluation process. And old-guard union leaders

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continued to worry about breaking up teaching's egalitarianism and weakening the prospects for continued solidarity among the rank and file.

The lack of major progress on NCTAF's ambitious agenda left the cause of teacher professionalism in a vulnerable state—still a target for those who did not want to see schools staffed with a continuous supply of well-prepared teachers who might challenge the status quo. At a time when teachers were being held primarily responsible for the performance shortcomings of high-needs schools and districts, both the unions and university-based teacher education programs were slow to agree that a special brand of recruitment, preparation, and support was needed for teachers in such schools – including modern work rules that protected the interests of students as well as adults in the system. As the century turned, former NEA president Bob Chase noted bluntly:

While some of NEA's critics aim only to dismantle public education, many others care about our schools, and we have been too quick to dismiss their criticisms and their ideas for change. The fact is that in some instances, we have used our power to block uncomfortable change, to protect the narrow interests of our members, and not to advance the interests of students and schools.⁹³

The Pushback Against Professionalism

The new priorities of President George W. Bush and other strong supporters of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 slowed efforts to professionalize teaching while also spotlighting problems in the teacher supply system. The requirements for a “highly qualified” teacher (HQT) under NCLB raised the policy ante for many states, and the hiring of emergency credentialed teachers was curtailed. But while NCLB helped raise public awareness of the unequal distribution of qualified teachers, by and large it did not erase the outmoded policies that continued to leave millions of students underserved. The lack of funding also proved problematic as much of the new federal teacher quality dollars were used to backfill shrinking state and local budgets.⁹⁴

As implemented, the HQT provision proved to be more of a low bar for states to clear than a lofty goal to achieve. Focused more on content background than high across-the-board teaching standards, the HQT rules actually widened the gates for alternative certification, allowing new recruits with the right degrees to enter with little professional training. As a result, the number of fast-track teachers going into the nation's most challenging classrooms increased dramatically, as district administrators struggled with growing teacher shortages and rapid turnover in high-needs schools.

In July 2002, Secretary of Education Rod Paige issued an annual report on Teacher Quality, which was, for all intents and purposes, an open declaration of war on teacher professionalism—arguing for the dismantling of both teacher education and certification. Secretary Paige, drawing on a narrow strand of research, claimed that current teacher certification systems were “broken,” and that they imposed “burdensome requirements” for

education coursework that made up “the bulk of current teacher certification regimes.”⁹⁵ Paige’s contentions were quickly challenged by researchers and reformers, who argued that teacher education needed to be fixed, not eradicated.

Six years after the passage of NCLB, there was only limited evidence that low-income and minority students had any greater access to highly qualified teachers.⁹⁶ An Education Trust report, released in 2008, revealed that, nationwide, about 40 percent of all core subject area classes in high poverty, high minority middle schools were staffed by out-of-field teachers.⁹⁷ But even an in-field teacher may not have the pedagogical skills to teach effectively — especially with the growing numbers of special needs and second language learners filling America’s classrooms. While the Bush Administration was calling for less teacher education, somewhere between 10 and 20 percent of the nation’s public school students had identified learning differences and another 15 percent did not speak English as their primary language.⁹⁸

But these numbers of diverse students and the increasing pedagogical demands on teachers did not dissuade the Bush Administration from promoting the idea that a teacher’s content knowledge, not pedagogical training from a university, was what mattered for student achievement. If teachers were to be deemed effective, it would be because they improved the test scores of their students, not because they achieved a credential — even a highly respected one like that granted by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Teachers also needed to be freed from onerous rules developed through school district and teacher union collective bargaining, many Bush Administration policy supporters argued. During the early 2000s, charter schools which did not have to hire certified teachers or adhere to specific working conditions (like the number of hours a teacher was expected to work a day) grew in importance to policymakers who sought to break up the perceived monopolistic practices of university-based teacher education programs and unions. Privatization champion Chester Finn, a former Assistant Secretary of Education, defined the position of the Bush Administration aptly:

