# TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (SEE ACCOMPANYING PRESENTATION FOR COMPLETE CHARTS*)

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It is wonderful to be back in the Philadelphia area, where I met my husband (then a law student at the University of Pennsylvania while I was a graduate student at Temple University) and started my career (teaching high school in Camden, Philadelphia, and Rose Tree-Media). I'm honored to be here to give the Connie Clayton lecture. Dr. Clayton became the superintendent of schools during the years that I spent in Philadelphia and she was a tireless worker for educational improvement and equity in this city. So I am particularly gratified to be able to give a lecture in her honor. The current holder of the Clayton Chair, Diana Slaughter-Defoe is another woman whose work on issues of educational equity for women and people of color I greatly admire. Of course I could say this about so many educators in Philadelphia who I've known throughout the years since I started teaching here more than 25 years ago.

I want to frame this conversation around what is currently going on in Philadelphia because I think it is in some ways a prototype of what is going on in the country. These are momentous and difficult times in Philadelphia. A major school district been taken over, handed out, and chopped up. The for-profit Edison schools opened here, just as Dallas has asked them to leave for a lack of measurable improvement in its schools. We know that hundreds of teachers and administrators are leaving their positions as they fear what will be happening in this city, while parents and children who can flee are frequently doing the same. What a sad change from the years of the late 1960s and early 1970s when there was such a renaissance of innovation and hope in the Philadelphia public schools.

As a prototype of urban education and as a sign of what may happen elsewhere, what will become of Philadelphia? What will become of her children? What will become of all of our children and what will become of us as a society? That is what I want to talk about today.

> John Dewey said, at the turn of the last century,
> What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely, and acted upon, it destroys our democracy (Dewey, 1900 [1968], p. 3).

A few years later, James Baldwin noted in his *Talk to Teachers*,

> The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself or herself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself "this is black or this is white," to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not, to ask questions of the universe and then to look at those questions is the way he achieves his identity- but no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What society really ideally wants is a citizenry that will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish (Baldwin, 1985, p. 326).

Now I think that the question before us is: will public education perish or will we be able to join hands and rescue probably the most important institution in our society today? Does every child have a right to learn and how do we secure that right for every child?

*The New Challenge for Education*

That right has become increasingly important because our economy has changed so much since the schools that we have inherited were invented almost 100 years ago. At that time, about 5% of the jobs were so-called "knowledge work," or jobs

requiring specialized training and skill. Now those are about 70% of the jobs, so that a young person who does not succeed at education has very little chance in life. And a society that does not succeed at education has a more and more difficult time competing in the world. If, in fact, the challenge in our time is to enable learning at much higher levels throughout our society, the equally important challenge is to enable teaching in ever more powerful ways so that we can support that kind of learning. [Insert chart 1]

The consequences of under-education grow more severe with every year. Today, a high school dropout has less than a 50% chance of getting any job at all. If he is African American, his chance is only one in four. And if he gets any job, it will earn less than half of what the same job earned 20 years ago. Wages are increasing only for those who have a college education. For those who have a high school education, they are declining. And for those who drop out, there is very little chance of income at all. Lack of education is ever more strongly correlated with welfare dependency, and, as welfare disappears, with incarceration. Today, we are building a two-tier society deeply divided by access to education.

A fundamental question for our society today is whether we will educate or incarcerate the children in our cities. Over the last decade, prison enrollments in the United States have tripled. For an African American male between the ages of 18 and 24, the odds of being in the criminal justice system are greater than the odds of being in higher education. Funding for the prison system went up by more than 600% over the last 15 years, while funding for schools increased only 25% in real dollar terms. More than 50% of the growing number of inmates is functionally illiterate; they don't have the literacy skills to engage the economy. And 40% of the adjudicated juvenile justice population has learning disabilities that were never identified in school. In essence, many of these young people are in prison because our educational system did not teach them so that they could learn. We're willing to spend $30,000 a year to put a young man in prison, which is nearly equivalent to the tuition cost right now at Stanford or Harvard University. But we won't spend even one-third that much for the education of a child who needs expert teaching.

The real challenge for a society that needs to educate all of its children to high levels is developing teachers who are able to teach every child. Teaching all children for understanding is much more complicated than merely "covering the curriculum" or getting through the book. This kind of teaching is not just standing up and telling students what you know. It requires understanding what kids are thinking, where they come from, and what it will take to connect to their experiences, their understandings, their language backgrounds, and create a bridge to the curriculum.

