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Investing in Professional Judgment-in-Action: Negotiating Relationships That Enhance Trust, Responsibility, and Efficacy

Cynthia J. Reed and Margaret Ross

Investing in Professional Judgment-in-Action: Negotiating Relationships That Enhance Trust, Responsibility, and Efficacy¹

Teachers' judgment-in-action has been maligned by current policies and legislation, as well as the cultures and structures of schools. During the last decade, there have been numerous calls for educational reform, often accompanied by expanded legislation to control, structure, and evaluate schools.² Most of these legislative mandates created policies focused on increased accountability. Frequently they included measures to assess student and personnel performance, dictate structural and governing arrangements, and impose curricular standards. Many of these accountability policies are punitive in nature: If a school or student does not perform well on standardized tests, then a punishment is administered. Although standardized test scores have been raised in some instances, there is a general feeling among many educators that these "reforms" are not working.³ Punitive accountability mandates do not work because they do not allow for the complexity of schools and the communities in which they are situated. Experts in school change theory agree that there must be a greater emphasis upon the roles, rules, and relationships governing schools if long-term and meaningful reform is the goal.⁴

If a renewal of roles, rules, and relationships is to occur, there is a need to re-examine the importance of civility and balance in the professional identities of teachers. One way to do this is to redirect energies toward investments in professional judgment-in-action. As educators, we need to work toward establishing public recognition for the high standards, hard work, and ability to adopt and sustain best practices that most of the teaching profession embodies. Further, we need to look inward, examining our own practice and taking responsibility for what we have accomplished and what we have yet to accomplish.

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In this article, we discuss three prime arenas for professional judgment-in-action: accountability and assessment; governance; and school-site level democracy building. For each area, we review academic dialogues regarding what has occurred in these areas and suggest possible strategies that would further enhance opportunities for renegotiating relationships that foster trust, responsibility, and efficacy. We begin by stating four underlying assumptions that guide our argument and end with policy recommendations that could enhance relationships and allow for the complexity within schools today.

Underlying Assumptions

1. Less is more. Many reform initiatives are too cumbersome, unrealistic, and grandiose to possibly make a difference. Any good teacher could tell reformers before time, money, and energy has been expended that overly complicated changes will not work, but no one asks. Teachers understand how the educational system works. They know that plans need to be focused and adequate time must be allowed for constructing meaning out of what the changes suggest.

2. We need to build on our professional strengths. We need to begin developing reform efforts by building on educators' professional strengths, including: knowledge of teaching and learning processes; in-depth understandings of how schools really operate; and recognition of the demands placed on teachers' professional and personal lives by various reform efforts. We need to focus on building capacity for institutional decision-making beginning at the classroom level. Teachers and their professional organizations need to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in powerful and public ways. We need to educate the community at large about the important roles that educators can and do play. Further, we need to emphasize the competence of educators and their collective willingness to be involved.

3. Teachers offer a source of professional judgment that others cannot offer. Who knows more about assessing learning than those who do it on a day-to-day basis? Who knows better the importance of reasonable class sizes if students are to be offered individualized attention? Because of this, educators must take responsibility for enlightening other teachers, as well as the public, regarding which issues and methods are valid and reasonable, rather than proffering that right to others with less knowledge and motivations driven by issues other than enhanced teaching and learning. As educators, we need to stop being so damned agreeable every time a politician or reformer suggests a large-scale overhaul that we, as professional educators, know will not work. With each failed reform, the public becomes more jaded—and so do we. While we need to be responsive to reasonable reforms, we have the right and the responsibility to collectively say NO! to initiatives that cannot possibly succeed. However, rather than simply refusing, we need to offer insightful, professional arguments explaining why that reform would not be in the best interest of students and the public at large. We cannot afford to look defensive. Instead, we should be taking a proactive stance and suggest reforms that do make sense. We need to initiate a few well thought-out reforms that will make a visible difference in teaching and learning.

