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## INTRODUCTION

### Bringing Teaching Out of the Shadows

It is a fantasy, in some respects, to imagine that many people could see the work that students and teachers do in school and college classrooms or that faculty members could freely and happily exchange and discuss their work in person, in publications, or through the Internet. These remain fantasies today for a host of reasons: insufficient time, lack of resources, and limited access to technology; stubborn bureaucracies; and school cultures that reward conformity rather than creativity. Nonetheless, we can imagine what such a public system would look like and what the implications would be for students, teachers, administrators, and parents.

#### **Putting the “Public” Back into Public Education**

In a system that makes teaching public, what happens in classrooms is no longer a mystery. Teachers work together, sharing their expertise with colleagues in their own communities and across the country, and contributing to the development of a rigorously examined and constructively debated body of knowledge. Teachers from all levels, kindergarten through the Ph.D. seminar, learn from both the commonalities and the significant differences in the work of teaching that they do. Administrators and policymakers look at samples of student work from their own campuses and others, identify promising instructional innovations, and provide support targeted to the strengths and needs they see in their students and their faculty. Parents and members of the wider public can see what their

children are doing in school, and they have opportunities to develop their understanding of both how well the children are doing and *why* they are or are not doing well. By making teaching public, the emphasis can be shifted from political accountability to public responsibility. Making such a shift, however, depends on confronting both long-standing efforts to monitor teachers and their work and pervasive assumptions about the simplicity of teaching that undermine investments in the time and resources teachers need to develop and share their expertise.

### **Overseen and Overlooked**

Although numerous initiatives over the last century have focused on making public education accessible to everyone, the ability to see what goes on in the name of public education remains limited. Ever since Americans created the one-room schoolhouse and sent their children to it, formal education has taken place behind closed doors. In the early days of public schooling in the United States, local communities could keep a close watch and a tight rein on education by hiring, monitoring, and firing the schoolmaster (Tyack, 1974). The task may have been made easier by the fact that communities were smaller and schoolmasters could be judged on the basis of their public deportment. In a sense, community members did not have to see into the classroom to feel they knew what the teacher was doing.

As communities grew and the task of compulsory education in cities and other communities became more and more complex, communities turned to principals and superintendents to oversee and manage the work of teachers, and the development and approval of textbooks for use in many schools and communities and the explosion in the use of tests and testing early in the twentieth century provided further means to control what went on in classrooms without having to go into them.

Occasionally, often-horrified critics peered into schools to “discover” what really goes on and report it to the public (see Kozol,

1967, for example), but for the most part, over the last thirty years we have relied on test score data or other secondary sources to judge the state of education and, by implication, the work and effectiveness of teachers. We have tried to refine accountability systems by specifying more carefully what should be taught and testing more vigorously. We have invented new tests, administered them to more students more often, and attached greater consequences to the results.

Even today, as educators, policymakers, and the business community continue to launch efforts to raise standards, invent better curricula, implement “research-based” practices, and improve teacher preparation and professional development, few reform efforts reach directly into the classroom to look carefully at what teachers do. This situation is as true in colleges and universities as it is in elementary and high schools. Across the country, from kindergarten classrooms to Ph.D. seminars, we rely on relatively superficial measures to determine whether or not teachers and students are doing well. If the students are engaged (or at least quiet), test scores are high, grades good, and student evaluations strong, we assume that the class is going well, the teachers are good, and learning is taking place. But if students are active and noisy, if the scores are low, grades bad, and student evaluations weak, we assume that something’s wrong, the teachers are not qualified, and learning is not taking place. However, few people—inside or outside education—have a particularly well-developed sense of the many different kinds of classroom arrangements and activities that can support student learning, and few can merely observe a class, look at a syllabus, or even review a piece of student work and determine whether or not sufficient learning is taking place.

Of course, surface indicators such as grades and test scores serve a useful and necessary purpose. They allow quick, general comparisons across students and schools. At the same time, they can be misleading. In particular, they represent teaching and learning as if the playing field is level. They provide little of the contextual information that is needed to adequately interpret those results, and

in the process they suggest that context does not matter. In the world of surface indicators, teaching in a well-supported school in a wealthy area is considered to be the same as teaching in a school with limited resources in an impoverished neighborhood.

Furthermore, surface indicators really only tell us what it *looks like* is going on. In many cases those surface indicators may not tell the whole story. Stories about schools where students were getting good grades and seemed to be learning—but the truth turned out to be otherwise—are well known. Zavala Elementary School in Austin Texas, for example, launched a major reform effort after the principal called parents and teachers together and showed them that even though most of the students were getting good grades, many were failing on standardized tests (Murnane & Levy, 1996; Shirley, 1997). Even studies conducted with students and graduates at Harvard and MIT have shown that some students who have performed well in classes and tests in math and science leave class unable to apply their learning in common tasks such as explaining the phases of the moon (Gardner, 1991). It is as if, when trying to figure out how well a car is running, we do not bother to look under the hood.