The challenge is that what our schools are now asked to do is something they have never before been asked to do and something for which they are not currently designed and organized. In recent years, we've heard a lot of talk about the failures of education. There is a view that public education has gotten worse. But in fact, in 1950, the so-called "good old days," more than 50% of all students dropped out of high school; students with exceptional needs did not have a right to education and most were not in school; and students of color were in segregated, underfunded schools, and frequently were denied access to high school altogether. It was the "good old days" only for a narrow slice of the population who had access to reasonably good schools and who managed to learn in the ways that schools taught.

In those days, high levels of education were less essential than they are today. For example, when I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, people with less than a high school education could get a good job in a factory, make a good union wage, buy a house, and raise a family. Those jobs are nearly gone in cities like Cleveland and elsewhere. Today, only 10% of jobs are low-skilled jobs like the ones that dominated our economy then. To meet the demands of the current labor market, we have to educate nearly all students to the levels we have typically reserved for the 20 to 25% who were streamed off into gifted and talented programs or "honors" courses. This new challenge is to educate a more diverse group of students to higher levels than we have ever before attempted.

*The Persistence of Unequal Educational Opportunity*

The ongoing problem of educational inequality is suggested by the persistent gap in achievement for majority and "minority" students (a term that is increasingly a misnomer, as students of color are the majority in urban districts, and they are the majority in the state of California, and will be within a couple of decades in the country as a whole). Over the last decade, the achievement gap has widened, and graduation rates have also begun to decline for the first time in this century. There are a lot of explanations for why we have such an achievement gap: We hear about the "bell curve," Murray and Herrnstein's (1996)argument that achievement differentials are race-linked and hereditary; we hear arguments that low achievement is due to a lack of effort, a "culture of poverty," deficient homes and communities, or inadequate school "accountability," (by which most proponents generally mean there is not enough testing in the schools or enough sanctions associated with test scores).

What are the actual sources of inequality? I think there is a big disjuncture between the popular conversation about what is going on and what the reality is in our schools. There are lawsuits now in New York, California, South Carolina, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Montana, and other states protesting the fact that some students get many fewer resources for their education than others. Here in the United States of America, where presumably all men are created equal-and maybe some women too - we have the most inequitable funding system for education of any country that we think of as a peer or competitor. In fact, the data show that nationwide, schools that serve students of color and low-income students have lower resource levels than schools that serve the most affluent students. Expenditure levels in the top-spending 10% of districts in this country are ten times higher per pupil than in the bottom 10%. Within any given state there is about a three-to-one ratio between the highest spending districts and the lowest spending districts. Students serving large numbers of low-income and "minority" students tend to have larger class sizes and larger school sizes; less well-qualified teachers; fewer computers, books, and supplies; less access to information technology; and fewer college preparatory or AP courses. In fact, in a lot of schools it's not possible to take college preparatory courses, because they are not offered.

When I was in Philadelphia in 1975, I did a study as a research assistant for a nonprofit education law center that was looking at the distribution of resources to students in Philadelphia. At that time the schools were extremely segregated. They are still well segregated, but it was even more pronounced then. We found that in schools that served primarily or exclusively black students, the instructional funding levels were lower, the access to qualified teachers was much lower (whether you count that by content degrees, higher degrees, credentials, or other measures), and the courses were much different. There were many fewer academic courses, many fewer advanced courses, many more vocational courses and many more general education courses. The lawyers were considering whether to litigate that issue in 1975. I'll never forget one of the consultants to the strategy session who argued against that line of litigation, saying, "Well, 'those' kids don't need those courses anyway." I was stunned at that response and distressed that the decision was not to litigate that issue in 1975. Two years ago, the Public Education Network of Philadelphia collected data that looked almost exactly like the data I had collected in 1975 - data showing the differential access to resources found in schools that serve different populations of students in Philadelphia. [see chart 6]

Not much has changed in all these years. The inequalities students experience are made easier to inflict by the fact that our schools continue to be deeply segregated. In fact, over the last decade our schools have become more highly segregated, according to Gary Orfield's (1996; 1997) research out of the Civil Rights Project at Harvard. Two-thirds of black and Latino students attend primarily "minority" schools, and these are typically schools with lower levels of instructional resources. One of the more important arguments for integration is not that a student might learn better sitting next to someone with a different skin color, but that by having those with more power in the schools with those who have less, it may be harder to maintain the inequalities that are otherwise inflicted on those with little voice and clout. However, there are also inequalities within integrated schools, where most "minority" students are concentrated in low-track classes, which have less well-qualified teachers, lower quality and less well-taught curriculum, and fewer and lower quality materials.

