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# educational considerations

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# Preservice Principals' Post-Internship Concerns About Becoming a Principal: America and Scotland in Review

Mack T. Hines, III

## Introduction

The capstone experience of teacher preparation and principal preparation programs is generally the internship. These experiences should provide preservice teachers and principals with the opportunities to develop their skills in teaching and school leadership respectively. Research has documented preservice teachers' concerns about becoming teachers.<sup>1</sup> The results show that preservice teachers depart their experiences with self concerns, task concerns, and impact concerns. Teacher education units have used this research to address their concerns during and after the internship.

However, no research has determined if preservice principals depart their internship with similar concerns. If, as Hall and Hord suggest,<sup>2</sup> many new American principals struggle to provide effective school leadership, could identifying and addressing their concerns during and after the internship be helpful? In addition, no research has investigated the possible differences between the internship experiences and concerns of preservice principals from the United States with those from other countries. Such comparisons could promote productive international discussions on the principal internship, diversifying our understanding of what constitutes a meaningful internship experience. To that end, the purpose of this study was to compare American and Scottish preservice principals' post-internship concerns about becoming a principal. This study was centered on the following research question: What are the differences between American and Scottish preservice principals' post-internship concerns about becoming a principal?

## Theoretical Framework: Concerns Theory

Fuller theorized that preservice teachers experience self, task, and impact concerns about teaching.<sup>3</sup> During the concern for self stage, preservice teachers are focused on their ability to survive in the profession. They are especially concerned about dealing with the daily problems that accompany teaching. The task concerns stage is characterized by a focus on the daily requirements of teaching. These tasks range from securing instructional materials to participating in

parent-teacher conferences. When preservice teachers move to the impact concerns stage, they are focused on making a difference in the profession of teaching. Here they are concerned about developing innovative ways to help students. Fuller concluded that preservice teachers rarely experience the impact concerns stage because the majority of the internship activities are centered on mastery of the fundamentals of teaching.<sup>4</sup> In spite of this focus, she maintained that the effectiveness of the internship experience is contingent upon the quality of preservice teachers' exposure to various teaching responsibilities. This study sought to determine this theory's relevance to preservice principals' concerns about the principalship.

## Related Literature

According to Alford and Spall, the principal preparation internship should provide aspiring principals with practical experience in performing leadership duties,<sup>5</sup> while Duffrin proposed seven broad goals for the internship experience:

- 1) Develop a practical understanding of the human relations skills needed to serve as principal;
- 2) Participate in experiences that link acquired theories and real world applications of the principalship;
- 3) Observe the supervising principal on a daily basis;
- 4) Recognize differences between the managerial and leadership aspects of the principalship;
- 5) Complete simple and complex tasks that accompany the principalship;
- 6) Focus on building relationships with faculty, staff, students, and parents;
- 7) Reflect on progress towards becoming an effective school leader.<sup>6</sup>

However, Fry, Bottoms, and O'Neill maintained that in reality internship experiences usually consisted of completing meaningless duties at the behest of the principal.<sup>7</sup> Their research found that preservice principals mostly observed and followed orders instead of directing and leading activities. University personnel and school districts seldom collaborated to provide a meaningful internship for the preservice principals, and most internship students departed their internship experiences without a clear understanding of the role of the principal. This study investigated the extent to which the concerns were found among American and Scottish preservice principals.

## Methodology

The study consisted of 69 American and Scottish preservice principals. The 33 American participants were selected from a university in Texas, and the 36 Scottish preservice principals were selected from a university in Scotland. At the end of their internship experience, they completed a survey regarding the concerns about becoming principals. In addition, The author held brief discussions with both groups about their internship experiences.

The survey was developed using Fowler's work on concerns theory.<sup>8</sup> A panel of American and Scottish principals was used to develop the constructs for the survey items and to establish the validity of the survey.<sup>9</sup> The survey was then piloted with a small group of American and Scottish preservice principals. The survey consisted of 33 statements that participants rated on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (not concerned) to 5 (very concerned). Survey items were organized under three constructs: Self Concerns (Alpha =.89); Task Concerns (Alpha=.91); and Impact Concerns (Alpha=.92) constructs.

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(See Appendix for a copy of the survey instrument.) Sample items under each construct included:

- Self concerns: Feeling like a competent principal.
- Task concerns: Finding the time to serve as the instructional leader of the school.
- Impact concerns: Convincing community leaders to contribute to the educational mission of the school.

A t-test for independent means was selected to analyze the differences in survey responses between American and Scottish preservice principals' post-internship concerns.