4. Governance structures should be redefined to promote relationships that build and enhance trust, responsibility, and efficacy. Governance structures must be reconstructed so that they embrace school site-level democracy building. This means a move away from conventional schools that operate through bureaucratic, fragmented, and disconnected means toward schools that are egalitarian,

participatory, and connected both internally and externally. There is a move from teaching in isolation toward sharing power, authority, and decision-making about critical issues while recognizing our responsibility to be serving the community.

These four assumptions are grounded in our belief that for too long there has been an over-emphasis on external controls to education. We have allowed others to tell us what we know best, and, as educators, we have believed them when we were told that we did not have the right to question their thinking or to challenge their mandates. Educators have become isolated pariahs because the public does not know who we are, how hard we work, or how important we are. Rather than continually fighting the same battles over who should control our schools, we believe that the problems should be reframed. A new emphasis should be focused on fostering and enhancing professional capacity, and on getting the word out to others about this professionalism. Discussed in the next section of this article are three arenas that we think are prime starting places, selected because they encourage teachers to view themselves as competent, worthy professionals. Each of these arenas builds upon relationships that enhance trust, responsibility, and efficacy.

Accountability and Assessment

In direct contrast to the underlying assumptions that frame our thinking is the prevailing public attitude that teachers are not as professional as they should be. This attack on teacher professionalism has been reinforced by media sound bytes, opportunistic politicians, and misguided reformers. These attitudes have been created and reinforced by a multitude of players: textbook and standardized test publishers; policy makers who focus on mandating minimum standards and quick-fix reform strategies; administrators who have promoted top-down authoritative strategies to “manage” teachers; researchers who negate the expertise of teachers’ lived classroom experiences; and others.⁵ When considered along with comparably low salaries, poor working conditions, and devalued worth as recognized by the public, it is possible that many teachers or potential teachers have themselves begun to believe this prevalent rhetoric. When teachers feel disenfranchised and leave the field, it further fosters a negative public perception about public schools.

Negative public perceptions of teaching and the quality of education in general are exacerbated by competing views about the purposes of public education, and, therefore, how quality should be assessed. A major political struggle has emerged between those who see policy and governance issues as the means for instrumental outcomes as measured by standardized achievement test scores or cost-cutting and those who see education’s potential for human emancipation.⁶ When considering the economies of schooling, the focus for too many has been on dollars and cents, not on common sense. According to Taylor and colleagues, public school policies have traditionally had two main functions: identifying the desirable cultural norms for education; and instituting mechanisms of accountability for measuring student and teacher performance. They state, “[E]ducational policy has thus become a bureaucratic instrument with which to administer the expectations that the public has of education.”⁷ The voices of much of the public have been silenced, though. Only those voices representing the “suburban” values of consumption and the need for external control seem to be taken seriously. These same voices tend to be the ones with the most political clout.

Accountability and Assessment as Strategies for Claiming Professional Judgment

We must take the lead in letting others know that we have something worthwhile to offer, while at the same time helping to create spaces for the voices that traditionally have not been heard. Policies, and particularly the accountability measures that spring from them, reflect the economic, cultural, social, and philosophic values of those who create them. Therefore, it is essential that we expand the dialogue to include those who have not been represented, such as parents, members of the business community, and teachers. Forums must be created that encourage open discussions about the multiplicity of purposes for public education. We need to reconsider to whom we are really accountable and for what. Throughout this process, we must also ensure that those who will be held accountable for the implementation of processes and practices have ample input into the dialogues that frame them.⁸

Next, accountability must be redefined. We need to move from the current bureaucratic emphasis on following established procedures to a new, flatter organizational style that recognizes and values professional accountability.⁹ Professional accountability emphasizes responsiveness to student needs while considering the realities of daily life for teachers. Asserting our professional judgment about assessment practices is a good place to begin.