We know much more about how achieve greater equality in educational outcomes than we can implement. As Yogi Berra once said, "In theory, theory and practice are the same, but in practice, they're not." I think that really holds true. We know, for example, from a number of studies that students who are placed in higher track courses achieve more than those with comparable initial achievement who are placed in lower track classes; that ultimately, what kids achieve is determined more by the curriculum they get and the resources brought to bear on their education than it is by their initial test scores. Jeannie Oakes did a recent study of a city, not far from where I live, in which she showed that at every band of achievement, for students who had the same test score levels, Latino students were much less likely than white and Asian students to be placed into the higher tracks, and these track placements strongly predicted later achievement [insert chart 7 or 10].

Other researchers have also shown that students of different races who have the same grades and test scores are generally sorted into different tracks offering different curriculum opportunities. I saw it with my own kids' education in Montgomery County, Maryland and New Rochelle, New York. They ended up, quite often, being the only or one of the only African American students in the upper track as they watched their equally bright friends tracked down in middle school. Gloria Ladson-Billings describes the same thing occurring in Wisconsin that I watched happening in New York. This racially based tracking system is a nationwide phenomenon that is played out as one of the "regularities of schooling," as Seymour Sarason calls them. And curriculum access creates educational opportunity. When you hold socioeconomic status constant, white and "minority" students who have equally well-qualified teachers and comparable curriculum perform comparably in reading and mathematics. But rarely do they have equally well-qualified teachers and comparable curricula. Curriculum opportunity is to a great extent allocated by race and class both within and across schools.

I want to give you a sense of how these inequalities play out for real children in real schools. And while we consider this, I want you to hold the question in your mind, "What is accountability, really?"

*Video transcript from "Teacher Shortage: False Alarm?" by John Merrow*

> [Narrator] What this does tell us is that many school systems have low standards, and some operate under the misguided assumption that any teacher can teach any subject. But, there are classrooms without qualified math and science teachers. School systems say they just cannot find instructors. For example, inside this portable classroom at Brett Park Middle School in California is an eighth-grade math class that has been without a regular math teacher for most of the year.
> [Interviewer] "How many math teachers have you had?"
> [The students] "Let's see, there is Mr. Barry, Miss Gaines, Mr. Lee, Mr. Dijon, Mr. Franklin, Coach Brown, plus one of our other teachers. . . There is another man named, uh…".
> [Interviewer] "So you've had so many teachers you can't remember all their names." [Student] "Yeah."
> Fifty miles away at Oakland High School, this eighth-grade science class has had nothing but substitutes all year long--the entire year without a certified science teacher.
> [Interviewer] "What has that been like, having 16 teachers or 7 or 9 during the year?"
> [Student] "It's just weird, it's like you have to get used to a new teacher every couple of weeks or something."
> [Another student] "I feel betrayed, because this is the third year, ever since I've gotten to junior high school, I haven't had a science teacher."
> [Interviewer] "So you've had substitutes?"
> [Student] "All three years."
> [Another student] "All it is…is like the same thing over again, when a new teacher comes, sometimes we've got to skip the chapters and start all over again. It's difficult."
> [Interviewer] "Have you learned much science this year?"
> [Students] "Nope…haven't had a chance to…"
> [Teacher] "It breaks my heart…"
> [Narrator] Nancy Coruso teaches science at Irvine High School.
> [Nancy Coruso] "People are not getting the classes here…they come down and they beg me, can I get into your class, please, I want to learn, I really need a science class. And they're not getting them."
> *End of video transcript*

