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ABSTRACT

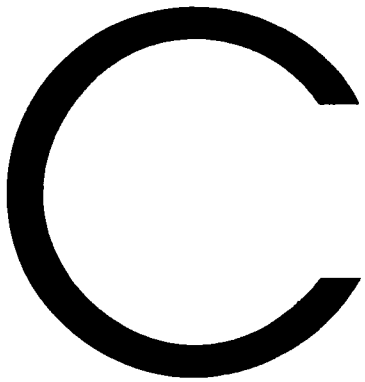
This paper describes, through selected personal snapshots, one person's experience inside the educational system and one foundation's experience trying to improve that system for all students. It focuses on: the track system and difficulty changing reputations; ways that diverse students and teachers can transcend the "cultural cocoon" with limited information and superficial criteria; how the system was built by and for adults; the work of the Ford Foundation to promote innovation over several decades; and the importance of the correctness of the theory of social action or change in the success of any efforts. The paper concludes that until more attention is paid to the context and conditions of schools and the work needed to improve them, there will always be a struggle to maintain any gains and to attract and retain quality teachers. (SM)

43rd Charles W. Hunt Memorial Lecture

Joseph Aguerrebere

Creating a better education system for all students

AACTE 55th Annual Meeting ■ New Orleans ■ January 25, 2003



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Charles W. Hunt 1880-1973

With a passion for teaching and a love of people, Charles Wesley Hunt helped shape teacher education for nearly half a century. His career spanned the range of educational responsibilities—teacher; university dean; president of State Teachers College at Oneonta, NY; and volunteer in national associations for teacher education.

As secretary-treasurer first of the American Association of Teachers Colleges and subsequently of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), which he helped create, Hunt participated directly in the changes sweeping teacher education during the mid-20th century. He worked diligently to develop AACTE as the vehicle to stimulate and effect necessary changes in the education of teachers. The tools for change were varied, but of special significance were institutional accreditation, qualitative standards for effective programs, and inclusion of all types of higher education institutions.

When the lecture series honoring him was established in 1960, Hunt observed:

> In the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, we have come from our varying stations across the nation to share our experience, to pool our strength, and to play our role in the galaxy of institutional organizations which are very important in our national culture. The gradual assembling of all [collegiate] institutions for the preparation of teachers into one working group is a movement of great significance.

AACTE is indebted to the life's work of Charles Hunt and honors him with this memorial lecture at each Annual Meeting.

About the Lecturer

The 2003 Charles W. Hunt Memorial Lecturer is Joseph Aguerrebere. Currently deputy director of the Education, Knowledge, and Religion unit of the Education, Media, Arts and Culture program at the Ford Foundation, where he has served since 1994, Aguerrebere takes office as president of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards March 1, 2003. At Ford, his grant-making responsibilities focused on education reform and the development of teachers and school system leaders. He also supported the advancement of community service in educational settings. Aguerrebere's career in education covers 21 years, spanning five school districts in California, as a high school teacher, assistant principal, principal, and central office administrator. He later served as tenured professor of education administration at California State University-Dominguez Hills.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share my thoughts and experiences with you this morning. As you know, the theme of the conference is about the future of the education profession and the boundaries that might need to be transcended as part of that future. I want to begin by using my personal experiences as a student, as a professional educator, and, now, grant maker to comment on where we have been and where we need to go as a nation to create a better system for all students. I also want to share a brief history of one foundation's efforts to create that better system and where collectively all of us need to focus our efforts.

Reputations Are Hard to Change

My story is not unique. The details may be, but many of you in this room may share some similar experiences in your lives. In talking with John Goodlad a few months ago, he told me that he was working on a type of memoir going back to his days as a student as a way of commenting on a set of topics. In a similar way, I am using my personal experiences to reflect on a larger world. I will share interactions with a system that needs to become better for all students. I must first acknowledge, however, that education in this country is not really a cohesive, coordinated system but rather a decentralized hodgepodge with the federal government exercising more interest in recent times but the states still playing the key role in carrying out an educational program that plays out at a local level.

