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## The Future of the Teaching Profession

**Barnett Berry**

# Executive Summary

In the early years of the 21st century, America still has a chance to create a real teaching profession for its beleaguered public schools. The evidence is everywhere that the global economy and new technologies have transformed most industries and have redefined the work of professionals within them and the tools they use, but teaching has changed very little over time. Since its modern origins in the mid-1800s, much of teaching's organizational arrangements and its cultural backbone have remained the same. Inside the school organization, today's teachers are treated more like 20th century factory workers than 21st century knowledge workers.

Stereotypes continue to relegate the status of teaching to what sociologists have called a "semi-profession," which discourages many talented individuals from seriously considering teaching as a career. While there are some recent, notable experiments to break up teaching's lock-step salary schedule and flat career structure, most of the nation's accomplished teachers have few career routes through which they can spread their expertise, create innovative ways to build bridges between schools and families, or lead policy efforts to significantly increase student performance and improve their profession.

However, some teachers are overcoming daunting odds and managing to break free of bureaucratic inertia, organizing and running their own charter schools or working in and through virtual schools. Some are abandoning the traditional education delivery system altogether, as they participate in

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the growing global trade of pedagogy. Other teachers are beginning to influence how new teachers are prepared. Perhaps these recent trends are harbingers of professionalism in the making and teachers themselves can lead the way to a new professionalism.

Teachers of the 21st century will have to become better educated and prepared to teach new content as the knowledge bases in the disciplines expand geometrically. Teachers also will have to develop a wider repertoire of pedagogical practices and content-specific teaching skills.

If Americans can move beyond the dysfunctional debate over whether market forces or professionalism presents the best path to teaching quality, they can begin to tear down and rebuild the whole schema of teaching and school. We will know the teaching profession has arrived when policy makers, practitioners, and the public come to see America's accomplished teachers as the most trusted source of insights into how to best improve public education.



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# The Future of the Teaching Profession

Barnett Berry



IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE 21ST CENTURY, America still has a chance to create a real teaching profession for its beleaguered public schools. Cognitive scientists are defining more carefully how humans learn, and teaching is beginning to develop a body of knowledge that can transform the way students are taught and what they are expected to produce. Methodologies in diagnosing and remedying literacy difficulties in children and adults are emerging. New technologies have the capacity to identify effective teachers, rapidly spread teaching expertise, and capitalize on 24/7 professional learning opportunities. Global projects like Wikipedia and virtual community tools like Ning demonstrate the Internet's potential to bridge cultural and geographical divides and offer powerful examples of what people can do and learn without traditional organizational structures.<sup>1</sup> With these emerging trends in mind, I believe more firmly than ever that teachers can join the ranks of other professionals who are respected for their knowledge and expected to take authoritative action in the best interests of their clients and communities.

The evidence is everywhere that the global economy and new technologies have transformed most industries and have redefined the work of professionals within them and the tools they use. Micro-multinational enterprises, online data gathering, and dynamic decision modeling are redefining how professionals learn and work. Digital tools, from laptops to cellphones, are used by groups of people—smart networks—to “gain new forms of social power, new ways to organize their interactions and exchanges.”<sup>2</sup> With well over 100 million registered users, MySpace—if it were a nation—would be the 11th-largest in the world, positioned somewhere between Japan and Mexico.<sup>3</sup>

But teaching has changed very little over time. In its 150-year history as an organized occupation,

teaching has not been marked by innovation or dynamic evolution; rather, it has been “rife with political dynamics, social drama, and philosophical debate.”<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, if we walk into today's classrooms, we may find a white board instead of a chalk board, or an LCD projector instead of an overhead projector, but the ways teachers organize their classrooms, teach their content, and expect students to learn will look eerily familiar—even to those who attended school in the 1950s. Since its modern origins in the mid-1800s, much of teaching's organizational arrangements and its cultural backbone have remained the same. Most teachers teach in isolation from one another most of the time. They are expected to implement a standardized curriculum and are most often supervised by





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administrators who are promoted to school leadership positions not because of their pedagogical expertise, but due to their ability to manage and control both teachers and students. In many communities today, teaching is still defined as missionary work or a subsidiary occupation—not a professional pursuit—and teachers therefore are expected to “accept even the most difficult school work and the least pay.”<sup>5</sup>

Inside the school organization, today's teachers are treated more like 20th century factory workers than 21st century knowledge workers. Some researchers contend that unions have been effective in advocating for teachers in terms of job control, work rules, and economic rights, but have done much less for “the other half” of their jobs. Collective bargaining has set a standard for defining teachers' economic interests along industrial union lines, but it has not significantly advanced the status of teachers in terms of being recognized and rewarded “as experts about learning.”<sup>6</sup> In contract negotiations, critics of today's teachers' unions reasonably claim that issues of seniority, tenure, and across-the-board pay raises often trump efforts to advance teacher leadership, teaching effectiveness, and student learning. Others argue that, given the way teachers continue to be treated as hired hands, industrial unionism is far from obsolete.<sup>7</sup> Whatever the reasons, teaching has not shed its historical image as an occupation for those who primarily nurture and care for children, as opposed to those who must draw on intellectual ability and serious professional study to prepare each new generation of students to become highly-capable adult learners.