At the beginning of the internship, the author gave the American and Scottish preservice principals, cooperating principals, and university supervisors a list of internship activities aligned with the survey items in order to ensure consistency in participants' internship experience.. In addition, the author hosted an ITV conference with all of the participants to explain and discuss each activity, and secured the agreement of their cooperating principal to take part in this activity.

### Analysis of Results

The results of the t-test for independent means between responses of American and Scottish preservice principals revealed statistically significant differences across all three constructs: Self concerns; task concerns; and impact concerns. (See Table.) In particular, the responses of American preservice principals showed substantially higher levels of concerns across all three levels. However, in relationship to the priority of concerns, both groups ranked them the same. The area of highest concern for both groups was task concerns, followed by self concerns. Last were impact concerns.

To better understand the findings from the survey, the author held brief discussions with both groups about their internship experiences. In spite of being given a common list of activities, American and Scottish preservice principal participants had very different internship experiences. The three most significant differences were the structure of the internship; support for the internship; and length and coherence of the internship.

From a structural perspective, American preservice principals completed the internship experience with an individual cooperating principal and a university supervisor, although the supervisor generally was overseeing multiple internships. Scottish preservice principals had both an individual university supervisor and cooperating principal.

Internship experiences for American preservice principals consisted largely of daily observations of the cooperating principal completing specific duties. Although Scottish preservice principals also observed their cooperating principal, afterward they met with the cooperating principal to discuss their observations. During these meetings, preservice principals were encouraged to ask questions about the activity they had observed. In collaboration with the cooperating principal, preservice principals then developed strategies for leading and completing the same tasks. After completing these tasks under the guidance of the cooperating principal, preservice principals were provided with feedback about their performance. As such, Scottish preservice principals' internship experiences were broader, consisting not only of observations but also active learning and reflection.

Mentoring for American and Scottish preservice principals also differed. American preservice principals received most of their mentoring from the cooperating principal. Scottish preservice principals were mentored by three people: The cooperating principal; the university supervisor; and a principal from a different school district. The cooperating principal coached preservice principals through every school activity. University supervisors mentored preservice principals by sharing their leadership experiences and relating them to school leadership. The other principal provided the preservice principal with information about their leadership experiences in another school district. This information provided Scottish preservice principals with multiple perspectives on school leadership and school environments.

The length and coherence of the internship experience were very different for American and Scottish preservice principals as well. American preservice principals completed their internship in one semester where they were required to complete a certain number of clock hours for embedded activities. In contrast, Scottish preservice principals completed a two semester internship. The first semester consisted of developing a school improvement project that matched the needs of the school and Scottish standards for management and leadership. Preservice principals then presented their plan to the cooperating principal, university supervisor, and a panel of teachers; and based upon this group's advice, they revised the plan if needed. During the second semester, preservice principals evaluated the school's readiness for accommodating the plan and then used the findings to determine how to implement it. Preservice principals were also required to incorporate daily internship tasks into the framework

**Table**  
**Results of Survey: Preervice Principals' Concerns About Becoming a Principal**

Categorical Concerns	Preservice Principals				T-Values
	American (n = 36)		Scottish (n = 33)		
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Self Concerns	22.23	6.91	17.96	3.06	7.21 *
Task Concerns	24.67	7.77	18.43	5.28	8.30*
Impact Concerns	15.29	4.51	11.50	3.05	8.35*

\*Statistically significant at the .0001 level.



of the school improvement project. Throughout, Scottish preservice principals provided their cooperating principal and university supervisor with bimonthly written progress reports. Preservice principals used feedback on these reports to strengthen the project's impact on the school.

### Discussion

The survey findings for this study showed that overall American preservice principals were more concerned about becoming principals than their Scottish preservice counterparts. Based on the groups' discussion of their internship experiences, these differences may be related to three factors. First, because Scottish preservice principals had individual university supervisors, they may have received more individual attention, enabling them to more readily share their concerns about becoming a principal. Second, Scottish preservice principals had more formal mentors in the internship experience. The addition of a principal from a different district as a mentor may have been particularly helpful in addressing a wider range of preservice principal concerns. Finally, Scottish preservice principals' internship experience was twice as long and was based upon development and implementation of a school improvement plan rather than a list of activities. In sum, Scottish preservice principals benefited from more time and opportunities to practice and receive feedback on their leadership skills.

### Implications and Need for Future Research

This study of a small group of American and Scottish preservice principals raised several important questions about the potential of the internship experience to address interns' concerns and help them build confidence in their ability to be effective school leaders:

- What is the appropriate length for the principal preservice internship?
- Who, and how many, should serve as mentors during the internship?
- How should the internship experience be structured?