Issues of assessment and accountability are of paramount importance to teacher professionalism and judgment-in-action. The accountability movement fostered by technocrats has done great damage to our schools and to the teaching profession. Over-emphasis on standardized, quantifiable results has refocused energies needed to systematically renew our schools and redirected those energies toward improving only what will be valued as criteria for success—standardized, quantifiable measures that tell little, if anything, about a student’s ability to apply knowledge in real situations. These types of directives tend to de-professionalize teachers, emphasizing cookie cutter approaches that encourage teaching to the test.¹⁰

New methods of teacher-designed and teacher-directed assessment must be legitimized and valued. Teachers work with students day-in and day-out. As connoisseurs of teaching and learning, teachers know quality work when they see it.¹¹ Innovative reform efforts, such as the Annenberg Challenge, recognize the importance of context-specific initiatives and rely heavily on teacher expertise about teaching and learning. As part of the evaluation plans for the partnerships in the challenge sites, teachers have collected work samples from students representative of both challenging and typical assignments.¹² Teachers’ professional judgment was recognized as valuable and necessary if reform efforts such as those initiated by the Annenberg Challenge were to become a reality.

Numerous other avenues can be taken to promote professional judgment-in-action regarding accountability and assessment. Teacher-initiated action research is a powerful means of encouraging professional judgment-in-action. By investigating their own teaching practices, teachers gain new insights and credibility. Involvement in action research, either individually or with multiple teachers, fosters a sense of self-efficacy—of knowing that what one does in the classroom really makes a difference. Other types of collaborative work, such as involvement in professional development schools or school-community partnerships, helps outsiders to see firsthand the high quality work that is being done in schools and offers validation to the teachers who are involved. There is nothing like knowing that you are

valued and appreciated for enhancing a sense of self-efficacy! Further, additional opportunities should be created for teachers to be involved in processes of accreditation, either as members of review teams or through involvement in the planning processes for their own schools. Having the opportunity to see what other teachers and schools are doing provides professional development opportunities as well as opportunities to offer meaningful constructive criticism to others. Who better to serve as critical friends than others who live daily with similar conditions?¹³

Having a voice in discussions about accountability processes and assessment measures is important. However, that alone will not support meaningful changes, such as modifying who has the power to determine which measures will be used and how they will be enacted.

Governance

A synergy is created when people work together toward a central purpose. Energy begets more energy. In our increasingly complex world, we can no longer afford the arrogance of leaders who think they can do it all by themselves. Listed below are a few examples of evolving structures and relationships that are intended to foster shared leadership and new forms of governance.

Hallinger and Richardson identified four models of shared leadership that encourage teacher empowerment and varying degrees of participation in decision-making: the Principal's Advisory Council; the Instructional Support Team; School Improvement Teams; and Leader Teacher Committees.¹⁴ The first three models imply that teachers serve primarily in an advisory capacity and that no formal contractual negotiation is required. The fourth model, however, implies actual decision-making authority and necessitates formal contractual agreements.

The Principal's Advisory Council generally focuses on ways to improve the school climate through involving teacher representatives (or others) in decision-making processes. These representatives serve in a purely advisory capacity, unless the principal extends more authority to them.

The intended purpose of Instructional Support Teams is to encourage instructional improvement within a specific curricular area through teamwork. This model offers teachers an increased instructional leadership role within a defined curriculum domain. The primary responsibilities of teachers in this model include diagnosing and solving student problems, coordinating curriculum, and improving instruction. This model also has been referred to as a "community of learners" which implies a high level of professional interaction.¹⁵

School improvement teams usually work with the principal to lead improvement and development activities for the school, meeting regularly to make decisions about the direction of teaching and learning for the building. The principal plays an active role in this model, as in the other two models described above. Typically, administrators receive training in skills and procedures to enhance the effectiveness of school improvement teams. Emphasis is placed on goal setting, team work, feedback, and positive working relations between teachers and administrators. Although the decision-making authority of school improvement teams varies greatly, "teacher input and support is needed to bring about changes in policy and practices."¹⁶ The school improvement team model is frequently associated with school-site management.