Growing up in East Los Angeles, I attended an elementary school where I felt very comfortable in that most of us had a similar background. We were for the most part Mexican American. There were a few students who were not, but we had more in common than not, because we were all from what could be called the working-class poor. As we were ready to transition to junior high school, plans were under way, usually by those who were not Mexican American, to begin to separate. We had all heard stories that the junior high school we were assigned to attend was a tough place and that gang fights and stabbings sometimes occurred. Those who could transferred to a neighboring school district that was largely White to escape the imagined dangers. Some used false home addresses. Instead, I went to the allegedly "dangerous" junior high school. After all, my father went there and he turned out fine, and my neighbor attended the school,

survived it, and went on to a successful high school, college, and work career. The stories of danger lurking in the hallways and in the bathrooms turned out to be untrue. Reputations, however, are hard to change. Schools do not have the luxury of a public relations firm to communicate the truth of what is really going on. Schools often have reputations that are either better than or worse than they deserve, but they are never quite accurate. There is always a lag time for the perception to become aligned with the truth. Often, it is never aligned. Student achievement scores were not part of the process for assessing a school; at least the information was never shared with the public in those days.

I attended a high school, the same one all of my family and extended family attended, that was largely segregated—over 90% of the students were of Mexican ancestry. About 3,600 students were crammed into one city block. I can still remember sitting in the school auditorium with about 1,000 classmates, all of us new to the school, about to experience a general orientation. Three years later, I received my high school diploma and we were down to 500 students. Half of us had disappeared. Where did they all go? Looking back at it, there must have been some expectation that at least half of us would drop out or transfer along the way. It did not seem like a problem since the school was so crowded with classes being conducted in every available space. Planning for student attrition apparently allowed the school to function normally knowing that half of us would leave by the 12th grade.

Many of my friends I saw only socially at lunch, during passing periods, and after school, because I never had classes with them. A system of tracking for students was well developed, accepted, and never discussed. If you were in a particular group or track in elementary school or junior high school, you remained there in high school. Each track of students had a qualitatively different curriculum and experience. The upper track was small, with one class each of physics, chemistry, advanced math, English, and history.

Transcending the Cultural Cocoon

Following graduation, if you didn't enlist in the military to go to Vietnam, you worked in any job you could find. If you continued your education, and a relatively small percentage did, you went to the local community college for what seemed like the 13th grade. If you were really ambitious, you attended a state college, like Cal. State L.A. or Cal. State Long Beach. A few Japanese-American students went to UCLA. I applied to a local

private school and two state schools. Although I flirted with the idea of attending Stanford and had the grades to do so, I decided not to send back the admissions application because I could not see myself living anywhere else but near my family. Every school I applied to accepted me. So I made my decision based on what I knew—the color of the school's football uniforms and the reputation of their sports programs. Was it going to be powder blue or cardinal and gold? The truth was I chose one school over the other because one school offered financial aid sooner than the other. This was the deciding factor since my parents could not afford for me to attend any of these schools.

What I am describing is a process that many students in some communities go through—of making life decisions with limited information and superficial criteria. No one in my family or extended family had ever gone beyond high school. The only college-educated people I knew were my teachers. I did a little research on colleges on my own, but I could never find independent and reliable information that told me which college was particularly strong in a given academic discipline or field.

I lived, in essence, in a cultural cocoon, but I didn't realize it until I attended the university, where I sat in classes with people who did not share my background or experiences. It took me years to realize that every student in the class, though they may have come from affluent circumstances, lived in their own cultural cocoons. Theirs were just different from mine. The real test of learning was to venture out of one's cocoon and discover that upon interacting with others, there were really multiple realities.