Today, enduring stereotypes continue to relegate the status of teaching to what sociologists have called a “semi-profession,”<sup>8</sup> which discourages many talented individuals from seriously considering teaching as a career. Low teacher salaries—especially in urban and rural districts that do not have the financial resources to compete in the teacher labor market—undermine recruitment efforts. But poor salaries, currently pegged at an average of \$46,000 nationwide, are not the sole culprit on the supply side. Teacher retention is a much bigger problem than recruitment in many school systems.

Currently, almost 16 percent of all teachers leave the classroom each year, costing districts at least \$18,000 per replacement. Analysts have estimated that the nation spends more than \$7 billion annually to replace teachers who leave. Some large urban districts lose massive numbers of teachers: Chicago lost 4,800 in one recent year (roughly 19 percent), at the staggering cost of \$86 million.<sup>9</sup> One key turnover factor: well-prepared, well-qualified teachers become frustrated when they cannot teach effectively in the many schools that are hobbled by poor working conditions (e.g., weak school leadership, limited time to plan lessons and assess learning, and too few opportunities to grow and lead). In a great many urban systems, woefully underfunded and underconceptualized new-teacher induction systems force most novices to teach the most challenging students without the support and assistance they need.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, the recruitment of teacher candidates tends to be ad hoc. Whether new candidates (however they emerge) need to be extensively prepared before they begin to teach is hotly contested, while policy makers routinely lower standards for entry into the classroom in the face of growing teacher shortages. As a result, more under-prepared new teachers fail, and the failure rate is exacerbated by anemic support systems. The problem is further compounded by tenure rules that make it difficult to fire any but the most blatantly incompetent teachers, a situation made more vexing by school administrators who have little time to supervise teachers or little expertise in teaching themselves. In many instances, school board mandates and union rules may allow schools to pay \$80,000 for an experienced physical education teacher while not being able to pay more than \$36,000 to a young math teacher with lots of knowledge content and teaching skills—and better offers in the private sector.

And there are still other factors in play. Despite the higher expectations of job satisfaction among today's average college graduates (who will hold at least four different jobs by age 30), the public school "human capital" system is built around the concept that teachers will teach for 30 years and be satisfied with the same responsibilities day in and day out. In the pre-service arena, universities do not

## About the Author

**Barnett Berry** is president and CEO of the Center for Teaching Quality, Inc., based in Hillsborough, North Carolina. Founded in 1999, CTQ seeks to close the student achievement gap by closing the teaching quality gap.



A former high school teacher, he leads a research-based advocacy organization dedicated to creating a 21st century teaching profession. In 2003, he created the Teacher Leaders Network, a dynamic virtual community designed to elevate the voices of expert teachers. He also has worked as a social scientist at the RAND Corporation, served as a senior executive with the South Carolina State Department of Education, and directed an education policy center while a professor at the University of South Carolina.

He has authored many academic reports and articles for the popular education press. He serves in an advisory capacity to organizations committed to teaching quality, equity, and social justice in America's schools. Currently, he advises the Education Testing Service and its Teacher Leadership Initiative, the Rhode Island Urban Education Task Force, the Coalition for Urban Teacher Residencies, the National Education Association Foundation, the Public Education Network, the Ford Foundation and its teacher retention project, and the Rose Community Foundation and its initiative around the strategic management of human capital.

This article is adapted from a forthcoming book, tentatively titled, *The Future of Teaching: A Vision and View with 12 Expert Teachers*, to be published by Teachers College Press.



**Teaching is a large occupation, with over 3.4 million members or about 3 percent of the entire U.S. labor force.**

have the policy structure or resources needed to prepare and support teachers for high-need schools. And when it comes to continuing education, the professional development opportunities offered by many school districts still tend to be “one-size-fits-all” and out of sync with the needs of today’s teaching workforce.