The last model discussed by Hallinger and Richardson is the Lead Teacher Committee. They state that this model "proposes the most radical change in the organizational structure of schools," although the model is limited to "prescriptive models in the literature."¹⁷ The stated intent of the model is improvement of educational outcomes for students through the use of teachers' professional expertise. Another aspect of this model is the intent to widen accountability within the school site. An implication of this model that is different from those described above is the assumption that the school board has vested formal decision-making power to this group. According to Hallinger and Richardson, there has been contractual experimentation with the Lead Teacher model in Rochester, New York, where lead teachers were expected to teach 50 percent of the time and to provide instructional leadership the remainder of the time. Their role offered a "formal voice in policy making at the school site."¹⁸ These four models offer a progression from advisory to collaborative process models.

The first three models discussed here—Principal's Advisory Councils, Instructional Support Teams, and School Improvement Teams—usually require no formal bargaining and focus on participatory decision-making. The last model, Lead Teacher Committees, does require formal negotiations. While the first three models are perhaps easier ways to begin, without establishing official rules and responsibilities use of these models will be at the mercy of the administration and policy makers. As administrators come and go, even past practice clauses may not be enough to retain the spirit of these models in practice. Formalizing processes, while time-consuming, offers greater guarantees of consistent practice and means for addressing concerns if the process breaks down. Even then, simply having structures and a process in place do not guarantee that there will be any substantial changes unless these teams are given the authority to make real decisions.¹⁹

Changing Roles, Rules, and Relationships

Koppich and Kerchner have suggested yet another model to foster teacher empowerment and develop new forms of school organization: The Educational Policy Trust Agreement.²⁰ The intent of this arrangement is to develop new patterns of teacher-administrator relationships while expanding the range of labor-management discussions about education. For example, within the six California school districts studied, there were at least five different foci for reform. These included: peer assistance and review; professional development; staff evaluation; a career development program for teacher aides; and the development of an interdisciplinary literature-based reading program at an elementary school. While these may not sound like unique endeavors, the processes used to formalize procedures for these were indeed unique.

Educational Policy Trust Agreements are collaborative efforts among teacher unions, school management, and the school board. Through a process of discussion and negotiation, a "negotiated compact" is developed that delineates: (a) the purpose of collaborative reform efforts; (b) the resources that will be provided, including money, time, personnel, and authority; (c) statements of structure and responsibility needed to accomplish the stated agenda; and (d) procedures for resolving disputes that might arise as the groups work together on the issue.²¹ Implicit in the design of an Educational Policy Trust Agreement is the focus on collective work regarding educational policy. Koppich and Kerchner offer seven tentative conclusions about these agreements:

1) Trust agreement discussions are substantially different from contract negotiations; 2) Strong union and district leadership are necessary components of trust agreement success; 3) Determining the policy area for trust agreement work is not nearly as thorny as developing a successful process through which agreements are reached; 4) The definition of a trust agreement is dependent on school district context; 5) Developing a network among participating districts is an essential element of the program; 6) Trust agreements may not be prerequisites to reform, but they serve as catalysts to speed change; and 7) Trust agreements produce role changes.”²²

It is encouraging to note that Koppich and Kerchner have found that trust agreements have fostered long-term, comprehensive changes in decision-making processes of the districts involved.²³ Additionally, the trust agreements have promoted collective responsibility for educational outcomes. This model appears to offer great promise.