As I sat in my first classes, it was not unusual to hear professors lecture using vocabulary I had never heard before. What surprised me, however, was that my fellow students would also use words that I did not know. I never wanted to publicly admit that I did not understand them, so I taped the lectures and discussions and used a dictionary to look up the words later. At the midway point of my first semester in college, I had my first midterm exam and first experience with a "bluebook." I was instructed to fill up the pages with answers to a set of essay questions in my political science class. I could not imagine filling up all of those pages with writing. Because I thought I was prepared for the exam, I was shocked to receive my bluebook back with a big D on my first midterm exam in college. I knew I was going to have to do something very quickly, especially since political science was my major. After class, a teaching assistant showed

me how to respond to essay questions. With only two grades used to calculate a final grade, I only had one more exam, the final, to improve my grade. I did much better on the final exam and felt quite lucky to receive an overall course grade of B. The problem was not that I could not handle college work. It was that I had never taken an exam before that required me to elaborate in essay form to a question. In high school, my tests were basically objective in format with occasional short answers. After that experience, I never had any more problems because I learned and practiced how to respond to a form of assessment that was unfamiliar to me.

Keep in mind that I was one of the top students in my high school graduating class. I thought I was well prepared since I had done very well in high school. I never felt like I did not belong or that I could not handle university-level work because there was always a message playing in my head that, with hard work and God's help, anything was possible. I got that message from my parents, especially my mother, and it has never left me. Unfortunately, many students of similar backgrounds are easily demoralized when confronted with a setting as daunting as a large university. Fortunately, my attitude in college was to learn and be open to different experiences. I sometimes saw myself as a type of anthropologist studying and experiencing the behavior of other cultures. I even joined a fraternity so that I could learn more about what they did in order to experience something different. Before joining one, the only thing I knew about fraternities was that on the TV show "Ozzie and Harriet," David Nelson, one of the sons, belonged to a fraternity and they used to have parties and go to the malt shop. It seemed harmless. Why not give it a try? I even got a job working at Disneyland all through college and spent my weekends and vacations operating rides in Tomorrowland and Fantasyland, an appropriate place for someone who failed to hear the master narrative that people from my neighborhood don't amount to much.

My decision to go into education did not happen until my senior year of college. I knew I wanted to contribute and provide some form of service to society, so I majored in political science because I thought this provided a way to work in government. By my senior year, I decided I wanted to teach at the high school level. In California, there was no such thing as an education major. Instead, we majored in a teachable academic subject first, then attended graduate school for the teaching credential. I'm glad that I didn't have to decide on teaching until graduate school. I probably would not have chosen teaching as an undergraduate because I

was not sure at that point. As in medicine, law, and other professions, there should be multiple defined paths at different stages of one's education into the teaching profession.

I spent my 5th year in graduate school learning how to teach and strengthening my expertise in the subject matter. I have to say, looking back, that I received pretty good training and had very good and well-supported student teaching experiences. I moved into my first job as a teacher knowing how to develop unit and lesson plans, goals, objectives, and activities and understood how to motivate and make academic subjects interesting for my students. My first job was as a high school teacher, and I experienced success, had no problems or frustrations, and received positive feedback from students, parents, and supervisors.

It wasn't until later that I discovered that not everyone went through the same preparation I did. I didn't realize until later in my career, as an administrator supervising and evaluating teachers, the extent to which so many teachers essentially learned their practice on the job and created their own way of teaching with little help, often referring back to the way they were taught when they were students in school. What I thought was a prescribed way for entering the profession turned out to be easily waived if a school district was desperate and chose to hire someone who lacked appropriate training.

In my next teaching assignment, I taught alone in a gym in a public park for high school-aged gang members who were not going to school because the school they were supposed to attend was located in the territory of another gang. I learned a little bit more about the teaching of different subjects and how they fit together. More important, I learned about the importance of motivation, developmental appropriateness, relevance, and context. The goal was to help these students complete high school, and I saw success as long as the external environment did not swallow them up. If I was in a cultural cocoon, these young people were in a cocoon that even Harry Houdini would find difficult to escape from, and that assumes they wanted to escape. The truth is most of these young people were very fatalistic about their life circumstances and opportunities because it was the only reality they knew.

A System Built by and for Adults

In the longest stage of my career, I served as an administrator in three different school systems and cultural settings. Though I learned from very experienced administrators and was always successful in different settings

and levels, it was always a struggle to create the best environment for students when it was so apparent that the system was built by and for adults. I remember attending a statewide meeting of top-name research professors and practitioners where the purpose, ostensibly, was to develop a research agenda that would help improve schools and meet the needs of students. I came out of it disappointed because it was really a meeting where researchers had already developed their research agendas and were simply seeking out practitioners to validate their work. The ideas for research never really originated with the real problems and challenges of practitioners.