While there are some recent, notable experiments to break up teaching’s lock-step salary schedule (like those in Denver and Minneapolis) and flat career structure (like new teacher-led schools in St. Paul and New York City), most of the nation’s accomplished teachers have few career routes through which they can spread their expertise, create innovative ways to build bridges between schools and families, or lead policy efforts to significantly increase student performance and improve their profession. Salaries and opportunities for career advancement rest on the mid-20th century assumption that teachers are born, not made, and that the nation still has a captive female labor pool with few other career options. The same archaic work-assignment and teacher compensation systems tend to discourage the creativity, collaboration, and communication now required of all professionals to effectively traverse the flat world described by Thomas Friedman and other explicators of the 21st century.<sup>11</sup>

Teaching is a large occupation, with over 3.4 million members or about 3 percent of the entire U.S. labor force. Teachers represent 10 percent of all college-educated workers. No enterprise of this size can be expected to be nimble. Even so, some teachers are overcoming daunting odds and managing to break free of bureaucratic inertia, organizing and running their own charter schools and often shedding outdated notions that a school principal must always lead and those who teach must always follow. More teachers are working in and through virtual schools, and some are abandoning the traditional education delivery system altogether, as they participate in the growing global trade of pedagogy.

Despite the pushback of university faculty, other teachers are beginning to influence how new teachers are prepared, establishing their own formal and informal mentoring and support networks, often through the use of web-based smart networking. By the end of 2008, there will be well over 70,000 National Board certified teachers, all of whom have

voluntarily submitted to tests of their content knowledge and teaching skills and to performance assessments not unlike those found in more established professions. While there is currently no systematic effort to utilize these formally identified experts, as a result of a 20-year federal investment in a system of national certification, the United States possesses a growing cadre of teachers, ready to be tapped, who have demonstrated they know the subjects they teach and they know how to teach them to diverse students. At the Center for Teaching Quality, our own Teacher Leaders Network is a growing national virtual community of expert teachers who use Web 2.0 tools and a robust collaborative Internet workspace to both spread their pedagogical expertise and elevate their policy voices on matters related to their profession and the students and communities they serve.

Could these recent trends be harbingers of professionalism in the making? What are the pitfalls, given the long, ambiguous history of America's largest semi-profession? What are the prospects for teachers, as a collective, to define good teaching and learning for the 21st century? What will it take to ensure a quality teacher for every student in tomorrow's schools? And what can teachers tell us about that? Before answering these questions, let's fly over the teaching policy battleground, where intellectuals far removed from the classroom continue to fight over whether teaching should be a profession at all.

## Teacher Professionalism: The Endless War

Since the mid-1990s, researchers of all ideological stripes and methodological perspectives have converged around a view that teachers play a primary role in advancing student achievement, however we measure it.<sup>12</sup> Even so, policy makers (and sometimes practitioners) still get caught up in bitter debates over how to identify effective teachers or improve teaching quality. As a result, we've made little progress in crafting a workable national policy that ensures a steady supply of highly-skilled teachers who are fully prepared to succeed.

These debates emerge from a larger set of contentious issues that are regularly promulgated by

two opposing camps—those who seek to deregulate teaching and those who seek to professionalize it like those in medicine, law, and architecture have done for their fields. Each camp has “differing notions of evidence, fairness, results, progress, public benefit, the American way, and other key ideas,” and their respective ideologies “are driven by ideas, ideals, values, and assumptions about the purposes of schooling, the social and economic future of the nation, and the role of public education in a democratic society.”<sup>13</sup> Both camps believe they are articulating the “truth” about teacher quality and describing what is best for students, who are held forth as the ultimate beneficiaries of each side's efforts to transform teaching.

***The Deregulators.*** For deregulation advocates—who generally believe that student learning and teachers should be measured only or primarily by standardized test results—extensive teacher preparation is unnecessary and costly. These critics argue that teaching cannot claim “a reasonably stable body of knowledge based on high-quality, replicable research accepted by almost everyone in the field and systematically imparted by its training institutions,” and that much of teacher education has been built on the “ideologies and enthusiasms of the faculty” and not on “anything (one) could call science.”<sup>14</sup> As such, deregulation advocates often consider a qualified teacher to be someone with “a solid general education, who possesses deep subject area knowledge, and who has no record of misbehavior.”<sup>15</sup> By opening up the teacher labor market and making it easier for reasonably intelligent people to enter classrooms, they contend, students will be more likely to be taught by effective teachers. (Most in the deregulation camp call for recruiting teachers with higher verbal scores on standardized tests, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test or Graduate Record Exam.)