A study of this size cannot provide definitive answers. More research is needed with larger samples across more institutions and more countries. These larger studies would likely want to add the variable of gender.<sup>10</sup> Future researchers may also want to investigate the impact of the cooperating principals' leadership style on preservice principals and their internship experience.<sup>11</sup> Another helpful measure would be the addition of a pre-internship measure of preservice principals' confidence to compare to the results of the post-internship survey.

Pragmatically, research that monitors preservice principals' concerns throughout the internship experience would provide helpful insights to those overseeing the internship as to when and how preservice principals develop particular concerns. With this information, university supervisors and cooperating principals can develop timely strategies to address such concerns..

In spite of its limited scope, this study has made a significant contribution to the field of educational leadership by raising important questions about how to maximize the effectiveness of principal preparation internships. The findings are a starting point for identifying and analyzing concerns of preservice principals. Additionally, they present a new way to understand how the internship experience can build confidence and leadership skills..

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Gene Hall and Shirley Hord, *Changes in Schools: Facilitating the Process* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Jeanne Adams, "Good Schools, Good Principals," *Thrust for Educational Leadership* 29 (Fall 1999): 9.

<sup>3</sup> Frances Fuller, "Concerns of Teachers: A Developmental Conceptualization," *American Educational Research Journal* 6 (Spring 1969): 207.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Betty Alford and Sharon Spall, "Promoting Student Learning through Integrated Internship Experiences in Principal Preparation Courses: Critical Factors and Recommendations," *Education Leadership Review*, 2 (Fall 2001): 16-22.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Duffrin, "Chicago Program Helps Leaders Test Drive Principal's Job," *Journal of Staff Development* 22 (Fall 2001): 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Betty Fry, Gene Bottoms, and Betty O'Neill, *The Principal Internship: How can We Get it Right?* (Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Educational Board, 2005), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Fuller, "Concerns of Teachers."

<sup>9</sup> Telephone and ITV conference calls were used develop the constructs for this survey.

<sup>10</sup> Alice Eagly, Steven Karau, and Blair Johnson, "Gender and Leadership Style Among School Principals: A Meta-Analysis," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 28 (Spring 1992):: 79.

<sup>11</sup> Terrence Deal and Kenneth Peterson, *Shaping School Culture: The School Leader's Role* (San Francisco: CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 105.



## **Appendix**

### **Preservice Principal Concerns Survey**

Directions: As a school administrator, you will be required to perform various duties. To that end, please circle the number that highlights your present concerns about the ability to perform each of the listed duties.

1 = Not Concerned                      2 = Not Really Concerned                      3 = Somewhat Concerned  
4 = Concerned                          5 = Very Concerned

#### **Self Concerns**

1. Maintaining poise and confidence in front of teachers and student.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Feeling like a competent principal.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Being accepted and respected by parents and students.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Being accepted and respected by teachers, other administrators, and district level officials.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Receiving a positive evaluation from teachers and students.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Receiving a positive evaluation from the Superintendent.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Maintaining a professional relationship with faculty and staff members.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Implementing my philosophy of educational leadership into the school.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Receiving the opportunity to participate in staff development activities for principals.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Receiving a mentor.	1	2	3	4	5

#### **Task Concerns**

11. Ordering and providing teachers with instructional materials in a timely manner.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Completing paper work in a timely manner.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Sending correspondence to parents.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Finding the time to serve as the instructional leader of the school.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Managing and allocating budget funds.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Responding to e-mails, letters, and other correspondence in a timely and appropriate manner.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Finding substitute teachers to cover classrooms.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Being flexible with students and teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Using consistent discipline to manage student behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Working 14-15 hour days.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Supervising after school activities.	1	2	3	4	5

**Appendix**  
***Preservice Principal Concerns Survey continued***

22. Solving disputes between faculty members or faculty members and parents.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Raising test scores	1	2	3	4	5
24. Conducting parent teacher conferences.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Providing teachers with timely and meaningful feedback about teacher observations.	1	2	3	4	5

**Impact Concerns**

26. Challenging and preparing students for becoming contributors to society.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Ensuring that ALL students receive meaningful teaching and learning activities.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Involving families in the school.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Creating professional development activities that improve the teaching and learning process.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Identifying the students who need special services.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Securing additional community resources to enhance the school.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Involving students in meaningful extracurricular activities.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Convincing community leaders to support the vision and mission of the school.	1	2	3	4	5

# So Deeply Embedded: Using Inquiry to Understand the Influence of Popular Media in the Classroom

Christa Boske and Susan McCormack

## Introduction

This inquiry originated with discussions among a group of colleagues' after viewing *Happy Feet*, a Warner Brothers film released in November 2006. This film, like many other animated films aimed at preschool and school-aged children, contained hidden messages.<sup>1</sup> Many of these hidden messages focused on social, political, and cultural issues that current and future educators face in schools and classrooms everyday.<sup>2</sup> Personal discussions and dialogues with current and future educators revealed that without critical analysis even adults are oblivious to hidden messages in popular films like *Happy Feet*.<sup>3</sup> The authors concluded that while these messages were so deeply embedded in most media that many do not question how they shape personal values and daily interactions, collaborative dialogues can assist in uncovering messages related to significant social issues related to marginalization.