Negotiating role changes, whether through educational policy trust agreements or lead teacher contracts, appears to be a key focus that unions need to tackle and researchers need to learn more about. Another way that educators have begun to work collaboratively and have arguably redefined roles is through the creation of Professional Development Schools (PDSs).²⁴ PDS work involves building and changing relationships among teachers, administrators, and university faculty. In this model, members of school systems, along side college and university faculty, develop partnerships designed to renew the educational enterprise.²⁵ Implicit within this model is a renegotiation of the roles that each member play, similar to other efforts aimed at rethinking educational systems at the K-12 and postsecondary levels, such as the National Education Association (NEA) Mastery Learning Project; the 21st Century Schools Project; Goodlad’s Network for Educational Renewal; and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Professional Practice Schools.²⁶

Typical roles of researcher, teacher, and administrator are redefined in a PDS organization. For example, school district faculty often serve as clinical faculty at universities, either teaching or team-teaching classes. Clinical teachers are able to bring a sense of urgency and authenticity to their work that some professors may not be able to offer. Another benefit is that the “partners” conduct research “on-site” as a collaborative process. This, too, leads to increased professionalism on the part of public school teachers, administrators, and college and university professors. The recognition that all entities must work together to redefine educational systems at all levels is indicative of a larger movement toward developing sustainable and mutually beneficial reform processes. PDSs simultaneously help to create new organizations and to refocus those that already exist. In this way, one purpose of a PDS is to redefine how K-12 schools and universities are governed.²⁷

Hansen and Liftin remind us of three types of governance models: representational; at-large; and functional.²⁸ Although they suggest these types of models in terms of site-based decision-making, they also may sense as a means of redefining other types of governing boards. Representational models include groups that have been elected by peers. At-large models also select members through elections, although these elections are not constrained by geographic or role concerns. Functional models include members, usually elected, who satisfy functional or expert roles needed for the task at hand. Perhaps functional models should be utilized more frequently to address specific concerns about education. Rather than having one governing body that handles everything, multiple work teams might be

organized by function. To make a real difference, these work teams would need to have the authority to enact changes. In this case, it would make sense that teachers, in their roles as teaching-learning experts, would take their place at the table.

Rather than focusing only on changing roles for teachers, though, consideration should be given to how other educators’ roles might be modified as well. If teachers are to take on more responsibilities, it would make sense that this would then allow others to redefine their professional identities. For example, what would happen if administrators were to teach at least one class? Would this allow them to join the “ranks” of teachers? Would it help to establish mutual trust and respect? Would it help administrators to better keep in touch with what is occurring in the classrooms? Perhaps unions should break new ground and offer incentive grants to administrators willing to experiment with new forms of governance. Rather than outside funding agencies or the district offering incentive grants to teachers, perhaps teacher unions should take the lead, reinforcing their role as professionals by offering incentive grants to administrators. Changing roles, rules, and responsibilities means breaking free from the mental models that have constrained our thinking.²⁹ Each of the ideas discussed above focus on changing the roles of teachers and administrators. However, it is essential that we broaden the focus of reform efforts so that they are more inclusive. One way to do this is to involve stakeholders who in the past typically have not been welcome at decision-making tables.

School-site Level Democracy Building

What is the purpose of education? What do we stand for? What drives our practice? These are important questions that need to be contemplated for they lie at the root of varying reform agendas. Is the primary purpose of school to prepare a literate work force, or is it to prepare young people to accept their civic responsibilities in a democracy? Who should control our schools, for what reasons, and under what circumstances? These questions raise issues about the public good, individual rights, and who knows best. These questions are of paramount importance in understanding issues of policy and governance; yet rarely are they debated in mainstream educational conversations. We believe that all stakeholders should have opportunities to be involved in meaningful ways in determining the content, standards, and processes for their schools. This implies that school boards must become more inclusive and flexible, utilizing work teams similar to those discussed by Hansen and Liftin³⁰ and Koppich and Kerchner.³¹

Currently several movements are afoot that challenge traditional assumptions about who should control our schools: charter schools; deregulation movements; privatization movements; and school-site councils. Each raises questions about the appropriate roles and composition of school boards. Issues of representation must also be addressed and discussed. Within these dialogues, space needs to be created to address issues pertaining to representation and inclusion—creating spaces for multiple voices versus negotiating space for a voice. Additionally, other concerns include financial constraints, public perceptions, notions of volunteerism versus legitimized job roles, and, finally, incentives and rewards. Each of these areas should be addressed in inclusive forums.