Pointing to what has been accurately described as a thin teacher education research base,<sup>16</sup> deregulation advocates call for dismantling teacher education and state licensing and replacing these long-standing systems with an array of pedagogy-free, alternative certification programs (already available in most states) and subject-specific, multiple-choice





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teacher tests. These substitutions are intended to identify highly qualified teachers and then measure their effectiveness primarily, if not solely, by whether their students also score well on standardized, multiple-choice tests.<sup>17</sup> Many of the deregulators have embraced value-added methodologies—which draw on standardized test score data to provide a longitudinal picture of individual student progress—to identify good and bad teachers.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the deregulators decry tenure and seniority-based compensation and frequently call for the overhaul of pension plans that currently reward teachers who remain in teaching for the long term.

Because of its historically weak knowledge base and highly uneven preparation programs, critics often compare the teaching occupation to journalism, where some practitioners are highly trained and others just learn on the job. In particular, they point out (correctly) that most schools of education graduate only one-half of their entering candidates, and typically only 70 percent of those graduates actually enter teaching. In some teacher surplus states, many universities graduate teachers prepared for low-demand subjects and areas (e.g., elementary education, physical education, social studies), while math, science, and special education vacancies continue to beset school administrators.<sup>19</sup> Many universities offer almost any kind of teacher education major, irrespective of the labor market supply and demand. Given the incoherent state of teacher education, the deregulators call for market forces to open up teaching to those with the right content knowledge and dispositions and a willingness to teach for a few years.

***The Professionalizers.*** For advocates of professionalism, short-circuiting teacher preparation or assessment is antithetical to the needs of diverse students who must have access to well-prepared and well-supported teachers. Transforming teaching into a true profession will be based in part, they believe, on the growing knowledge base of how humans learn,<sup>20</sup> as well as on new advancements in the teaching of reading, math, and second-language acquisition. A professional teacher will know how to assess students and use data and evidence to improve instruction.<sup>21</sup> With the dramatic growth of stu-



dent diversity (the latest census predicts more than half the nation's children will be non-white by 2023), issues of cultural competency have also become a teacher-quality centerpiece for advocates of building the profession.<sup>22</sup>

For those who promote professionalism, new salary incentives, leadership opportunities, and professional working conditions are drivers that can increase both the size and quality of the teacher workforce. For these advocates, more serious preparation and induction—and more rigorous assessment processes that draw on multiple measures of teaching quality and student learning—are the primary tools to identify effective teachers. While most will concede that value-added methods represent improvements in how test scores are used to judge students and their teachers, they also note that many psychometricians say the complex formula used by statisticians yields far too unstable data to be applied in high-stakes decisions about individual teacher effectiveness.<sup>23</sup> Advocates of professionalism generally agree that the assessments developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards are one powerful way to measure good teaching, a position supported recently by the National Research Council, which found that the NBPTS certification process is a strong indicator of teaching quality.<sup>24</sup>

### *Mediating Tensions: A Third Way.*

Many tensions exist in public education: between costs and quality; between public regulation and professional self-governance; between controls that ensure competence among practitioners and those that create self-interested monopolies; and between those advocates who envision a public education system that offers opportunities for all students to achieve at the highest levels in school and in life, and those who envision a more limited mission and reach. These tensions often play out in rancorous debates among researchers, think-tank bloggers, and politicians, with teachers and teaching quality solutions viewed in terms of a zero-sum game.

Teacher union officials, administrators, school boards, Democrats and Republicans, and right- and left-wing institutes all continue to play from their team game book, locked in a never-ending contest to control the definition of teacher. As Lorraine Mc-

Donnell observed two decades ago, “The greatest obstacle to states in their struggle to balance popular control and professionalism may well be the inability to resolve the questions of who should evaluate teachers and how they should be evaluated.”<sup>25</sup>

Much as in other political spheres, the teacher-quality tensions often play out in rather ironic ways. Advocates for infusing free-market principles into teaching also call for using external, high-stakes accountability to control teachers. Advocates for professionalizing teaching prefer using internal, low-stakes accountability to “empower” teachers. Market advocates often hinge their views on conservative policies that are built from a belief that government maintains order, promotes self-interest, and limits social programs. Public education is important, many market advocates will say, but it is an individual rather than a society-wide imperative. Professionalism advocates often hinge their views on progressive policies that are built from a belief that government should offer safety nets and opportunities, and that universal public education is intended for the common good.