A better way to get good teachers is not to raise the entry hoops and hurdles and standardize and homogenize and tighten up, but is in fact to open the doors and welcome lots more people into American public schools through lots more pathways. Devolve most of the personnel decisions to the individual schools to hire, compensate and deploy people who they think are good at what they do and who they see are good at what they do. And, then hold individual schools accountable for their results. Don’t put all the emphasis on the inputs. Put most of the emphasis on the results. Free up the public schools, as in fact has happened to private schools and charter schools in most of the country, to make the personnel decisions to hire the people they think would do the best job.⁹⁹

Despite any convincing evidence that teachers in private or charter schools outperformed public school teachers, opponents of strong teacher organizations saw a “free market” for teacher labor as the surest way to end the tenuous controls teacher unions still exert over

salary and working conditions. It was also a way to redirect resources that were now being expended in order to certify teachers, including investments in advanced credentialing programs like the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Finn, advocating from his post as president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, argued that:

States should insist on subject knowledge but otherwise open up entry into teaching. Let the market generate both quality and quantity. Decentralize personnel decisions to individual schools and empower them to pay teachers what they're worth. Then hold schools accountable for their results, with teacher performance judged by what students learn.¹⁰⁰

Finn and his allies, including many free-market economists, had their effect. High profile alternative certification efforts like Teach for America, which was launched in 1990, began to pick up steam — promoting the idea that bright young college students, with only a few weeks of pedagogical training and a two-year teaching commitment, could meet the needs of students in schools characterized by high poverty. Many TFA recruits have joined the program out of a strong sense of citizenship and a real desire to help students whose start in life was quite different from their own.

While TFA recruits have very limited pre-service training, they are taught and expected to believe in the possibility of their students' success. Unlike its university counterparts, TFA has also made major investments in collecting data on its recruits and their effects on student achievement. The non-profit, which raised an annual budget in excess of \$200 million in 2011, spends many millions annually on marketing. By late 2009, TFA had begun to place 4,000 recruits a year in some of the nation's highest-needs schools.

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TFA is without question the most high-profile supplier of new teachers who enter the classroom through non-traditional routes. However, in 2009 about 62,000 teachers, enrolled in nearly 600 programs, came into teaching through some form of alternative certification program. Most were trained for a few weeks before assuming full classroom teaching duties (some, like those recruited by TFA, were specifically trained to raise the standardized test scores of the children they taught) and were expected to eventually earn full certification by taking courses in the evening after the workday.¹⁰¹ In most instances, the education coursework would focus solely on classroom management and how to teach a particular district's prescribed curriculum.¹⁰²

In some cities, like NYC, one-third of all new hires now enter teaching through alternative certification programs like TFA. Policy analysts, drawing on studies showing that alternative

certification recruits teach no less effectively than their traditionally trained counterparts, have claimed that the only way to attract talented teachers to teaching is to minimize their “burden” (in terms of costs and time) and not expect them to remain in the classroom very long.¹⁰³ Their vilification of university-based teacher education has been supported by many high-profile journalists who have called for the opening up of classrooms to non-traditional recruits. Pulitzer Prize winner Nicholas Kristof made his case with vitriol similar to that used by teacher education critics of previous eras:

The idea behind teacher [education programs and] certification is that there are special skills that are picked up in teacher training courses — secret snake-charming skills to keep the little vipers calm. But there's no evidence this is so.¹⁰⁴

In reality, evidence on how and why teacher education matters for student achievement does exist. Several scholars have found that the right kind of pre-service teacher — one with extensive and well-supervised student teaching, with strong “congruence” between the training experience and the first-year teaching assignment — makes a difference for student achievement.¹⁰⁵ In addition, a number of researchers have pointed out that alternative certification recruits, with only limited pre-service training, have much higher attrition from the classroom — leaving their students to a revolving door of novices.¹⁰⁶ To be sure, compared to traditional university-based programs, alternative certification approaches are more likely to recruit minorities to teaching — which is much needed given the growing diversity of America’s public school students.¹⁰⁷ However, while alternative certification programs have become central to many urban school districts, they currently supply only a relatively small proportion of the 250,000 new teachers hired annually. But these data points were routinely ignored by the mainstream media, represented by journalists such as Kristof who were relentless in their message that teacher education (and unions) were the source of the teaching quality problem in America.