Controversial Reform Initiatives

Charter schools have become a rallying cry for many seemingly oppositional groups. Charter schools offer the possibility of creating

new organizations that are designed by and responsive to the needs of the teachers, administrators, parents, and others. They are often viewed as a means of by-passing restrictive and prescriptive policies and practices that have limited reform efforts aimed at creating productive learning environments for students and teachers. Each school must develop its own “charter” that specifies how the school will be governed and who will govern it in addition to the delineation of new procedures and practices for the school. Many charter schools have been organized around particular themes, such as arts education or mathematics and science. Some charter schools have long waiting lists for admission. Concerns arise, though, over underlying reasons for the organization of some charter schools. Who has access to these schools? Are they a means of legalized segregation? Are they offering educational opportunities for only the elite at taxpayer expense? Are charter schools an off-shoot of a particular political group or business? Are they developed for the sole purpose of union busting? As with all of the options discussed in this section, huge ethical dilemmas exist that must be identified and openly discussed.

Hand-in-hand with the charter school movement came deregulation initiatives. A stated intent of deregulation is to remove the organizational, cultural, and structural barriers that prohibit educational reform efforts. Deregulation initiatives generally must receive the blessing of school boards and the state. Additionally, if the intent is to by-pass state or federal regulations, then waivers usually must be sought. Furrman and Elmore, as cited in Hodge, suggested that districts and schools must meet one or more of the following criteria before they are granted waivers: (a) Attain high achievement and become deregulated as a reward; (b) Be selected through a competitive process; and (c) Complete a detailed change plan/application process.³² It seems paradoxical that an initiative designed to lessen restrictions on school reform itself has placed multiple restrictions on schools that might wish to be involved. Several states, including Florida, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington, have adopted deregulatory policies intended to foster a shift from mandates to site-based decision-making, although the jury is still out on the effectiveness of deregulation initiatives.

At first, privatization of public schools appeared to be a booming wave of educational reform. Some privatization efforts, such as one in Wilksburg, Pennsylvania, offered teachers “ownership” in the company managing the school.³³ This particular case was especially interesting because it represented the first time that a private company had hired its own faculty rather than retaining the services of faculty already employed by the district.³⁴ When Alternative Public Schools, the company hired to run one of the elementary schools in the district, took the reins, teachers in the district had been without a contract for several years. As a result, the district became embroiled in a bitter battle with the teachers’ union, amid charges of union busting and claims by some that teachers were unwilling or unable to educate the students in that district.³⁵ This is a very complicated case, but the point to be made here is that unless we, as educators, take the lead in educational reform, others will step in and do it for us. Educators need to take the initiative to become more professional and to let others know that they have done so.

Strengthen Teaching and Professionalism of Teachers

Urbanski suggested a number of ways to strengthen teaching, and as such, the professionalism of teachers.³⁶ Each of these implies actions that we can begin to take. First, he suggested that there be a