The next stage as a professor made me realize how little higher education actually influences behavior and practice in schools. Schools and universities, then and now, find themselves answerable to separately developed accountability structures that are not aligned with each other. Schools and school systems are answerable to federal- and state-developed schemes that measure worth through a testing regimen.

Professors owe their allegiance to a system that measures productivity in prescribed ways. Scholarship, teaching, and service are all defined in usually narrow ways. For those professors who decide to work in the field with real schools, it is usually as an individual entrepreneur. Rare is the occasion when a group of professors or an institution gathers and coordinates its resources from different academic disciplines and professional schools to address the needs of a particular setting.

The Ford Foundation—Innovation and Limitation

This brings me to my current position, where I have had an opportunity to examine and observe how the larger system operates in a variety of settings around the country and, more recently, around the world. From my vantage point, I have been able to learn and interact with the best thinkers and doers not only in education, but in other fields in which the foundation operates.

I work for an organization that has worked behind the scenes in a very profound way and had an influence on my education, though I didn't realize it at the time. For this, I draw directly on the reflections of the late Ed Mead, one of my predecessors at Ford, to describe the foundation's work over a period of decades.

As a student and unsuspecting consumer of these efforts, I didn't realize, for example, that Ford was behind the experimentation going on in my school and others around the country in the 1950s and '60s where

time, space, use of staff, and resources were being manipulated in different ways. Time was being reallocated in the form of flexible scheduling, space in the form of open classrooms, and staffing where a team of teachers cotaught a group of students, or instructional television, where the teacher reluctantly put a television in front of us and we all passively watched an educational program. When it was over, the television was carted away and we quickly moved into another subject. It was also a time when major curricular reforms like PSSC Physics, BSCC Biology, and MACOS Social Science were developed and became the newest formulation of a particular academic subject. Math was always preceded with the word "new" to make sure we all understood it was new and improved—while secretly everyone was asking why the old math was so terrible and why counting using a binary system was so much better. These innovations unfortunately failed to take into account the importance of context—the complex interaction of students, parents, teachers, community, and the larger social environment in which schools operated. Many of the innovations did not last because these contextual factors were not addressed.

Recognizing these limitations led to the development of work that was more comprehensive and addressed several issues at once in the same setting. The foundation's Great Cities Schools Program of the 1960s had projects located in school systems in some of the nation's larger and older cities aimed at improving the opportunity of disadvantaged children in schools. The program helped to develop remedial and compensatory education along with preschool education. It set the stage for large investments by the federal government as part of its War on Poverty. In education, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, HeadStart, Follow Through, and Upward Bound all followed this early foundation-supported work. The foundation's efforts also developed links with communities informally through shared programs with other municipal services like health and recreation and began to use community parents as classroom aides. This laid the groundwork for later efforts by the foundation.

In the mid to late 1960s, the foundation promoted community participation, and the democratization of schools became part of the core of the decentralization movement as it played out in places like New York City. As we see today, we continue to alternate among various governance models in which the decision-making authority moves back and forth between centralization and decentralization, proving that good and bad decisions can occur regardless of the governance structure.

Also in the 1960s, Ed Mead launched an initiative called the Comprehensive School Improvement Program (CSIP). It ran throughout the 1960s with 25 projects spread around the country at a cost of $30 million. The projects included school systems that were large, small, medium, urban, rural, suburban, rich, poor, segregated, and desegregated. They covered early childhood through secondary school, and each was linked to one or more colleges for technical assistance, research, and training. The distinctive feature of CSIP was the deliberate introduction of a variety of innovations in curricula, staffing, student grouping, and uses of space, time, technology, and teaching methods—operating simultaneously. The thinking was that the sum would be greater than its individual parts. No two projects were alike, and some were broader than others.

In 1972, 2 years after the last grants were made, Ford published a report called "A Foundation Goes to School" as an assessment of the CSIP. The report examined the role of the foundation and its assumptions, strategies, tactics, and decisions. Since the assessment found the CSIP program wanting in a number of aspects, some observers skipped the insights and lessons learned and pointed only to the failures. It was and continues to be one of the rare occasions when a foundation looked honestly at its work, warts and all, and shared it with an external audience.