### **Why Make Teaching Public?**

The invisibility of teaching and the focus on overseeing teachers' work grow out of the persistent and prevailing assumptions that teaching is a relatively simple process, one that requires little more than basic skills and can be studied largely without reference to the expertise of teachers themselves. Such views fail to take into account the extent to which high-quality teaching has to be adapted to the demands of constantly evolving curricula, changing contexts, shifting demographics, and the varying strengths and needs of students (Ball, 1996; Lampert, 2001).

It is possible to imagine teachers who feel their lesson plans and curricula are so well developed, their strategies for classroom practice so refined, and their skills in interacting with students so effective that they can carry out their work almost without thinking

about it. Like chess masters who have seen all the moves and know how all the games turn out, their practice has reached such a level of mastery that they can act intuitively, recognize problems automatically, and make appropriate responses with ease (Berliner, 1988). However, substantial differences exist between logical, concrete games like chess and an inherently ambiguous and unpredictable craft like teaching (Shulman, 1987; Lampert, 1985; Ball, 1996; McDonald, 1992). Teachers also must deal with the fact that conceptions of what and how students learn keep changing. These changes come about through the development of knowledge in the subject matter disciplines such as mathematics, English, and history; the development of new pedagogical approaches and techniques; and changes in policies, programs, and textbooks that are intended to help to guide teachers' instruction in the classroom. Correspondingly, over the years teachers have to make adjustments in their strategies and approaches to meet the needs and interests of changing student populations. Furthermore, at any given time classroom activity and student learning are open to interpretation (Eisner, 1998). What one teacher sees in a situation or in one student may be quite different from what others see, and, accordingly, they may respond in very different ways. Finally, the outcomes of teaching are unclear. Even with higher standards and better tests, teachers cannot be sure exactly what students will be doing in the future or that what students do in the classroom in one day or in one year will necessarily lead them to behave appropriately or act successfully in related situations in the future.

In a way, what teachers have to do is akin to playing twenty (or thirty or forty) games of chess all at once. To complicate matters, teachers cannot see all the pieces on each of the boards, and they often have to make the same move in every game (regardless of the progress of the individual matches). And teachers always pick up the game in the middle: they have to build on the "moves" of their colleagues and then pass the game on to others. Under these circumstances, mastering a finite set of moves or strategies or implementing a preordained script is not sufficient; teachers need to

develop the ability to make professional judgments with limited information in uncertain environments. In doing so, teachers gain knowledge and understanding of the process of learning that others are unlikely to have and that are not easily captured in research or experiments that attempt to generalize across groups and settings. This expertise—grounded in specific situations and adapted to the needs of particular students and communities—needs to be articulated, examined, and shared.

## **Why Is Making Teaching Public So Hard?**

### **Assumptions About the Nature and Work of Teaching**

Limited time and rewards for reflecting on their practice and sharing it with others often leaves teachers with few regular opportunities to reflect on their work or share what they are doing in their own schools, much less with colleagues in other communities (Little, 1999, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989). As a consequence, many teachers lack the means and the support they need to adapt their practice to the changing conditions they constantly face or to consciously and purposely deepen their expertise and produce more sophisticated performances.

The lack of support for teachers' learning stands in marked contrast to the elaborate and sophisticated support systems that can help professionals in other fields to develop their ideas and share them with a wide range of audiences. Nowhere are these differences in support more evident than in comparing the treatment of artists and scholars with the treatment of teachers. "Uninterrupted time to work, good working conditions, and a supportive community"—that is the promise of many institutions dedicated to advancing the work of scholars and artists. In institutions for advanced study, scholars and artists learn when they work alone and without interruption, with little or no guidance from others, in a beautiful environment

and a relaxed social setting; but teachers usually learn in intense courses, seminars, and workshops, in close collaboration with peers, and under the supervision of someone else (Hatch, 1998).

These drastically different approaches to the support of scholars, artists, and teachers are rooted in strikingly different perceptions of the outcomes and nature of the work that teachers and artists and scholars do and in substantial differences in the conditions and contexts in which their work is carried out. Both these differences in perceptions and contexts help to explain why there has been so little support to help make teaching public.