shared knowledge base. As educators, we have a responsibility to add practice-based knowledge to the field. Second, he suggested that teachers be involved in setting “high and rigorous standards for their profession” that are enforced through peer review.³⁷ Third, there must be high-quality preparation programs that blend theory and practice. Currently, this is primarily the province of colleges and universities; however, there are a number of ways that teachers can influence what and how prospective teachers are taught. The Professional Development School is an excellent example of what can be done. Fourth, new teachers should receive ongoing support and nurturing from more experienced teachers. Informal mentoring, opportunities to dialogue with more experienced faculty, and increased access to teaching materials are all ways to provide this support. Fifth, there should be opportunities for ongoing and meaningful professional development. Rather than one-shot workshops, the focus of professional development should be “inseparable from the day-to-day work that teachers do.”³⁸ Sixth, there should be expanded career opportunities for teachers so that they don’t have to leave teaching in order to be promoted. Seventh, the conditions of teaching— compensation, professional treatment, adequate resources— should be improved. Eighth, teachers should have a say “about what to teach, how to teach it, and how to assess student learning.”³⁹ Finally, the “current emphasis on bureaucratic accountability (following established procedures) must be replaced with a new emphasis on professional accountability.”⁴⁰ This system of accountability must be framed by responsiveness to student needs while considering the realities that teachers encounter on a daily basis. Emphasizing teachers’ professional judgment-in-action through accountability and assessment, new forms of governance, and promotion of practices that encourage site-based democracy building are good places to begin. Each practice mentioned offers a high profile opportunity to draw attention to the prevalent professionalism of teachers. Further, teacher involvement within each of these three arenas helps to establish that these areas should be the province of educators.

Implications

We have discussed three major areas of professional judgment-in-action: accountability and assessment; governance; and school-site level democracy building. As professionals accountable for student learning, teachers make decisions on a daily basis concerning what is taught and how it is taught. Decision-making is a continuous and crucial part of teaching. Even though teachers are held accountable for student learning, they often must comply with decisions made by those who have no real contact with students. Boards of education, in conjunction with state and national legislatures, set rules and regulations for schools, teaching, and the assessment of learning. As professionals, teachers must be given the opportunity to blend their voices with those of other education stakeholders. Educators add unique insights that no other stakeholder can offer. However, teachers are busy people and cannot add more to their overfilled schedules without giving up something else. Educational organizations need to critically consider the changing priorities for roles that educators should play in the day-to-day running of public schools.

We take the position that teachers, as front-line professionals, have a right to be included in meaningful ways in the governance of schools. Opportunities should be created to increase teacher control over classroom level decisions that affect student learning as well as systemic issues. To better prepare teachers for these new roles and opportunities, attention must be paid to developing the skills needed to work as

part of a democratic, collaborative body. Providing for increased teacher participation in school governance has budgetary implications. Often, work teams fall apart due to misunderstanding or misuse of group dynamics. Money must be set aside for professional development to prepare teachers for their increased participation. Although some of this professional development should be conducted through ongoing reflective practice and action research, opportunities to learn how to communicate more effectively, build consensus, and handle conflict must first be available.

It is important to voice a note of caution here. If we are to redefine what it means to exercise professional judgment-in-action, then attention must be paid to the working conditions of teachers. Unions traditionally have, and should continue to, play a key role in helping to reshape the terms, responsibilities, and working conditions for teachers. Part of this process must continue to include negotiations about issues of security— both professional and financial— as well as ways to promote, preserve, and protect the professional judgment-in-action of teachers. However, as economic conditions worsen, unions should seek ways to collaborate with rather than compete against other social and educational institutions who are also vying for funding.

Recommendations

Through encouraging relationships that foster teacher trust, responsibility, and efficacy, we are investing in the future of our children. Teachers are ultimately responsible for student learning; thus, teachers' professional judgment about schools and classrooms is an essential component of change initiatives. Without teachers we cannot implement change— they are the ones that enact change in the classroom. Although teachers have spent years learning their profession, there is no room for arrogance. We must trust and respect their professional opinions and judgments as teachers must trust other stakeholders and value their input. Otherwise we all lose.

In light of the essential role that teachers play in educating our children, it is important for unions, administrators, and policy makers to work together to ensure that their voices are integrated into school governance and decision-making. Rather than being merely the implementers or consumers of educational policy, educators must step up to the plate by negotiating ways to increase levels of trust, responsibility, and teacher efficacy. For too long educators have focused on the hopelessness of influencing bureaucratic structures. It is time to stop trying to beat the system and instead begin to recreate the system. Toward this end, we have outlined the following policy recommendations that emphasize simultaneous action at the local, state, and national levels.