The video goes on to highlight three certified science teachers who applied to teach in Oakland and were not called in for job interviews. The real story is that unqualified teachers and substitutes have been hired in this and other districts to save money because they cost less. This school district happens to be Oakland, but there are schools in Philadelphia that have the same kind of situation. There are schools in Newark, in Jersey City, and all up and down this coast as well as the West coast that have children deprived of an education in this way. So, what are we accountable for-to these children? Some say, "Let them eat tests." Accountability is all about testing, so, we'll give them more tests. But we have to ask, will that make our system more accountable to students for providing them the basic services that they deserve and need? What do we mean by accountability today? And what is the obligation of the state, the obligation of the district, and the obligation of every school to every child within it? When most people talk about accountability, they talk mostly about what the kids are accountable for, what test score they have to achieve before we hold them back, or take away their diploma. We rarely talk about the accountability of the adults in the system-those with the power to change policy -and what they're accountable for on *behalf* of the children.

Well, what matters most for student learning? We know some things about what factors influence achievement, and I would argue that this is what states, districts, and schools should be held accountable for. Parents are compelled by compulsory education laws to send their children to school. What is the obligation of those in power to ensure that these children are treated appropriately when they get there? We know, for example, that one of the most important determinants of how students achieve is the quality of their teachers: what teachers know and can do makes a big difference to what students learn. This includes not just what teachers know about the content that they teach, but also what they know about *how* to teach that so that it can be understood. This encompasses what teachers know about how to appreciate the backgrounds, cultures, and experiences of their students; what they know about how to teach such things as reading and writing; what they know about how to teach second language learners; and more. We also know that students tend to learn more in smaller classes and smaller schools. In fact, we

have been accruing research for about 40 years that shows that, all else equal, students do better in schools that are between about 300 and 800 students, depending on which studies you read. Students, especially those who have the greatest needs, tend to do much more poorly in schools of 2,000 or 3,000 students where they are anonymous, where no one knows them well, and where their teachers cannot work together well.

When I was teaching in a comprehensive high school, seeing more than 150 kids a day, and I had a little tenth grade English niche in a big bureaucracy, I did not know my kids' math teachers or their science teachers or their social studies teachers. Within each class, all of my students had different teachers who had no knowledge of each others' curricula or students and no time to plan together. I became aware of how little I could be truly accountable for my students beyondmy classroom when one of my students, whom I had gotten finally to begin to write and to engage, stopped showing up for class. After about two or three days I called and couldn't get anyone at the home, so I called the office and found he'd been expelled for using drugs. Nobody had bothered to tell me. There was no sense that teachers should be involved in decisions affecting their students, that educators should work as a team, or that there was an obligation to get to know each student and be accountable for his or her overall welfare and progress.

*Organizing Schools that Work*

We know from both research and practice that schools that organize themselves so that the kids are well-known, so that teachers can take care of their students, have better outcomes. We also know that students achieve at higher levels when the curriculum is coherent and when it is aimed at understanding and performance. In the kinds of bureaucratic schools that we inherited, there is little collaboration: Each teacher typically does his or her own thing. The standards movement is trying to change that, trying to encourage a more coherent curriculum so that it adds up from one year to the other, so that what goes on in one class is similar to what goes on in others.

But most kids have to make sense of a fragmented school experience themselves. They go from one teacher to another, each with different standards and expectations. One says, "I want you to put your name on the right hand corner;" another says, "Put your name on the left hand corner." This one says, "Write in pen," and another one says, "Write in pencil." This one says, "Tell me what the book says," and another one says, "I want you to be creative and think for yourselves." And you're eleven years old, going into middle school and wandering from one side of the big building to the other, with a lot of adults telling you different things about what they expect and what they care about, and you're supposed to make sense of that for yourself.

Imagine if you went to your job everyday and you got there and after about 45 minutes sitting at the desk somebody rang a bell and said, "Now you've got to run to another desk and work for another boss at the other end of the building, one with different rules and different activities. And we're not going to tell you all the rules or expectations; you've got to figure it out for yourself. Please, don't talk to your co-workers; that would be cheating." After 45 minutes of trying to work there, somebody blows a whistle and you've got to run to another part of the building and get another boss with another set of rules. And 45 minutes later you go to another end of the building and do the same thing all over again. How much productive work do you think that you would get done? And then after a few months, somebody says, "Well, that's enough of that; we're giving you a whole new batch of jobs with new bosses." Some students can handle this complexity, but others become overwhelmed and have few anchors to hold onto. That's why we start losing kids in middle school.