What often gets lost in the squabble is that both sides have a piece of the solution. When market advocates decry long-standing teacher union advocacy over single-salary schedules and seniority transfer rights, they're not much interested in the history of these compensation policies, which were designed to overcome gross inequities of the past. But when they argue that such policies do not reward good teaching and do not take into account the need to offer incentives for good teachers to teach in the subjects and schools where they are needed most, they argue from higher ground. Market advocates rightfully claim that many traditionally certified (and National Board certified) teachers are not willing to teach in hard-to-staff schools, whereas bright young Teach for America teachers are more than willing to do so, despite their lack of preparation.

On the other side, the advocates of professionalism often belittle short-cut alternative certification programs without advocating as strongly for reforms in the cumbersome certifying and hiring procedures that provide a rationale for the alternative certification movement. But they, too, can claim higher ground when they make the case that easy



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entry for less-prepared teachers may relieve policy makers of the obligation to make deeper investments in teacher preparation and salaries—or to call for the redesign of schools in ways that would improve working conditions and give teachers more self-determination to act on behalf of students.

So are we trapped in a policy labyrinth from which there is no escape? Maybe not. Perhaps there is another way to frame the future of America's teaching profession. Perhaps teachers themselves can lead the way to a new professionalism, one which acknowledges and addresses the weaknesses in the old system, but also champions the values of equity, opportunity, and community that have drawn many of our best citizens into teaching careers for generations. Today's accomplished teachers have a huge stake in the outcome of this policy debate. They rightfully fear teaching policies that focus on prescriptive, narrow curriculum and the prospect of working with colleagues who are under-prepared and most likely transitory. Expert educators are able to envision a more ambitious 21st century curriculum developed and taught by well-prepared, well-paid, and well-supported teachers who know a great deal about content, teaching, and the specific students they teach.

I am personally convinced that the future direction of teaching will depend on how well teacher leaders can communicate to the larger public the choices we face in our education system and the potential of a fully-realized teaching profession to spark a learning renaissance in our public schools. Public opinion polls have revealed that most Americans want highly-prepared teachers for all our children.<sup>26</sup> These polls also suggest that most Americans are largely uninformed about the policies being promoted that, intentionally or unintentionally, undermine the development of a profession that can meet the challenges of a constantly changing world and also maximize the opportunities for learning presented by new technologies and the Internet.

## Teachers for the 21st Century

Teachers of the 21st century will have to become better educated and prepared to teach new content

as the knowledge bases in the disciplines expand geometrically. It is equally true that teachers will have to develop a wider repertoire of pedagogical practices and content-specific teaching skills. In particular, teachers will need to know more of what cognitive scientists are discovering about how humans learn. They will also need to possess an in-depth knowledge of individual students' characteristics and capacities as a precursor to setting learning goals and planning effective lessons. This is a radically different approach to learning than we see in many of our schools today, where students are grouped into grade levels or sharply delineated courses and spend inordinate amounts of time drilling for a single, narrowly-focused standardized test.

Effective 21st century teachers must also be prepared to accommodate and succeed with children who are second language learners, who have learning disabilities, or who simply learn best in particular ways. To earn the distinction of "professional," they will need to be experts in formative assessment. Research tells us that such expertise is a key determinant in whether a teacher raises achievement for all students. Being good at formative assessment means having the ability to design standards-based classroom assessments that detect learning differences and accurately portray student progress. Such teachers grade student work in far more reliable, valid, and consistent ways and adapt their lessons based on their classroom assessment data.<sup>27</sup> They also use new technologies to assemble and analyze this data and know how to involve students in managing their own learning.

Professional teachers must do all of these things with their colleagues, understanding that many learning problems cannot be solved by individuals in self-contained classrooms but require strategies that engage the whole faculty. Effective collaboration requires teachers to develop their skills as leaders to a higher level than ever before and apply them not only in school-based professional communities, but in ways that inform policy makers and the public about the complexities of teaching and learning.

With the explosion of technical information, which doubles every two years, teachers (like the rest of us) cannot hope to keep up with all of the content they and their students might need to know.



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For that reason, teachers must be highly information-literate, able to locate and manage important knowledge and also lead students in becoming thoughtful and critical consumers and producers of content. As one designer of an online learning environment asserted:

It's one thing [for students] to contribute to a wiki, but we also need to be critical thinkers, to be able to spot false or inaccurate information. I don't think that the negative part—people adding false information—should prohibit us from allowing others to be knowledge creators. I think we just have to be smarter about how we get people to decide which information is appropriate, accurate, and relevant given particular situations.<sup>28</sup>

All of the 21st century teaching skills I have touched upon here point to a serious shortcoming in most schools' approach to student assessment. To accurately determine what students are learning and how well they are teaching, teachers must move away from a dependence on paper and pencil tests and create opportunities for students to demonstrate their acquisition of new skills and knowledge, as well as their ability to create and communicate. The Naval Education and Training Command is moving away from "standard classroom-lecture formats of fixed duration, where students sit for eight weeks to learn the material and then take a test." Instead, the Navy is using performance assessments that allow instructors to customize education and reduce time wasted on reteaching material to students who have already mastered it.<sup>29</sup> In our public schools, teachers are the key to developing and using such assessments. Current standardized, multiple-choice tests may be simple and relatively inexpensive to administer, but they are ill-designed to determine whether students have acquired essential 21st century skills, skills like application, evaluation and synthesis of knowledge, literacy in a digital world, smart networking, and collaboration.