Defending university-based teacher education against poorly researched and often venomous attacks does not mean that these programs are above criticism. In the early 2000s, the Carnegie Corporation of New York (once again) made a major investment in university-based preparation. Teachers for a New Era (TNE) funded 11 universities over five years to (1) measure the quality of their training program on the basis of the student learning growth in the classrooms of the teachers they graduated from the program; (2) engage the arts and sciences faculty fully in the development of new teachers, and (3) support the teachers they produced during their first two years of full-time professional teaching. As part of that support, the novice teachers were to have access to mentoring with respect to the clinical skills necessary for effective classroom teaching.

TNE yielded some local successes. For example, the University of Virginia put into place a series of unique courses developed jointly by arts and sciences and education school faculty and created much-needed mentoring programs for its two major local school districts. Stanford University scaled up intensive yearlong internships for its teacher candidates in nearby partner schools and devised new forms of assessment for its candidates, assembling

evidence on the effects of the program on K-12 learning. In fact, several studies showed clearly the positive effects of Stanford teacher education graduates on student achievement (L. Darling-Hammond, personal communication, December 9, 2009). Most importantly, from the perspective of teacher professionalism, one K-12 school administrator reported, “Stanford prepares teachers who are not afraid to transform their schools.”¹⁰⁸

But the TNE universities, as a group, had no plan to spread any lessons learned outside their own inner circles. There was no marketing strategy for universities to tout their changes and improvements at a level anywhere near the well-funded and highly effective promotion of counter-efforts to more quickly recruit teachers in direct response to school district needs. As the first decade of the 21st century drew to an end, critics intensified attacks of the caliber of candidate entering teacher education. In fact, the bashing of university-based teacher education programs has become part of a larger set of critiques of the teaching profession.¹⁰⁹ Ironically, evidence reveals the criticisms to be unfounded: In the early 21st century, researchers have shown that teacher education students were actually getting smarter, with newly minted teachers far more academically qualified today than in the past.¹¹⁰ However, the vitriol against education schools increased.

Perhaps because of the continuing political power of teacher unions, resistance to professionalism and teacher education actually intensified. Chester Finn’s critique, however, may have surfaced the underlying narrative and most important reason for pushing back. He claimed the teacher professionalism movement was nothing but a “facade” where the “teacher cartel” does not have to prove itself in the “competitive arena.” Professionalism means that teachers will be no longer “instruments-of-school-improvement,” but “shapers-of-school-improvement.” Teachers will no longer be “workers;” they will be “bosses.” And from the point of view of Finn and other vocal critics of a full-fledged teaching profession, this would be a very bad thing for the public schools. Indeed, one might discern that the deregulation advocates want less-prepared teachers to enter and then leave teaching quickly, which helps keep teacher salaries low and limits the potential impact that highly professionalized teachers could have on what is taught — and how it is taught — in our nation’s public schools.

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Another Step Forward?

In 2009, President Barack Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan launched a \$4.35 billion Race to the Top (R2T) investment in turning around low-performing schools. In doing so, the federal government committed to its largest discretionary funding program ever. The Obama Administration expects states and districts to adopt standards and assessments that prepare students for college and the global economy; to build data systems that measure student growth and success; and to recruit, reward, and retain effective teachers and principals and make sure they work where they are needed most.

In part, the early efforts of the Obama administration drew on the agenda of the Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) — which emphasized the expansion of charter schools and high stakes accountability for teachers. For DFER supporters, charter schools are necessary to break up the education establishment, given that they can free themselves from the entanglements of teacher tenure laws and union work rules. And test-based accountability, they say, is necessary to get educators focused on student achievement and to shake up unions that protect incompetent teachers.