Another key factor in achievement is instruction that focuses on understanding. Accomplishing this on a wide scale is a challenge in this country. When students come to this country from other systems they tend to say that the work here is much more rote-oriented and memorization-dependent and less is expected in terms of thinking, writing, and performing. These differences are related to the very different kinds of performances we cultivate on examinations. The U.S. is almost alone in the world in our reliance on multiple choice standardized tests. Students who go to school in most other countries, including in most parts of Europe, the Caribbean, Asia, Canada, and in parts of Africa, take essays and oral examinations, create work that is evaluated by teachers and moderated in scoring sessions by teachers. Learning is enhanced when students receive the kind of instruction that reflects knowledge and skills they are going to use when they get out of school.

*The Importance of Teacher Quality*

Teachers are central to all of this, and evidence suggests that qualified teachers are one of the most important elements (for a review, see Darling-Hammond, 2000). In an analysis of nearly 900 Texas school districts, Ronald Ferguson (1991) found that

teachers' expertise-measured by scores on a licensing examination, master's degrees, and experience-accounted for more of the inter-district variation in students' reading and mathematics achievement in grades 1 through 11 than student socioeconomic status. An additional, smaller contribution to student achievement was made by lower pupil-teacher ratios and smaller schools in the elementary grades.

The moral of the story is that student achievement relies on teachers who know what they're doing in settings where they know the kids well. We can create all kinds of special programs, but if we don't have teachers who know what they're doing in settings where they know the kids well, all the peripheral programs - compensatory education, dropout prevention, pregnancy prevention, and so on - are not going to get kids where they need to go. The other finding of Ferguson's study was that, holding socioeconomic status constant, almost the entire black/white achievement gap would be eliminated if the students had equally well-qualified teachers. Yet qualified teachers are the most inequitably distributed school resource.

Another study (Strauss & Sawyer, 1986) found that North Carolina's teachers' average scores on the National Teacher Examinations (a licensing test which measures subject matter and teaching knowledge) had a strong influence on average school district test performance. Taking into account per-capita income, student race, district capital assets, student plans to attend college, and pupil/teacher ratios, teachers' test scores had a strikingly large effect on students' failure rates on the state competency examinations: a 1% increase in teacher quality (as measured by NTE scores) was associated with a 3 to 5% decline in the percentage of students failing the exam. The authors' conclusion is similar to Ferguson's:

> Of the inputs which are potentially policy-controllable (teacher quality, teacher numbers via the pupil-teacher ratio and capital stock), our analysis indicates quite clearly that improving the quality of teachers in the classroom will do more for students who are most educationally at risk, those prone to fail, than reducing the class size or improving the capital stock by any reasonable margin which would be available to policy makers (p. 47).

The effects on achievement are large. Another study that looked at matched samples of teachers who were and were not certified in mathematics found that the students of those who were certified made significantly greater gains in achievement in general mathematics, and even larger gains in algebra (Hawk, Coble, & Swanson, 1985). Yet in schools that serve the largest proportions of students of color, there is only a 50% chance of getting a mathematics or science teacher who has a license and a degree in the field they teach (Oakes, 1990).

Poor and minority students all across the country get the least qualified teachers. In California, the proportions of unqualified teachers are almost 10 times greater in high-minority schools than in low minority schools [see chart 14], and these trends are very similar in a number of other states and cities [see chart 15]. The teaching gap is in fact what causes much of the achievement gap. Because of the recent 'shortages' of teachers and the hiring of less and less qualified teachers in many cities over the last five years, there are now lots of places where lots and lots of kids are taught by teachers who don't have a background in their content area, who don't have knowledge about teaching, and who are unable to help students learn.

*The Enforcement of Sanctions for Students*

Despite these inequalities, states increasingly hold students to the same standards. And studies in California, Texas, and New York have shown that, after controlling for student background, students whose schools have less qualified teachers score significantly lower on the state reading and math tests that now have very high stakes attached to them. That was always the case, but now the stakes are higher and the punishments are stronger. The punishment falls on the child, for the most part. In some states with high-stakes testing and exit examinations, there are now as many as 50% of students of color not receiving diplomas and sometimes as many as 30% or more of all students failing to graduate.