1. Teachers must help others to redefine what it means to be a professional and a member of a teacher's union. For example, rather than create scenarios that foster competition between unions and administrators and school boards, efforts must be made to reframe dialogues about turf issues and resources so that they foster reflection-in-action.⁴¹ Rather than reinforce perspectives that negotiations must have winners and losers, union leaders can help all parties to understand ways to create win-win scenarios. We need to move beyond coercion and compliance to cooperation.

2. Cooperative contract negotiations alone will not change public perspectives about education. Teachers must take the lead in learning how to work collaboratively with others. Before we can accomplish reform goals, a truce must be called. We must stop blaming others

and start looking more carefully at our own practices. Rather than focusing on what others are not doing, there must be opportunities for dialogues so that we may hear others' expectations of the teaching profession, while having the opportunity to express our expectations of others. Unions should take the lead in creating forums for these types of dialogues.

3. Union leaders must take the lead in conducting a public relations campaign informing the public of the professionalism of teachers and the win-win situations that have been achieved. The public must be helped to learn about the new unionism. Rather than public perceptions about unions that emphasize strikes and refusal to cooperate, new mindsets must be created in stakeholders. The public has a need and a right to know about the many initiatives undertaken by unions that are designed to enhance the quality of education.

4. As new roles, relationships, and responsibilities are created, we need to remain mindful of the need for creating self-correcting systems. Our world has become so complex, that what works one week may not work the next. Therefore, national, state, and local policy makers must incorporate flexibility into rules and regulations that allow for site-level input and decision-making that reflect local values and learning needs.

5. Teachers should be included on boards that oversee curriculum development, standard setting, assessment, professional development, and other areas that directly affect teaching and learning. Unions, in working with schools, must promote practices and structures that facilitate teacher involvement in school governance and decision-making. Emphasizing the need for more functional boards that specifically require membership of those with expertise in the areas being addressed may be an appropriate way to progress.⁴² Policy work could then be delegated to multiple work teams whose purpose and membership have been established by function. Additionally, unions must take a leadership role in working with administrators to redefine teacher and administrator roles within school governance structures.

6. Administrators must provide opportunities for teachers to showcase their involvement in and accomplishments related to educational reform and student learning. These opportunities should be both within and beyond the school setting. For example, administrators might schedule time during the annual school open house for teachers to showcase their activities around school reform. Further, administrators could invite local media representatives to attend these presentations in order to publicize teachers' efforts to the community at-large.

7. Administrators and policy makers must support change initiatives that involve increasing teacher decision-making power. Support not only allows for risk-taking without reprisal, but also provides financial resources for teachers to be released and compensated for participation in governance, research, and design of learning and assessment tools.

Changing roles, rules, and relationships will not happen automatically. It will necessitate hard work on the part of many. It is important to note:

Empowerment is not a simple process nor one that can be accomplished overnight. Empowerment requires that principals, teachers, staff members, and parents all have mature judgment and the desire to make the school a learning place for all students."⁴³

The same is true for policy makers. Meaningful change is most likely to occur at local site levels, rather than through state or federally

mandated policies.⁴⁴ However, this is not meant to imply that large-scale initiatives are not needed. Reform initiatives focused on increasing the meaningful opportunities for teachers to not only implement but determine what should transpire will require that all groups work together.

Rather than continuing the counter-productive deficit approach to “fixing” schools that many policy makers and politicians have pursued, we believe a systemic approach to validating the involvement of all stakeholders is needed. This means creating a new vision of what schools should be, how they should run, and who should run them. This also means negotiating policies to protect teachers’ professional judgment-in-action by fostering increased trust, responsibility, and efficacy. If meaningful school reform that recognizes the valuable contributions educators make is to occur, then teachers’ unions will need to challenge the status quo. We can no longer allow, or wait for, those who are satisfied with the present system to take the lead.

Endnotes

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