In fairness, the study never framed its analysis in terms of success or failure, but rather looked for what could be learned from a well-funded and thoughtful effort to improve schooling. The study found that despite remarkable efforts, the projects generally did not firmly establish innovations in practice or produce widespread improvement in the quality of educational programs. The study challenged many assumptions and beliefs. It found, for example, that it was much more difficult to put the products of educational research and development into practice in real schools, especially urban settings. Applying university-based academic expertise to the world of public schools rarely led to lasting or significant improvements. It also found that money alone did not guarantee better results. Overall, it underestimated the complexity of improving schools. Some features of this complexity are well known to us today but were being realized for the first time in the 1960s. The context of schooling, which includes organized teacher unions, the community, parents, and students all operating in a range of social conditions, had a profound impact on the day-to-day and long-range work of the schools. The lessons

brought into clear focus the effects of the broader community on the affairs of a school.

Until that time, the foundation had appeared to be relatively confident about cause and effect. New insights caused the foundation to ask what could be learned about achieving enormously complex objectives by exploring a range of options in different settings.

Another lesson that emerged from the Foundation Goes to School report was that the ultimate innovator in schools was the teacher. CSIP learned that changes in practice were directly related to the degree of training of teachers. In all of the projects, the teacher was seen as the key to school improvement. The teacher's skills and attitude were identified as the central factors in improving a school beyond the status quo. The report also put instructional technology into clearer perspective. No matter how rich the potential of a technology, it would always be complementary to the human teacher. Likewise, curriculum packages produced in research depended in large part on the understanding and support of the teacher. A major understanding gained from CSIP was that lasting and significant changes would not occur unless teachers were directly and actively involved in the planning and development of the desired changes.

CSIP also caused the foundation to think about the nature of institutional change in education. The question was no longer what innovations work, but what works for whom and in what context.

Results from CSIP affected the foundation's grant making of the 1970s, which focused on two broad areas of concern: equity of the educational enterprise and the quality of teaching and learning in schools. The foundation's equity work during the 1970s was concerned with school finance, which led to state-level litigation around the country, school desegregation remedies, Title IX implementation assistance to address gender equity, affirmative action, and the rights of children in relation to schools. Each of these areas led to public policies in education.

In the 1980s, building on the lessons of previous work and working on the larger context of schools, the foundation merged its public school work and its human services and community development work into a single unit called Urban Poverty. It tackled issues like youth unemployment, teen pregnancy, safety, housing, social services, and welfare, all in addition to the improvement of urban schools. The foundation decided to concentrate its resources to address this constellation of issues. This led to the foundation's City High School Recognition Program from 1981 to 1983. Two hundred high schools were recognized for their progress on many

fronts. This was the beginning of a strategy that would be adopted by government and industry. The Baldrige Awards and the Innovations in Government Awards are current-day examples of using recognition to advance good practice.

The issue of teachers' composition and quality continued through the 1980s, and a minority-teacher diversity initiative began in the last part of the 1980s. I had been a part of that work as a professor, and I inherited the work when I joined the foundation in 1994.

There was also a renewed concern with teacher preparation programs. As the *Nation at Risk* report in 1983 called for the raising of standards for students, it took a second wave of reports in the middle 1980s to argue that students could only reach high standards with the help of well-trained teachers. The Carnegie Corporation issued a report on teachers in 1986 that recommended a number of changes, and around the same time, a group known as the Holmes Group was launched with the help of the Ford Foundation. Each called for reforms in teacher preparation and development. One recommendation of this group called for an emphasis on the clinical phase of teacher development. This led to a new foundation effort focusing on clinical teaching based on two foundation efforts that were started earlier in the decade. The first was the Urban Math Collaboratives formed in many cities around the country. These were learning communities of educators from school systems and universities. The second effort expanded on the idea of a teacher center and turned it into a clinical setting. The foundation worked with the Pittsburgh school system to turn one of its high schools, Schenley High School, into a school where teachers were trained in a clinical setting. This was very similar to the medical training model of a teaching hospital to prepare doctors. In this case, specially trained teachers were called clinical residents. The Holmes Group in its reports called these settings professional development schools; Ford called them clinical schools. These schools were viewed as beachheads for improving the initial training, induction, and development of teachers. They were led by schools, universities, and teacher organizations.