A group of National Board Certified Teachers that participated on a Teacher Leaders Network study team recently defined the professional knowledge and skills they believe teachers must possess to



succeed in the new millennium:

- Ability to create a risk-free, interactive, student-centered learning environment which nurtures creativity (rather than an emphasis on high-stakes evaluations which motivate students through fear or competition, causing some to drop out or give up);
- Effectiveness in using multiple paths to learning (not just one prescribed or teacher-preferred way);
- Creative and adaptive use of instructional materials and current, authentic intellectual resources for learning (rather than dependency on managed or scripted instructional programs);
- Demonstrated capacity to recognize and honor all forms of human diversity and culture, and expertise in culturally-responsive teaching practice;
- Imaginative and fluent use of technology to effectively advance learning;
- Effective collaboration with colleagues that models for students shared professional practice as a critical workplace skill;
- Productive relationships with parents, leading to the core competency of mutual trust, and facility in using the community as an embedded instructional resource;
- Systematic, critical examination of their own teaching, using student work products and feedback to continuously improve daily lessons; and
- A lively personal commitment to teaching well.<sup>30</sup>

I do not mean to suggest that all 3.4 million teachers in America need to possess each and every one of these skills or deploy them in exactly the same way from the first to the last day of a long teaching career. If we move beyond the dysfunctional debate over whether market forces or professionalism presents the best path to teaching quality,

we can begin to tear down and rebuild our whole schema of teaching and school. To achieve the overall level of professionalism I have outlined here, schools must “break away from their 19th-century, ‘egg carton’ organization” that assumes a qualified teacher with the same credentials, experience, and expertise is needed for every 25 students, and that every teacher will work alone in his or her respective classroom.<sup>31</sup> In the new schema, many teachers will continue to be generalists (although their generalist skill set will be of a higher order than is often the case today), but they will be supported by “specialist” teachers who are fully prepared to spread their expertise as they work in carefully-defined leadership roles.

Other professions, including the medical field, readily recognize specialties and deploy professionals in sharply differentiated ways. I’m not suggesting that teachers specialize to that degree. Given the volatile lives of many of our nation’s public school students, it would be terrible moral mistake for the teaching profession to mirror the rigid specialization (and isolation) that now defines the field of medicine. Instead, the profession of teaching must identify its best practitioners and give them a differentiated platform to spread their expertise, while also assuring that every teacher remains vested in the success of every child. With this in mind, I offer a brief glimpse into what can be the future of teaching.

## Imagine the Future of Teaching

It will not be easy for teaching to shed its historical and sociological baggage, which has defined both organizational norms and media images. For over 150 years, teaching has been befuddled by a series of contradictions. Teachers are controlled and regulated, but isolated from each other. They are expected to exert authority over students, while always submitting to political, bureaucratic, and school managerial authorities on matters of policy and practice. They are admired for service to young people but often relegated to second-class status because they work with children. In fact, they are frequently mocked for the assumed anti-intellectual nature of their work.<sup>32</sup>



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But I believe teaching can shed this baggage. It can emerge as a new kind of profession, one that draws on empirical evidence and collective norms of excellence while avoiding the pitfalls of other professional occupations that have become more focused on self-interest than on clients. In Top 10 fashion, envision this bright future for teaching:

1. Imagine that teachers are recruited annually from a large pool of talented college students, newly minted graduates, and mid-career switchers—and that 30,000 of the most promising have opportunities to learn to teach in paid residency programs, where they demonstrate readiness-to-teach through National Board-like performance assessments and earn incentives that will promote high rates of teacher retention.
2. Imagine that 300,000 (about 10 percent of the teaching force) of the most accomplished, experienced, and well-paid teachers spend most or all of their time supporting adjunct teachers (content experts who may teach for short periods of time) and novices (who enter with different levels of preparation), and are evenly distributed so all students have access to the best teaching.
3. Imagine that teacher teams—using Web 3.0 tools, wireless student handheld computers, and virtual spaces—facilitate students' abilities to find and use knowledge, create novel solutions to relevant problems, and share new ideas as they participate in global communities.
4. Imagine that teachers with different skills and expertise work collaboratively to create personalized learning plans and assessments for small groups of students who they teach over many years, all the while providing a dynamic form of public and professional accountability for results.
5. Imagine that communities of teachers, working in school buildings (and virtual spaces) open 24/7, have flexible time, resources, and skills to work with a variety of social service and health care providers to ensure that all stu-

dents have access and opportunity to meet 21st century learning standards.