The problem is severe. Graduation rates in Texas for a cohort of 9th graders four years later are now less than 70% for whites and less than 50% for African American and Latino students. The same process is happening in a number of other states, especially where testing is not accompanied by investments in the quality of schools and teaching. Where incentives are strong to increase average school test scores, the easiest way to achieve this is often to push out the lowest scoring kids.

Some recent studies have documented several effects of such incentives. One is that kids are pushed out to special education where the scores don't count in school averages. Another is that students are held back so that their scores look better in the short run because they're being tested at a lower level. And another is that they're transferred out to GED programs or encouraged to leave. Studies have found over and over again that in districts using tests mostly for grade retention, retained

students do not do better. In fact, they achieve at lower levels than similar students who are promoted, and they drop out in higher rates. Now this does not mean we ought to socially promote students. However, the answer for students who struggle is not to punish them, but to teach them more effectively. Holding them back and doing the same thing all over again is not a solution, particularly if they're in a school where the quality of education that they're getting is poor anyway and the quality of teaching that they're getting is poor.

Under these circumstances kids get discouraged. They try and try to pass the test and finally give up. In Texas, new reports are documenting how students disappear. Although many high schools have a senior class one-third or one-fourth the size of the freshman class, dropout rates don't include the missing students. They can't find them. They're not in the data system. They don't know where they are. As low-scoring students disappear, average scores go up, but education is not necessarily improving. We have to start asking the questions: What really is going on here? Who is getting educated? How are they getting educated? And what are we doing to ensure that education actually improves for all students?

What will we do, in a society where increasing numbers of jobs require higher levels of education, if we have more and more young people leaving school earlier and earlier? That is one of the unintended outcomes of retaining kids in eighth or ninth grade so that they'll do better on the test in the 10th grade. In addition to Texas, data from Massachusetts, New York, and other states with high stakes tests show that dropout rates are going up; students are leaving school earlier and are less likely to return. Kids are leaving school with an 8th or 9th grade education in an economy that has almost no work that pays a living wage for that level of education.

Can we afford a set of policies that essentially fail our children once by offering them an inadequate education and then fail them again when they cannot achieve standards they were never prepared to meet? And then when they've been failed, put them out on the street without the wherewithal to be a productive member of society? What will happen to us as our prisons become nearly as populated as our higher education institutions?

*Alternatives that Work*

The situation I have described is, fortunately, not universal and it is not inevitable. There are redesigned schools in urban areas that support powerful teaching and learning for all students (Darling-Hammond, 1997). These are small schools where teams of teachers stay with the same students for a couple of years, where resources are allocated so that more teachers can be hired, where classes and pupil loads are smaller so that students are well known. In New York City, there is a set of schools with these features - schools like the Urban Academy, International High School, Landmark High School and others - that have had more than 90% of their students graduating and more than 90% going on to college in communities where the graduation rate is typically 30%. To achieve these kinds of outcomes more widely, we will need to redesign the schools that we inherited from Franklin Bobbitt and Frederick Taylor and the scientific managers of the 1920s, who had a very different idea of what they were trying to accomplish, in order to create places where all kids can be well taken care of and can learn.

As one of the students in one of these schools said to a researcher who was studying the school, "School should not be mass production. It needs to be loving and close. That is what kids need. You need love to learn." (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002) We have to remember that. We can't teach kids well if we don't know them, particularly if they come to school not having had the kind of supports, day to day, that can compensate for poor schools.

The differences in such schools are obvious when you spend time in them. This is Vanguard High School, one of several schools designed in the way I've just described.

[Transcript of video]

> …One of many schools that share the same facility. Students play together on interscholastic teams. They share the gymnasium, a library and an art gallery. The graduation and college attendance rates are over 90%. It's a very safe school. There is no graffiti. The community is involved in that school. It's a wonderful success story.
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> Vanguard [is] one of four high schools in the Julia Richmond Education Complex. There is also an elementary and middle school in the building. Students remain in the same schools with the same teachers for four years. At

Vanguard, 340 students are taught by 26 full time teachers. That's a student to teacher ratio of 14:1.

[Principal speaking] "I put all of my resources into teachers. I don't have assistant principals. I don't have a social worker."