As former school leaders, the authors realized educators ostensibly recognize cultural difference. The reality, however, was that issues facing students from marginalized populations— inequities, cultural norms, inclusive practices, imbalance of power, and access to resources— were not addressed throughout the curriculum, including instruction through visual media. Administrators and teachers, those in power positions, did not seem to see or want to see these issues and, instead, chose to maintain the status quo by promoting diversity through celebrations rather than the lived experiences of those who felt isolated, abandoned, and unwelcome in schools.

Addressing this imbalance of power is one of the greatest challenges facing today's schools.<sup>4</sup> Through our inquiry, we explored to what extent this distribution of power was embedded in media messages and to what extent these issues revealed themselves to young children, if given the opportunity for critical discourse. Popular media venues are not often associated with educational settings. However, when Dewey's experiential philosophies are considered— the idea that learning does not happen in the vacuum of school, but that children develop understanding of the world through societal influences— it is difficult to dispute media impact on what children learn.<sup>5</sup> Popular media is the most powerful social phenomena in our world, especially visual media through film designed for young audiences.<sup>6</sup>

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The purpose of this critical inquiry was to examine the nature of popular media and its impact on children's social and cognitive development. The authors hope that, given the opportunity to participate in critical discourse related to media literacy, children's responses will contribute to building equitable learning communities.<sup>7</sup> Building learning communities in diverse educational settings is achieved when educators encourage multiple perspectives in approaches to everyday pedagogical proceedings. In popular media, voices of marginalized populations are frequently silent or represented in negative ways. Beginning with the analysis of *Happy Feet*, the authors strived to better understand popular media's powerful hold on children's social development and to suggest critical ways educators can approach media within the context of constructing equitable learning communities.

## Early Observations

As educators of preservice teachers and educational leaders interested in popular media's potential impact on children's learning, we began our inquiry when our small group eagerly lined up to see what we believed would be a light-hearted comedy with appealing animated characters starring popular voices. While several of us laughed out loud during the film, others left the theater seriously considering the moral implications of the messages portrayed. Our resulting collaborative discussions were the impetus for the second stage of this inquiry where we created and critically examined personal narratives about our immediate and subsequent reactions to the film. One of our group reflected:

I was first intrigued with the *Happy Feet* setting, Antarctica. From a purely instructional viewpoint, I wanted to examine different landscapes across the globe and to illustrate this through popular film. But the film was more than that. I was a little confused about the two different story lines: one story line dealing with a penguin that doesn't quite fit in, and the other story line dealing with environmental issues—and neither was completely sorted out. So, I immediately felt tension related to the plot, but nothing more.

After we regrouped to discuss the film, the critical discourse caused many of us to rethink our original reactions and to consider the film's powerful implications in greater depth. Mumble, a young penguin and the main character, was unique, although most of the other characters described him as "different." This level of analysis was important to one member, who presents media literacy lessons each semester where every discussion related to critically examining media messages, intended audience, and voice. The ensuing analytical discussion among the group, some of whom are versed in the specifics of cultural deficit theory, caused great concern for those versed in basic media literacy practices. Cultural deficit theory, in addition to established literature on racial minority identity development, uses a deficit-oriented perspective to explain physical, social, and emotional differences between historic racial minorities and white students.<sup>8</sup> Analysis through a cultural deficit lens revealed that one member had overlooked culturally specific normative developmental perspectives by comparing her experiences to the normative developmental processes she observed as a white scholar.

The group agreed that the media literacy approach needed to move beyond basic analysis of the film to consideration of racial and social implications. After re-viewing the film, we compared its surface story to those of traditional fables that focus on social, political, and cultural

issues. However, there was deeper footage to explore. We perceived hegemonic practices through hidden messages embedded in the film and hypothesized their presence and societal significance often went unchallenged by audiences—children and adults alike. Most significant to the story line, Mumble communicated differently than other Emperor penguins. In the film, the most important lesson for young penguins to learn on the first day of school was, “Every penguin has a heart song. Why, if you have no heart song, you’re no penguin at all.” Mumble’s inability to sing was ridiculed by all, as was his true talent—tap dancing. The dialogue strongly implied that his inability to sing heart songs threatened the legacy of the Emperor penguin colony, and the exaggerated characterization of Mumble’s difference suggested that something was innately wrong with him.