6. Imagine that the need to recruit new teachers has abated because of much-improved teacher working conditions—improvements driven by common data revealing which of America’s 100,000 schools offer teachers supportive administrators, time to learn from colleagues, opportunities to lead and use their professional judgment, and well-established relationships with students, families, and community members.
7. Imagine that teacher education and new teacher induction programs are connected to each other and are built upon a body of research-based knowledge and 21st century learning tools. They are driven by a governance and finance system that literally fuses collaboration among schools, universities, and community partners.
8. Imagine that many accomplished teachers, notably those certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, serve in hybrid roles that allow them to teach students as well as prepare and induct novices, spread their expertise among all colleagues, and lead entrepreneurial reforms for schools, communities, states, and the nation. Many will create and lead their own schools that mirror the way senior partners run a law firm.
9. Imagine that high-needs schools have the resources, tools, and incentives to “grow their own” accomplished educators, with support from a large virtual network of National Board certified teachers.
10. Imagine that all teachers meet high standards and are paid as professionals, and that the most accomplished teachers can earn up to 100 percent more for advancing student learning, spreading expertise, and leading changes in policy and practice.

How will we know when we are making progress toward these goals? First and foremost, we will see evidence of greater student learning. One bench-

mark might be that over 90 percent of all America’s students graduate from high school—demonstrating knowledge and application of 21st century skills and civic responsibility—and that 90 percent of them go on to graduate from a wide variety of post-secondary institutions. Another benchmark might be that students routinely demonstrate their knowledge and skills on both standardized tests and performance assessments designed and scored primarily by accomplished teachers, with the data used to inform a multi-layered public school accountability system.

We will know we’ve made significant progress when policy makers are no longer willing to lower standards for becoming a teacher simply to fill shortages. Instead, any under-qualified teachers who must be hired to fill vacancies will be closely supervised by expert teachers who team-teach with them until they can pass an array of sophisticated teacher performance assessments. We will know we’ve made real progress when the most prestigious education professors regularly spend time teaching children and modeling best practice in professional development schools and residency programs. We will know the traditional hierarchy of school districts is breaking down when the highest-paid professional in a school district is a practicing teacher.

Finally, we will know the teaching profession has arrived when policy makers, practitioners, and the public come to see America’s accomplished teachers as the most trusted source of insights into how to best improve public education.

## What Will It Take to Get There?

There is large graveyard filled with promising education reforms that died prematurely. Analysts have documented how past efforts to transform teaching have failed because of limited technical know-how or the lack of political will. Without losing sight of that reform history, one thing is certain: Everything that needs to be done to transform teaching into a profession is being done somewhere: in some school, district, state, or nation. Indeed, many countries with whom America competes economically have instituted the kinds of changes proposed here. In Singapore, for example, teachers frequently



**Administrators must focus on organizing schools so teachers can learn 21st century pedagogy and spread their teaching expertise.**

work in hybrid roles, teaching, coaching, and leading while earning more than school administrators for whom they officially work. Globalization will bring more and more ideas about accelerating the effectiveness and professionalization of teachers to the forefront. Web 2.0 (and soon 3.0) tools can drive changes and ramp up the de-isolation of teaching.

Serving all public school students well in the future will require more than just the transformation of the teaching profession. We will need to create community schools that are “hubs of educational services” for children and families and offer disadvantaged school communities additional resources for safe housing and health care.<sup>33</sup> I believe we can create a dynamic new teaching policy framework that could soon guarantee a high-quality teacher for every student, every minute of the school day. These four components might be pieces of such a framework:

- An international clearinghouse of best teaching quality policies and practices to inform policy makers, practitioners, and the public alike, a venue that can be trusted by the majority of stakeholders and constituents.
- A national teacher recruitment and retention network that (1) identifies promising candidates interested in preparing themselves to teach in high-needs schools; (2) hosts and disseminates relevant hiring information on varied teacher candidates who potentially could enter teaching from various pathways; and (3) provides incentives for high-needs school to hire and keep these teachers in the classroom.
- New federal and state policies and funding systems to accelerate partnerships among school districts, universities, and community-based organizations to design and implement world-class teacher preparation and support systems.
- New union support to identify and support teacher leaders who have the expertise and the entrepreneurial spirit necessary to promote the spread of teaching expertise across the nation and the development of new forms of differentiated compensation, as well as accountability and new performance expectations for members of their profession.