Related to educational quality, the foundation increased its efforts to train teachers through other types of staff development projects. This included projects using class advisers, teachers as consultants, and the creation of independent teacher centers. These were indirect attempts to improve schooling. The foundation also supported research efforts about teaching and learning. The shortcoming of this strategy was complicated by the very nature of educational research, which at its worst is fragmented,

not cumulative, poorly conceptualized, and produced for researchers and not policy makers or practitioners. At its best, good research can provide insight and guidance to efforts in the field and inform practice and policy.

This brings me to the 1990s and the beginning of this decade. I would describe the foundation's domestic education work as investing in various strategies simultaneously. First, an "inside the schools" strategy focuses on improving the capacity of the education professionals, which I work on. Second, an "outside" strategy attempts to build understanding of external constituents including policy makers, community and advocacy groups, and the public at large. Third, a pipeline-connecting strategy attempts to connect the various segments of education into a seamless pathway for students to proceed successfully to eventual graduation from college. Last, because each of these strategies cannot succeed alone, collaboration across levels and from inside and outside the educational system becomes the critical element to realize successful outcomes.

The Theory of Social Change

So why have I taken so long to retrace history when the theme of this conference is about the future? Because if we are not careful, we will embark on a road of repeating mistakes of the past, as we are prone to do. We must learn from our experiences and build agendas that are able to build and sustain progress toward the goal of improved student outcomes for everyone.

What I have learned from my time at the foundation is that the success of any effort depends in large part on the correctness of the theory of social action or change and the conditions in which the action plays out. In the past, the foundation operated without articulating and being explicit about a theory of social change, though it was implicit in the work. We still need, however, to unpack and test the assumptions that underlie our work in order to develop a theory of social change that is useful. For example, the idea of linking scholars with public officials, with practitioners, with community members may sound like a good thing to do, but how do they work together successfully when they often have different perspectives and interests and speak different languages? This has proven to be extremely difficult to accomplish but very powerful when achieved because the collaborative is better able to address the key challenges of sustainability and scale. Sustainability refers to the ability to sustain good practices, behaviors, and successes over time despite inevitable changes in personnel and fluctuations in monetary support. Scale refers

to the ability to take good practices and have them spread so that they become standard practices across a larger and larger set of schools and settings.

Another element to a theory of social change is how ideas are adopted, take hold, and grow. Where should reform ideas come from, and who should lead these efforts? One view is that reform ideas must grow organically from those closest to the problem. This view holds that ideas from the outside will never stick if they are imposed from the outside. Our experiences tell us that there is not a simple answer. Good ideas can indeed be shared and, if accepted, can be adapted to local situations. As for who leads the reform efforts, the ones we have worked with suggest that the impetus and leadership for an idea can come from many places. The history and political and cultural context ultimately determines this. For example, many of the school-wide reform models implemented in schools, such as Success for All, Accelerated Schools, The Comer School Development Model, and the Coalition of Essential Schools, are led by a researcher/scholar from higher education who is external to the local schools. In another case, a comprehensive school reform model called Project Grad, which started in Houston, was initiated by a businessman who was a former CEO of a large company. The Alliance Schools, which are active in Texas, was started by a community organizer who has helped parents and adult communities to take the lead in school reform. Leadership for school reform can also emanate from within schools, as District 2 in New York City has demonstrated, where the district superintendent has developed a powerful model of investing in the capacity of educators to teach more effectively, and it continues to yield strong and consistent results.

The creation of a better education system will never be a simple one, but there is no question that we have never known more about these issues than we do today, and each year we will know even more. But the knowledge we gain must be harvested and used to build a knowledge base that is useful and reliable so that we repeat the successes, not the failures. We need a research infrastructure that is organized to address real problems facing the field. It must be codified and organized in such a way as to be easily searchable. It must be cumulative and build on current knowledge. The new Institute of Education Sciences has the potential to address that need if it can develop its own identity and stay free from political influences. Current technology makes it possible for the field to accomplish this in ways that were not possible in the past.