### The Automated Teller

*Happy Feet* resembles many stories which portray the main character as out of sync with others in the community.<sup>9</sup> In previous generations, childhood favorites were repeated by someone old enough to interpret and transmit the “moral of the story” (from a dominant cultural perspective) so that children absorb the cultural lesson within. In contemporary storytelling through the media, the teller is often automated and embodies the power and privilege associated with the dominant culture such that children are still likely to construct meaning from a dominant cultural perspective. Because the automated teller reinvents the process by which the story is shared, the main character’s “weaknesses” are intricately woven into a deficit perspective. This approach perpetuates the subordination of marginalized groups, with implications for race and racism.<sup>10</sup>

Mumble’s differences were perceived as unredeemable. They were frowned upon by his family, schoolmates, teachers, colony elders, and Emperor penguin community. His father, embarrassed by Mumble’s awkward appearance (fluffy, slow-to-mature feathers, and blue eyes) and behavior (tap dancing), declared, “It just ain’t penguin, son. It just ain’t penguin.” His father attempted to hide Mumble from his mother and prevent him from speaking out in public. In school, classmates laughed and teased Mumble when they heard of his inability to sing a heart song. They were stunned when he danced his song, and they stared at him. They ridiculed his appearance and called him “Fuzzball.” The elders, who represented the powerful dominant culture, called Mumble an abomination and ultimately banished him from the colony. How often does this scenario play out with asynchronous children in schools? <sup>11</sup> Combined, Mumble’s differences emphasized that he did not fit the expected cultural norms within the Emperor penguin community. Educators who use cultural deficit theory lens easily recognize the process of marginalization. Can children also see the inequities portrayed in *Happy Feet*?

After being banished from his colony, Mumble discovered another colony of penguins and was immediately drawn to a group who identified themselves as “misfits.” One of them informed Mumble that his father thought he was a “loser” too. The misfits accepted Mumble into their penguin community and considered his differences strengths. Mumble’s dancing, which was similar to the misfits’ preferred behavior, was considered an asset for attracting a mate. Through a critical media lens, educators can compare Mumble’s journey to the plight of students who do not fit into the mainstream.<sup>12</sup>

### Critical Inquiry through Media

The assumptions behind this critical inquiry were shaped by the work of critical observers like Marshall and Rossman.<sup>13</sup> In a manner similar to that of McClare and Apple, the authors argue that popular media reflects dominant societal values and, as such, involved power issues.<sup>14</sup> More specifically, media reflect a white male viewpoint. As a result, other social groups are often portrayed negatively. Unfortunately, dominant cultural values are indoctrinated through film leaving some students feeling marginalized, which in turn prevents the development of a real sense of community in the learning environment. It is imperative for current and future educator to understand the complexity of children’s knowing through popular media.<sup>15</sup>

The known is socially constructed through popular media’s stories. Children interact with media, subconsciously developing a sense of self and values. Negative images aimed at marginal groups can become self-images for school-aged children who do not possess the tools to confront or challenge the status quo. To comprehend media’s tendency to further marginalize students, educators must critically examine their own suppositions regarding race, gender, and ethnicity in order to recognize their representation in mainstream media. To build a sense of community in classrooms, one that seeks equitable practice, educators must ask student inquirers to construct new, critical interpretations of media’s influence, ones they may not have previously considered.<sup>16</sup> Only then will they have the moral impetus to construct more critical methods for media analysis. As Darling-Hammond noted, anything less is counter to teaching equity.<sup>17</sup>

### Understanding Difference

Schools, universities, and schools of education have undergone dramatic changes due to educational reform efforts. Increases in the number of children from historic racial minority groups, children living in poverty, and English language learners are changing the composition of schools in the United States.<sup>18</sup> With this in mind, two camps of educators have evolved—geneticists and multiculturalists/reconstructionists. Educators adhering to the multiculturalist/reconstructionist ideology believe that specific knowledge and skills are necessary to work with culturally diverse groups of students.<sup>19</sup> Multiculturalists assert that understanding cultural variables is of primary importance in the education of aspiring teachers and school leaders. Multiculturalists contend that children absorb beliefs about superiority from sources embedded in the social, political and economic structures.<sup>20</sup> This assertion leads to the belief that preparation programs must promote cultural responsiveness by considering how race, gender, sexual orientation, language, and other variables influence student learning.