Vanguard aims to help students become intellectually resourceful and to develop lifelong learning skills. You won't find as many tests given here as in most public schools. Vanguard relies on portfolio assessments. Francesca Smith is a senior at Vanguard. She says that portfolios are like multifaceted term papers. A student has 2 to 12 weeks to research a subject, write a paper and then to defend its thesis in an oral presentation before a committee consisting of students and teachers. The idea is to get students away from formulated learning.

[End of video transcript]

There are features that Vanguard and similarly successful schools have in common. First of all, there are teams of teachers, each of whom see no more than 80 kids, rather than 150 or more. This is accomplished by having longer class periods and by having more of the staff committed to full-time teaching. In the United States, only 43% of education employees are classroom teachers. In Japan and Belgium, it's 80%. In most European countries, it's about 70%. So we have a lot of people who are involved in schooling around the edges, but not nearly as many of our resources invested in the classroom, where the most important work has to happen. In these schools, most staff are classroom teachers.

Each team of teachers works with a group of kids whom they share. The social studies, English, math, and science teachers stay with the same group of kids for two years; they get to know them well. They have time in their schedule to plan as a team around the kids and time to plan as with other teachers in their discipline around content. Every adult is an advisor who is responsible for about 10 or 12 students as a guide and an advocate. The advisor calls students' parents, goes to the home, and connects with other teachers on behalf of the student. The parents come in for parent conferences. The bond is there.

The assessments are portfolios in which students have to conduct a number of projects and meet standards within each discipline: for example, they must conduct a science experiment-design it, meet certain criteria, control the variables, write it up and then defend it against standards to a committee, like a dissertation committee. They have to do the same thing with a social science research project, a literary critique and analysis, a mathematical model, and so on. They graduate with a portfolio of ambitious work that most people think kids like this cannot do. If they had gone to a traditional high school most of the students would be doing worksheets and questions at the end of the chapter most of the day.

I've been to defenses of such portfolios --we have started a school modeled after this approach in a community where I am working-and it is thrilling to see students' pride at the exhibition and their sense of accomplishment they've met a standard they understand and respect. There's a culture now that if we teach it and if you don't learn it, too bad, we go on to the next unit and the next course. At these schools, in contrast, there is a culture of revision and redemption. You work on the task. We give you feedback. You revise it. We give you more guidance. You revise it. You revise it until you meet the standard. At every juncture there is greater and greater competence, and we point out your growing competence to you, and we make sure that you get the coaching you need to improve.

Anybody who achieves anything great in life in a performance area goes at it over and over again until they get it right. If you're an Olympic skater, it's not like you do a couple of turns and fall on your butt and your coach says, "Well, that was too bad, now let's move onto the next thing." No, you get up. You learn what you need to do to get it right and you keep at it. Similarly, what we see in schools that have this kind of performance standard with a culture of revision and redemption is that performance increases and the gap begins to narrow. At the end of the process, the result is a very narrow gap and a steep improvement between where people started and where they finished, because it's not about, "Did you get it right the first time?' It's not about teaching by assignment-I give you the assignment and your parents teach it to you at home. And the parents that are home and know how to do it have kids who get better grades than the kids who don't have parents who are at home and know how to do it. It's about teaching with lots of scaffolding. It's about teaching with lots of skill. It's about performance that is continually rewarded and challenged to the next level. Under these circumstances, we see that all kids can learn.

*Policy for Successful Schools*

How can we, as a nation, create a system of schools within which all students have the opportunity to learn? We've tried a lot of kinds of accountability strategies over the last decades. There's political accountability, enforced by voting for school boards and other elected officials; bureaucratic accountability, enforced through rules and regulations; market accountability, reflected in schools of choice. We've seen all of these in Philadelphia and other urban districts over periods of time. Professional accountability is a newer idea: it is based on the notion that we need to develop teachers' skills. Policymakers are currently pursuing standards-based reform. It is critical to realize that high standards have to be for the adults, not just for students. Accountability is not achieved through a system that says, "We have high standards and we know they're high because so many students can't meet them." You hear that in a lot of schools, "Our standards are so high, few students can meet them." If that happens, I believe standards are too low for adults in the system. The adults have to improve their teaching, their ability to design and run schools so that kids can learn.