I have described, through selected personal snapshots, one person's experience inside the educational system. I then described, through selected examples, one foundation's experience trying to improve that system for all students. Where are we today and where do we need to go?

The optimist in me suggests that we have made tremendous progress over the last 20 years of building a better system that is educating more students at a higher level. The progress, however, is uneven because of the inequitable and inadequate distribution of human and material resources. This prevents us from having the kind of educational system that all of us deserve where all students are being well served. The research enterprise needed to support this goal has not kept up with our ambition. If we are serious about making true and lasting progress, we must increase our research investments many times over. Government expenditures for educational research remain a few hundred million dollars per year compared to the multibillion dollar investments in fields like agriculture and health. Surely our children are as important.

Despite that, we have now reached a point in the national discourse where most people in positions of responsibility agree that good teaching matters and that all students do not have access to this critical resource. I can honestly say that many of our grantees bear the responsibility for helping to shape the discourse that the way to better student outcomes is through competent, caring, and committed educators. Over the last decade, a substantial amount of resources have been expended by the federal government and states to invest in a system that supports better teaching.

In some ways, however, we are only in the beginning stages of what must be a long-term effort to build and strengthen a profession that is, in some respects, still a quasi-profession.

Debates about regulation versus deregulation of the profession, content knowledge versus pedagogical knowledge, alternative certification versus traditional certification are really false debates and not helpful to advancing a profession. They derive from different notions of what it means to be a professional educator. Other professions had to endure some of these same issues and fortunately they survived them, and education can as well.

When I consider all of the efforts that have been made in the name of education reform, I am reminded of what Ed Mead said in his reflections on the foundation's work. He said that given all of our efforts to improve education, ultimately they boiled down to the quest to optimize the point of contact between a teacher and a student. If we were truly successful in

creating a system in which that point of contact were optimized, then we would no longer talk about people who succeeded and who came from environments like the one I grew up in by saying they "beat the odds." Unfortunately, success is still too rare in communities like mine. When it does happen, it becomes worthy of a feature-length movie—as was done with my alma mater when a math teacher named Jaime Escalante demonstrated, to the disbelief of the administrators of a national testing organization, that students from my neighborhood could actually perform at a high level on the Advanced Placement test in calculus. The movie, *Stand and Deliver,* still serves as an inspiration to many as a triumph of underdog students and their teacher beating the system at its own game. Unfortunately, if you were to visit the school today, you would still find the same situation I experienced as a student—a small proportion of the students performing at a high enough level to attend top-ranked colleges and the large masses moving through the school undereducated. We have not been able to hold onto our gains. When I visited that school a few years back, the principal then told me that achieving success was like climbing a hill of sand. "The moment you stop moving your legs toward the top, you slide back down," he said. I understood his point about the never-ending process of improvement, but I now think that his use of sand to describe school improvement was more accurate than he realized. One cannot build or sustain a school on a hill of sand. Rather, we should build schools for which the foundation is strong and solid and the building is engineered to withstand the latest half-baked idea, yet is designed with an open architecture so that innovation and new ideas can be added to the structure. This means we should be working collectively to "change the odds" by changing the environment and culture so that it is a positive force that supports success.

Unless we pay equal or greater attention to the context and conditions of schools and work to improve them, we will always be struggling to maintain our gains. We will also struggle to attract and retain quality teachers. Students in schools are a captive audience. Prospective teachers are not. Good teachers will work where they feel they have a true chance of being successful, are fairly compensated, and are in an environment where they are valued and can continue to grow. This climate of honor and dignity is what all of us desire as human beings. While acknowledging the presence of self-interest, authority, honor, and dignity have been the driving forces leading to the growth and development of other professions. Ultimately, authority, honor, and dignity in the public interest need to be

the driving force for educators if education is to take its place as a strong and respected profession. We are on the verge of crossing that threshold. We must not stop now, because the cause is worth it and our children deserve more.

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