As researchers, the authors recognize the need to adapt our curriculum and pedagogical practices to the culturally diverse needs of students. As Ladson-Billings stated, anything else is unacceptable.<sup>21</sup> However, even though the United States is experiencing increases in the number of marginalized populations, multiculturalists and reconstructionists still represent a small number of educators nationwide. Despite the enormous amount of theory and research focusing on marginalized student populations, preparation programs remain unchanged.<sup>22</sup> If multiple cultural perspectives are not studied by future educators, then traditional monocultural practices will perpetuate the marginalization of some children.<sup>23</sup>

Critical examination of embedded beliefs helps educators to better interpret difference or social characteristics outside of the cultural majority.<sup>24</sup> Without critical reflection, educators may overlook hidden messages regarding the influence of difference from the cultural majority. Overlooking these has far-reaching consequences for children served in schools. These messages constitute important parameters for ethnic identity development, social cognition, ego identity, gender, and race.<sup>25</sup> According to Lewis, when culturally biased messages are hidden, their impact is far more resilient.<sup>26</sup> Marginalized children are likely to perceive their differences as obstacles rather than strengths.<sup>27</sup> These negative attitudes toward difference might perpetuate a "why try" attitude. As children continue to experience their world, they construct their realities about the world in which they live. These realities are constructed by the beliefs, social contexts and values of those around them.<sup>28</sup> As children's identities evolve, they not only imitate what they see around them, but they also actively process images and patterns of behaviors which include families, friends, and specifically, the media.<sup>29</sup> Nurturing the abilities of children to foster images and behaviors of care and understanding for others is critical. Children are not only taught prejudices, but they are also taught how to accept or reject others,<sup>30</sup> which was illustrated by the colony's rejection of Mumble.

Culturally responsive educators are responsible for facilitating learning communities in which unconscious assumptions about difference are challenged. Educators might begin by examining their assumptions about marginalized populations. In order to unlearn these assumptions, they might examine how unconscious assumptions impact their educational approaches, specifically in relationship to working with children who do not resemble the cultural majority. Culturally biased assumptions were apparent in *Happy Feet*: Mumble's differences—methods of expression and physical appearance—were perceived negatively by his teachers, peers, parents, and community. Mumble's teachers described him as hopeless and lamented their "failure" to teach him to be like the majority. These biases are evident when educators blame children from marginalized populations for low-performing schools rather than examine the impact of social, political, and economic systems—as well as their own assumptions—on student learning.

### Critical Media Literacy

Combating the problems associated with deficit thinking requires a paradigmatic shift in thinking. According to Kincheloe, educators' focus should be grounded in justice and equality.<sup>31</sup> This shift requires all stakeholders to be involved in collaborative discussions about the purpose of schooling and who is served by the process. Educators must closely examine current practice to ask difficult questions about curricula and the level of inclusiveness. The systemic occurrence of punitive learning environments that exclude children who fall outside the cultural majority must be recognized and transformed. Educators can develop alternative practices that empower all students to participate in curricula designed to reflect the entire learning community's interests.

Children are exposed to media's influence at young ages without benefiting from a systematic analysis of the content or its purpose.<sup>32</sup> Engaging in media literacy strategies may counter this phenomenon. Ten years ago, Megee proposed that media literacy be taught in every classroom at every level—an educational strategy already practiced by educators in many countries, but one that has gained little

ground in American schools. Imagine the improvements that could be underway. In a media literate society, film-makers would likely be more aware of and sensitive to stereotypical, negative representations of marginalized populations. For example, in *Happy Feet*—a film deemed suitable for young children—the Macaroni penguins, referred to as "misfits," reflected a marginalized community, specifically a Latino/a population.

Media literacy introduces cultural consciousness and understanding of the relationship between media and culture. Critical media inquiry moves beyond this examination to introduce a critical vocabulary. Horn argued that critical vocabulary delves deeply into tough concepts like hegemony, hierarchy, privilege, resistance, oppression, and marginalization.<sup>33</sup> When these concepts are used to expose the inherent power of popular media's representations, positive learning opportunities result.<sup>34</sup> Instead of allowing students to passively watch films like *Happy Feet*, educators can encourage children to critically discuss and challenge embedded messages and concepts that limit social efficacy.

### Conclusion

Educators can serve as a positive force when they encourage students to develop their strengths by recognizing how their identities are shaped by social, cultural, and political forces, and how these are represented in media. Like students, educators also make sense of their surroundings through interactions with these forces. As a result, media's subtle hegemony also penetrates educators' belief systems. These experiences educators' shape attitudes and beliefs about schooling marginalized children.

How can educators shift their thinking from a deficit perspective to a strengths perspective, thereby empowering students to participate in their own learning process? Implementing critical inquiry into media provides educators with a means to tailor to the needs of children who are marginalized, which is critical to eliminating inequity. Continuing to promote the status quo rather than challenging negative portrayals of students who differ from the norm is detrimental to students' progress and the development of equitable learning communities. Schools must improve the experiences of children from historic minority groups, children living in poverty, English Language Learners, children in special education, and children who share other differences. Recognizing media's powerful impact on students, educators must assess school practices, including the use of media that equates difference with dysfunction.