### **Advancing the Field Versus Developing Personal Skills**

Advanced study programs for artists and scholars reflect the basic premise that the *work* of artists and scholars has a life beyond the individual that will make a difference in their fields and disciplines. In contrast, programs for teachers are based on the premise that the *individual* will make a difference in the lives of others. Thus many programs for artists and scholars assume that those who have been selected have the skills, expertise, and potential to make those contributions. And if those individuals need anything to advance the field (aside from time to do their own work), these programs suggest that what they need primarily is supportive and stimulating interaction with peers with whom they might not ordinarily come into contact. Consistent with these beliefs, it would be presumptuous for directors or staff to assume that they knew what the participants needed to make their breakthroughs and that programming particular activities would be counterproductive. However, programs for teachers make the assumption that, no matter how skilled and accomplished the participants are, they could be more effective if they could learn the latest ideas, techniques, or strategies developed by other experts. As a result, it makes sense to engage them explicitly in activities in which they can learn with and from others.

## **Doing Creative Work Versus Learning to Improve**

Hand in hand with such different premises are basic differences in the way the work that artists and scholars do and the work that teachers do is perceived. “Real work” for scholars and artists includes the examination, development, and refinement of the ideas and products that reflect their art and scholarship. Although many of these individuals may also teach, teaching is usually part of the daily burden of activities from which they are relieved. In contrast, many people view the “real work” of teachers as taking place solely in the classroom in interactions with students. Work that takes place outside the classroom—whether for planning, professional development, or building relationships with colleagues and parents—is often seen as secondary (if it is considered to be work at all).

As a consequence of these different perceptions, when scholars and artists go to centers for advanced study, they are perceived as going to do their real work and getting away from the distractions and other burdens that can interfere with it; but when teachers take time out from their own classrooms, they often have to face the perception that they are getting a break from their work and from their primary responsibilities.

## **Working in a Public, Historical Context Versus Working in Isolated Places**

The differences in advanced study programs also grow from the different conditions in which the work of artists and scholars and that of teachers is carried out. For example, although it is not always easy for young and unknown artists and scholars to get their works displayed, produced, or published, it is expected that they will do so. In areas such as the visual arts, music, and drama, professionals have the means to make their work and ideas public in galleries, museums, theaters, journals, and books. Scholars can choose from a wide array of informal lunches, job talks, meetings, presentations, conference proceedings, and publication opportunities to share their

latest research with their peers. Publishing industries and institutions exist that can make their work public.

Furthermore, the fact that artists and scholars produce works that can last over time and that can be read and viewed by wide audiences creates a history to which the participants in centers for artists and scholars can contribute. Even something as simple as the fact that the previous residents have left their signatures on the walls of their studios at an artists' retreat like Yaddo in Saratoga Springs, New York, can have a profound effect in this context. As the public affairs coordinator from Yaddo once explained to me, "I showed [a writer] into her studio and a couple of days later she said that she remembers very clearly the moment in her life when she decided she was going to be a writer, and it was after she'd just completed a book by James Baldwin. And she's sitting there working on her novel in the studio and she looks up and sees James Baldwin's name signed on the pine board on the wall." Because many of the most recognized and accomplished scholars and artists have been to centers like these, to be a resident is, in some ways, to join with them. In such settings, James Baldwin becomes a colleague and not just an inspiration.

Given these conditions, programs for artists and scholars assume that they must give artists the time and place to do the *real* work—doing research and creating art—that they have the capacity to do but may not be able to do because of the normal constraints of their daily lives. Correspondingly, programs for scholars and artists generally make little effort to find out how the participants' work is going while they are in residence. At most, program staff may ask participants to report on what they have done during their residencies, or they may keep track of the products produced by participants; rarely are the programs themselves asked or expected to produce results that demonstrate the value of their efforts.

Instead, program staff assume that if they provide the time and place, then the results will come. Books will be published, articles will be read, artwork will be displayed, and plays and music will be performed. It's assumed that simply by placing artists and scholars

in proximity to one another they can become part of a larger community; they can make connections to existing networks and gain access to the publishers, editors, producers, and funders they might need for support. Simply by being in the same surroundings as James Baldwin, Aaron Copland, and Albert Einstein, they can become a part of the history—and the future—of their professions.

### **Immediate Impact Versus Long-Term Development**

The conditions for teachers are far different. In programs for teachers, the focus is on the here and now, and they are expected to develop skills that will have immediate benefits for their students. As a consequence, teachers face almost constant assessments of their own work or that of their students, and programs for teachers are often asked to pursue formal evaluations and produce quantitative results that show what the participants have learned and demonstrate the “added value” of the programs immediately after teachers have participated.