The DFER agenda also honed in on a number of progressive ideals often associated with the Democratic Party, like early childhood education, and promoted reforms believed to serve the nation's “most vulnerable” students.¹¹¹ However, some of DFER's policy approaches — particularly related to teaching — were similar to those of the Bush Administration: devaluing teacher training and creating a union-free workplace where teachers would be evaluated primarily by student scores on standardized tests in a narrow range of subjects. Their influence was evident. Early in his administration, Secretary Duncan made it very clear: Winners in the Race to the Top competition would not be able to “limit alternative routes to certification for teachers” or “cap the number of charter schools,” and they had to “have strategies for rewarding and retaining more top-notch teachers and improving or replacing ones who aren't up to the job.”¹¹² Using student test score data to evaluate teachers became a centerpiece criterion that states and districts had to meet in order to win the large federal grants — up to \$700 million for states the size of California, Florida, and Texas and up to \$400 million in states like Illinois and North Carolina.

However, after 1,161 public comments (offered during a 30-day period in the fall of 2009), the final R2T guidelines proved more expansive, going well beyond the lifting of charter school caps and the removal of digital firewalls between student and teacher data. Effectiveness measures remained paramount, but in a “nod” to the NEA and AFT, as well as to teachers themselves, the final regulations made clear that student test scores “should be just one component” in judging educators.¹¹³ The focus of R2T also began to lean more toward using student data to support teachers in improving their teaching — not just to identify bad teachers who could be quickly removed from the classroom. (In spring 2010, only Tennessee and Delaware were awarded first-round grants—sending a message to other states that they needed to more aggressively “revamp” their education policies.¹¹⁴)

Charter schools have generated some panache in the reform community. They appear to offer freedom from both district bureaucracy and onerous union rules that get in the way of mandating longer school days and firing weak or uncooperative teachers. While different researchers have reached different conclusions on the effectiveness of charters,¹¹⁵ one apparent charter advantage, at least from a management point of view, appeared to be threatened by the end of 2009. Teachers in charter schools began to unionize. A chief reason, some observers have argued, is that without a union looking over their shoulder, charter administrators were pressing teachers to work under conditions that finally provoked rebellion in some schools. The unionizing teachers said their concern was about their capacity to help their students learn, not their own convenience. A *New York Times* article reported that charter school teachers in Chicago sought unionization because of frustration with staff turnover, lack of teacher input, and having “to work longer and harder than teachers at other schools and earning less.”¹¹⁶ (In 2007, the national average teacher salary reached slightly over \$51,000, while charter school teachers earned, on average, \$10,000 less. Other similarly trained professionals continued to earn higher average wages - about \$72,000).¹¹⁷

For many high profile policymakers, the very public firing of poorly performing teachers has become the centerpiece of their teacher quality reforms. For example, in 2009, Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York City used the Race to the Top policy framework to focus primarily on making it “easier to fire bad teachers” and lay them off on the basis of their students’ test scores.¹¹⁸ It is difficult to find anyone, on any side of the education reform debate, who would be willing to defend teachers who consistently turn in a poor classroom performance. But the issue is far more nuanced and complicated than is typically expressed by the popular media. For example, many high-needs school districts do not fire underperforming teachers because they could not replace them with more qualified recruits. (Researchers have reported that talented alternative certification recruits, especially in high-demand fields like math and science, are not readily available.¹¹⁹) Other studies have shown how poor salaries and working conditions undermine recruitment efforts — and how factors such as poor school leadership, lack of time to collaborate with colleagues, and out-of-field teaching assignments can keep teachers from teaching effectively.¹²⁰ But the mass media never seems to pick up on this story line. Instead, as a *Newsweek* cover story blared in March 2010: The key to saving America’s failing public schools is to fire “bad teachers.”¹²¹ No one, of course, seems prepared to say how many “bad” public school teachers continue to teach after reasonable efforts have been made to improve their performance. But most would agree the percentage is relatively small—too small to be the major reform focus of so many politicians and advocates of school privatization.