Based upon this inquiry, the authors recommend a series of reflective inquiries for current and future educator to assist them in critically analyzing mainstream media in public school settings. (See the Appendix for suggested activities.) Also recommended is the introduction of critical inquiry (as it relates to media literacy) into all educational settings, especially K-12 levels of public schools, thereby equipping students with the skills needed to dissect this media-driven society.



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## **Appendix**

### ***Suggested Activities for Current and Future Educators: Inquiry Related to Societal Issues***

I. Suggested questions to stimulate critical discussion regarding the influence of media messages.

- A. What are the demographics of the school community?
- B. How do we understand difference?
- C. How did we develop this understanding?
- D. What are the needs of children with difference?
- E. How is our school attempting to address these issues?
- F. How is the state, nation or world confronting these issues?
- G. What historical events influence the experiences of children with differences?
- H. What are the current cultural, social, political, economic contexts that influence this issue?
- I. What do we believe are the most effective approaches to create positive change for children with difference?

II. Suggested questions to guide critical analysis of media's potential impact on the school community.

- A. What roles do media play in providing a foundation for our beliefs and attitudes toward difference?
- B. How does this understanding influence how we design curriculum and deliver instruction?
- C. What is the role of media in curriculum?
- D. What school policies influence the use of media?
- E. What tools do we use to analyze media and its influence on student learning?
- F. What steps will we take to assure that we help students learn to critically examine the influence of film?
- G. How will we measure whether or not we understand the influence of media on student learning?
- H. What new knowledge have we learned about the influence of media on student learning?
- I. How will decisions be made regarding the use of media in schools?



# What Does GPA in an Urban High School Actually Mean?

**Robbie J. Steward, Martin F. Hill,  
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and Ah-Sha-Ni Wabaunsee**

## Introduction

The purpose of this researcher-school collaborative study was to examine factors which might be intervenable by urban high school counselors in assisting at-risk students. There were two primary objectives. The first was to examine the degree to which urban adolescents' academic competence predicts cumulative GPA. The second objective was to examine the relationship between academic preparedness and teacher perceptions of student honorability, where student honorability referred to positive vs. negative classroom behavior. Because of the potential influence of teacher perceptions, high student attrition rates associated with academic failure, the limited population of college bound students within urban settings, and the subsequent potential loss of human capital to general society, this study was specifically limited to an urban high school setting. The authors hope that this study will add to the current body of literature on current grading practices and assist teachers and school counselors in identifying effective interventions.

## Background and Rationale

Although mainstream media attention has recently turned to education issues such as grade inflation,<sup>1</sup> researchers in higher education have long acknowledged the importance of examining the construct of K-12 grade point averages (GPA). For example, Gutman, Sameorff, and Cole found that a student's GPA is significantly and positively affected by mental health interventions.<sup>2</sup> Demoulin and Walsh found GPA was related to students' personal development and associated positive behaviors,<sup>3</sup> while Stumpf and Stanley found it was also related to college graduation.<sup>4</sup> In addition to these studies of general high school populations, studies of academic performance have included urban high school student populations, which are characterized by heightened exposure to poverty and crime; limited access to positive role models for academic and life success; lower GPAs; and higher absenteeism.<sup>5</sup> For these students, Linnehan found GPA to be significantly and positively correlated with involvement in work-based

mentoring programs.<sup>6</sup> Williams and colleagues found GPA correlated with student gender, church attendance, and percentage of relatives completing high school.<sup>7</sup> Powell and Arriola concluded that GPA was related to urban high school students' methods of handling unfair treatment,<sup>8</sup> while the research of Brown and Jones showed the importance of students having and future orientation.<sup>9</sup>

Although there are a few differences in foci in the most recent study of this population, i.e., church participation, family composition, etc., the commonalities in conclusions drawn from the empirical findings of research examining the general and urban student populations appear to be consistent. Findings can be summarized in the following points: GPA may be positively affected through interventions not directly related to academic competence, e.g., mental health interventions; students who have higher GPAs tend to pursue and graduate from college more so than those who do not; and, students who behave in a socially acceptable manner, e.g., positive behaviors associated with personal development, methods of handling unfair treatment, and a future orientation, are more likely to have higher GPAs than those who do not. This latter association of GPA with student behavior is the primary focus of this article.