## Who Needs To Do What Next

These proposals are not for the faint of heart. Some may call them impractical or unworkable—or just plain old “pie-in-the-sky.” But big ideas must pave the way for big deeds. Teachers as well as those who prepare and support them must take some big next steps if our nation is going to capitalize on the potential of a fully realized teaching profession.

Teachers can no longer afford to sit back and listen to the debate over the future of their profession. Instead, they have to engage in enterprising and risk-taking strategies that can promote a bold vision of professional teaching that the public is willing to embrace. They have to learn to be change agents. Michael Fullan has noted, “There is a difference between being an expert in the content of an innovation versus being an expert in the change process.”<sup>34</sup> Teachers must learn to translate their professional insights into practical policy advice. And those teacher leaders who have already become skilled at thinking about, designing, and advocating effective change strategies must be supported in carrying their messages to broad audiences interested in hearing what they have to say.

An assortment of recent national surveys reveal that teachers are among the most trusted members of their communities.<sup>35</sup> Teachers know more than anyone else what is and is not working well for students in their schools. Thanks in part to the No Child Left Behind legislation, attentive citizens are developing increasingly more sophisticated views of teaching and learning and are increasingly skeptical of current standardized testing regimes that de-professionalize teachers and severely limit the time students spend pursuing higher-order, inquiry-based learning and 21st century skills.<sup>36</sup> Influential voters are weary of the circular debates, tired of being stuck in a standardized-test rut, and anxious for fresh solutions that will benefit their children and communities. They are ready to listen to and heed the advice of thoughtful teacher leaders whom they respect. Now is the time to talk about the future of teaching.

Teacher educators must focus on not just preparing teachers for 21st century pedagogy, but also on preparing them for teacher leadership and preparing

their communities to listen to what teachers have to say. This brand of community organizing must focus not on partisan politics, but on mobilizing colleagues, administrators, and parents for the common good. Teachers and those who prepare them need to know how to effectively educate adults around issues of change and how to promote civic participation, public action, and negotiation to build a new non-partisan political force that can help transform public education for all students in all communities.

Universities and other non-profits who run training regimes must change their hiring, evaluation, and compensation practices so that only the very best teachers train the next generation—and that they are well-rewarded for doing so. In tandem, the policy makers who control the purse strings of teacher education and training must instigate radical and tough-minded incentives to drive dramatic changes in how teachers are recruited, what counts for being fully prepared, and who emerges as teacher leaders and educators.

Administrators must focus on organizing schools so teachers can learn 21st century pedagogy and spread their teaching expertise. The new administrative imperative is not only instructional leadership to ensure that 90 to 100 percent of students in a given high-need schools achieve proficiency in core academic subjects (e.g., New Leaders for New Schools), but leadership for teacher leadership. The new school administrator must know how to create time for teachers to lead and then design systems for them to do so, with and without formal authority. The new administrator must embrace more balanced, less hierarchical management and control systems, and be prepared for teachers to use and spread expertise that administrators may not possess. Administrators who rise in the ranks and are praised as exemplars in the field will be those who not only can manage schools, but those who can develop and use organizational and technological tools to elevate the best teachers and ensure that their teaching colleagues learn from them.

In closing I must mention Malcolm Gladwell, who has drawn on the sociological concept of the “tipping point” to describe and explain how unique ideas and products, as well as messages and behaviors, can rapidly develop and spread.<sup>37</sup> There will

need to be several tipping points along the road to this vision of the future of teaching. Social networking tools that galvanize human relationships will soon expand technical know-how and promote political will among growing numbers of teachers. Gladwell proposes that tipping points require connectors (those who link people), mavens (those who have specialized information used by those who are linked), and salespeople (those who are charismatic and can persuade policy makers, practitioners, and the public).<sup>38</sup> I am convinced that our nation has sufficient numbers of expert teachers who can serve as connectors, mavens, and salespeople. Many are ready, and others can be developed to lead the movement to create teaching as a 21st century profession that defines expert knowledge and its use for the public good far differently than even medicine, law, and architecture did in the 20th century. In doing so, they will transcend the debate currently owned by the unions, academics, and policy pundits and push forward a new era of teacher leadership that our public school students need and deserve.



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