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A Hopeful Future

In 2010, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched a \$335 million investment in teacher effectiveness, with major grants to three large school districts and one public charter school network to reform their systems of professional development, tenure, evaluation, and compensation. Working collaboratively with the unions, the Gates-fueled approach to teacher effectiveness will rest not only on standardized test score data but other metrics derived from student engagement tools, rigorous analyses of teaching practices, and surveys. In Hillsborough County, Florida, the \$100 million grant will drive the redesign of teacher evaluation, where 40 percent of an annual review will rest on student performance data — but not just a single test. How teachers spread their expertise among their peers may also play a major role in how they are evaluated.

In addition, foundations and think tanks are giving some serious attention to a 2009 study which found that peer learning among small groups of teachers seems to be the most powerful predictor of student achievement over time.¹²² Using 11 years of matched teacher and student achievement data, the researchers were able to isolate and quantify the added value brought about by such collective expertise — finding that most value-added gains for students are attributable to teachers who are more experienced (and qualified) and stay together as teams.

About the same time, another national task force, the Strategic Management of Human Capital (SMHC) in Education Project, released a report suggesting ways to get beyond the typical debates swirling around the teaching profession. For example, the SMHC report called for shifting dollars away from university-based teacher education programs that did not produce quality graduates—but also called for more stringent evaluations of proliferating alternative certification programs. The report made a compelling case:

Teaching — like other professions — requires an extended period to develop effective professional practice. Neither undergraduate university-based training programs nor alternative route training programs can turn out teachers with a full complement of classroom and instructional management skills to use in their first years of teaching.¹²³

The SMHC task force believes teacher education must be taken seriously. The report called for an intensive induction/residency program for all new teachers until they meet minimum performance standards — challenging both university-based teacher education and Teach for America alike. The task force concluded:

On-going, targeted and on-the-job professional development is an essential part of school reform. A highly effective strategy involves teachers working in teams to analyze student data, tailoring instruction to diverse student needs, delivering content in multiple ways, and quickly measuring their students' progress (as well as their own).¹²⁴

As the 21st century's second decade began, a shift in outlook within the unions also became more visible. Although the mainstream media's attack on teacher organizations continued, growing numbers of teacher leaders, with union backing, opened their own schools designed to close the achievement gap. Lori Nazareno, an NBCT and a member of the national Teacher Leaders Network, opened a progressive elementary school in Denver, with a focus on both math & science and community activism.¹²⁵ Other teacher-led schools, working under the auspices of their local unions, have set out to show that reasonable work rules and a focus on student achievement do not have to be “cast in opposition.”¹²⁶ In Boston, a teacher-led school offers a longer school day, but promotes a less-scripted curriculum while agreeing to serve all students — not just those “cherry-picked” to ensure higher test scores.

As teacher-run schools continue to make “strides in autonomy, creativity, and collective decision-making,”¹²⁷ they will also be working diligently on innovative ways to measure their success. If they are successful in showing results that matter for students, in very convincing ways, then the movement toward teacher professionalism will be re-energized — and perhaps led by our very best teachers for the first time in America's stormy and convoluted educational history. From there, growing numbers of teachers, organizing themselves via the Internet, will develop and spread a new message about what matters most for student achievement, as well as their profession. The public, which has always had respect for teachers, will begin to pay attention as never before.

Margaret Mead posed a simple claim with regards to social change: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” While her postulate may seem a cliché after so many repetitions over the years, there's a reason for its staying power. It rings true. If teaching is to develop into the profession that students deserve, there is no doubt that a (relatively) small group of thoughtful, committed teachers will lead the way. They will have to do what they do best — teach students effectively. But they will need to do more as well, serving as a breakout generation of teacher leaders who mentor, research and organize, while transforming their unions into the client-centered, results-oriented organizations they must become. If not, teaching will remain a semi-profession at best.

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