Furthermore, there are few expectations that teachers will produce work that will be shared beyond their classes and schools, and, in comparison with artists and scholars, relatively few means exist for teachers to publish their work and share it widely. The industries and institutions of education are designed to provide teachers with materials and information and to test them on what they do with it, not to help them share their own work with a wider audience. Some teachers can and do write articles and books, and there are some journals and book series dedicated specifically to publishing the work of teachers, but for the most part these opportunities remain few and far between, and for most people these activities are generally secondary to their real work—teaching.

Instead, what is shared widely is the work *on teaching*—produced to a large extent by researchers and others—rather than the work *by teachers*. It is as if, in the art world, there were a vast network to support the development and dissemination of the work of the

philosophers, reviewers, and critics, but few ways for painters, writers, sculptors, and musicians to get out of their studios and share the products of their work with their peers or a wider audience.

Due to the absence of an infrastructure analogous to the one that supports the development, dissemination, and preservation of the work of artists and scholars, it is as if teaching has no history. Although artists and scholars, and even the public at large, know the names of many of the most accomplished members of art and academia, even teachers are more likely to know the names of famous researchers than they are to know the names of effective teachers. Artists and scholars can trace their work back to the influences of people they never met or knew, but many teachers are rooted in the present. Their horizons are largely restricted to the teachers they have had in their own experiences and to the peers that they meet in their own schools and communities.

### **Bringing Teaching Out of the Shadows**

Despite the different assumptions that underlie the treatment of teachers and the treatment of artists, scholars, and other professionals and the corresponding challenges for making teaching public, well-established efforts to support teacher inquiry and research among K–12 educators and more recent initiatives to enable higher education faculty to document and examine their classroom practice reflect an entirely different set of beliefs (see, for example, Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Freedman, 1999; Stenhouse, 1983, 1988; Hollingsworth & Sockett, 1994). Building on Dewey's (1904) view that learning to teach is inseparable from learning to inquire, these efforts approach teaching as a complex intellectual endeavor that demands disciplinary expertise, a deep understanding of students, and sophisticated pedagogical skills. Furthermore, these efforts reflect the belief that the skills of the teacher are not innate capacities, but abilities that need to be developed over time, in collaboration with others. In this view, teachers are gaining new insights and ideas and learning all the time, advancing not only

their own work but also the work of their colleagues and their disciplines (Hatch, 2005).

These continuing efforts, along with renewed interest in education and recent developments in schools and college campuses across the country, provide glimmers of hope that the time may be right for change:

- Although many teachers continue to teach behind closed doors, on some schools and on college campuses they now meet regularly to share and discuss student work, write cases about their experiences, visit one another's classrooms, and post assignments and course materials on websites.
- Whereas professional development for K–12 teachers once consisted largely of brief “in service” workshops, and most professors had no preparation or professional development for teaching at all, faculty in both K–12 and higher education now have some opportunities to participate in discussion groups, teaching circles, video clubs, and “lesson studies” that enable them to learn from and build upon one another's work.
- Whereas the quality of teaching was once assessed by simple checklists and student evaluations—or ignored entirely—some teachers and higher education faculty now create their own portfolios, participate in peer review projects, and develop the skills to document their practice, reflect upon it, and improve it.
- Advances in technology and the reality that more and more of the materials and interactions of teaching and learning can be made available through the Internet are also contributing to an unprecedented opportunity to develop more sophisticated ways to collect, examine, and share the work of teaching and learning.

These developments reflect, as well, the growth of a number of institutions and organizations—including school reform networks, district-based professional development centers, campus-based cen-

ters for teaching and learning, and virtual networks—that are beginning to establish some of the incentives, infrastructure, and support that teachers need to make their work public.

The success of these endeavors rests on addressing the basic assumptions that lead society to treat teachers so differently from the way in which artists, scholars, and other professionals are treated. In particular, we must come to terms with history. A history of teaching should reflect in a central way the breakthroughs, debates, and advances of many different teachers. To make history, teachers have to have the kinds of institutional supports and networks that preserve ideas and advances in other fields. That means that simply giving teachers more time and space for reflecting on and articulating their expertise is not sufficient; we have to build an infrastructure for the scholarship of teaching by developing new means for representation and publication and by establishing forums for the discussion and exchange of teaching to which many teachers and the wider public can have access. We can begin to build that infrastructure by looking carefully at what it takes for teachers to make their teaching public and at how and what they learn when they do.

### *Questions for Consideration*

What assumptions do people make about teaching?

How hard is it to learn to teach? Is it a “natural” process” or one requiring teachers to develop specialized skills and knowledge?

How does the work of teachers compare to the work of other professionals? To the work of scholars and artists?

What will it take to make teaching public?