What we see across the country are a lot of different approaches to standards-based reform. Some states have used tests to drive reform, attaching incentives to test scores for students (for example, promotion and graduation), for teachers (for example, merit pay or poor evaluations), and for schools (for example, extra funding if they see an increase or "D" or "F" if they don't). Other states have engaged in a more systemic reform, in which they have developed standards for teachers as well as students, used learning and teaching standards to guide professional development and curriculum reform, and used tests for information, rather than for punishment. And they've begun to redesign schools and equalize resources.

In districts that have pursued this kind of approach - San Diego being one that was recently studied - they recruit the most able teachers. They invested in a well-qualified teaching force. They raised the salaries to recruit fully certified teachers. They did more outreach. They created mentoring programs for beginning teachers. They put in place intensive professional development around student literacy. And when a student is not meeting a standard, they get assigned to the best teacher for the next year, the most expert teacher, rather than the least. Achievement has been increasing and the gap is narrowing in San Diego, because the focus has been on improving the quality of education, not just on testing.

At the state level, Connecticut provides another example. During the 1990s, Connecticut raised its reading scores to the highest level in the country. The public school population is about 35% African American, Latino, and recent immigrant students. There are a growing number of English language learners who are second language speakers, as well as a growing number of low-income students, and yet, achievement is going up along with graduation rates.

What did Connecticut do? They invested in higher salaries for teachers, and they also increased the standards for entering teaching so that the knowledge base for practice increased. Teachers were expected to know their subject matter more deeply and to learn how to teach students with special education needs, students whose first language is not English, students who need a variety of types of instruction. They invested more money in schools that were doing least well, instead of taking money away from those schools. And they used assessment data to guide improvements rather than to punish students or schools. What we see when those kinds of investments are made is that the picture changes dramatically. All students learn to higher levels. The question is: do we have the will?

Do we have the will? Do we have the courage? I know all of you who are out there in the school system are working hard, day in and day out, often unappreciated by the people who stand on the sidelines and point fingers and criticize. God bless the people working in our public school systems. We need to join hands among those who are in higher education, those who are in school systems, those who are in political roles where they can change policy, those who are working in the legal system, those who are working in the health and community systems. We need to join hands. This is probably our last opportunity as a society to take the steps needed to reclaim our democracy. When Frederick Douglass talked about the process of change, he said,

> Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has. It never will. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightening. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its waters.

Well, we can make a difference together. I want to leave you with the words of my favorite democrat (with a small "d"), Langston Hughes, whom I think described what it is we need to do. In his poem *Freedom's Plow* (1943), he says,

> When a man starts out with nothing
> When a man starts out with his hands empty but clean

When a man starts out to build a world
He starts first with himself
And the faith that is in his heart
The strength there, the will there
To build.

First in the heart is a dream
Then the mind starts seeking a way….
His eyes look out on the world
On the great wooded world
And the rich soil of the world
On the rivers of the world.
The eyes see the materials for building,
See the difficulties too,
And the obstacles.

The hand seeks tools to cut the wood
To till the soil and harvest the powerful water
And then the hand seeks other hands to help
A community of hands to help

Thus, the dream becomes not one man's dream alone
But a community of dreams
Not my dream alone but our dream
Not my world alone but your world and my world
Belonging to all the hands that build.

America is a dream
The poet said it was promises
The people say it is promises
That will come true.
The people do not always say things out loud
Or write them down on paper
The people often hold great thoughts
In their deepest hearts
And sometimes when blunderingly express them
Haltingly and stumbling say them
And faultily put them into practice.

The people do not always understand each other,
But there is somewhere there
Always to trying to understand
And the trying to say,
You are a man, you are a woman,
Together we are building our land.

America.
Land created in common
Dream nourished in common,
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on.
If the house is not yet finished
Don't be discouraged builder,
If the fight is not yet won
Don't be weary, soldier.

The plan and the pattern are there.
Built into the warp and woof of America.

All men are created equal.
No man is good enough to govern another man
Without that other's consent.
Better die free than live slave.

Who owns those words?

America.

Freedom, brotherhood, democracy.

A long time ago an enslaved people
Heading toward freedom made up a song
"Keep your hand on the plow.
Hold on!"

That plow ploughed a new furrow
Across the field of history
Into that furrow, the freedom seed was dropped
From that seed, a tree grew
Is growing, will ever grow

That tree is for everybody
For all America
For all the world
May its branches spread
And its shelter grow
Until all races and all peoples
Know its shade

Keep your hand on the plow.
Hold on.

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