## Teacher Perceptions of Student Behavior and Academic Success

The powerful influence of teachers' beliefs about students' academic propensity is well-supported in the literature.<sup>10</sup> Teachers' perceptions have not only been associated with students' current success, but with future success as well. In Alvidrez and Weinstein's study, children with higher socioeconomic status were judged by teachers to be more academically competent than their actual academic ability based on standardized test scores; and, conversely, lower socioeconomic status (SES) was associated with more negative teacher judgments than standardized test scores indicated.<sup>11</sup> The longitudinal results indicated that preschool teachers' ratings of student academic aptitude significantly predicted GPA and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores 14 years later.

In a study of urban high school students, Hopmeyer-Gorman, Kim, and Schimmelbusch found that low GPA, low submissiveness, and high rates of absenteeism were associated with low teacher preference.<sup>12</sup> DeMoulin and Walsh concluded from their research that GPA was based on teacher perceptions of students' positive personal development;<sup>13</sup> while Zimmerman and colleagues found a significant relationship between GPA and teachers' perceptions of student engagement in problem at-risk behaviors.<sup>14</sup>

In Gumora and Arsenic's study of middle school students, teachers assessed students' positive and negative moods; and schools provided achievement test results and student grades as measures of cognitive ability/achievement and school performance. Students' emotion regulation, general affective dispositions, and academic affect were found to be related to each other, and each of these variables made a significant contribution to GPA, over and above the influence of other cognitive contributors. Consequently, grades received were enhanced by student behaviors in the school setting.<sup>15</sup>

Results from these studies suggest that student demographic variables, e.g., family of origin SES, and classroom behavior affect not only teachers' perceptions, but GPA as well. How teachers define appropriate behaviors may have a significant influence on differential perceptions of students in both general and urban high school populations. However, these perceptions may have even greater negative

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influence within urban communities given teachers' tendency to report more negative impressions of students from lower SES families.<sup>16</sup>

## Methods

### *Participants*

Forty-four African American, regular-education freshmen newly enrolled in an urban high school, who had been identified as students most at-risk during middle school, were selected to participate in this study, with parental consent. These students shared the same teachers for four core required courses: English; science; mathematics; and history. The sample was made up of 24 (54%) males and 20 (46 %) females, and the mean age was 14.2 years. The high school's student population of 1,100 is predominantly African American, and the surrounding community, also predominantly African American, has high levels of poverty, unemployment, and crime. Over a five year period, the attrition rate for ninth grade students has ranged from 60% to 75%.<sup>17</sup>

### *Variables and Definitions*

Grade Point Average (GPA). GPA was defined as the participants' cumulative grade point average for the first six weeks of the academic year in core courses: History, English, mathematics, and science. GPA was calculated based on participants' teacher records.

Academic Competence. Academic competence was defined as and measured by reading, spelling, and mathematics scores on an individually administered achievement test, the Wide Range Achievement Test- Revised (WRAT-R). According to Jastak, Wilkinson, and Jastak, the WRAT-R was designed to "measure the codes which are needed to learn the basic skills of reading, spelling, and arithmetic" for populations ages 5-0 (5 years, 0 months) to 11-11 (11 years, 11 months), and 12 to 75 years.<sup>18</sup> The overall assessment includes three subscales with individual scores: Reading (recognizing and naming letters and words); spelling (writing symbols, name, and words); and arithmetic (solving oral problems and written computations).<sup>19</sup>

Students were administered the WRAT-R individually over a three week period.<sup>20</sup> This specific measure was selected and the individual mode of assessment was used so that researchers could work with students with whom a relationship had been established and a rapport had been developed. The researchers had found in earlier attempts at small group administration of data collection that students tended not to complete measures or tended to respond randomly without reading items. Also, the authors became aware through anecdotal reports from teachers and staff that many students' reading levels were below that required of the measures researchers distributed while some students failed to complete research packets because of limited investment in the process or lack of commitment to the researchers. Therefore, to circumvent some of these issues so that valid results might be acquired, an individual mode of assessment was used only after researchers had spent time in day-to-day contact with students and teachers in the school setting.<sup>21</sup>

Academic Preparedness. Academic preparedness was difficult to assess for this sample because it is typically associated with grade level knowledge. However, very few students in this sample were found to have WRAT-R subscale scores reflecting ninth grade level knowledge in all three domains. Therefore, the researchers developed an alternative definition of academic preparedness more reflective of the mean scores. Students whose WRAT-R subscale scores indicated knowledge at least the sixth grade level in two out of three WRAT-R

academic areas were labeled academically prepared. This adjustment was made to accommodate the academic norm within this setting and sample. For the purposes of the statistical analysis, academically unprepared students were coded as 1 while academically prepared students were coded as 2.

Honorability. Honorability was defined as teacher perceptions of the degree to which students engaged in behaviors that were conducive to instruction and learning in the classroom, such as arriving to class on time; arriving prepared to work; and submitting homework products consistently.<sup>22</sup>

After the administration of the WRAT-R, students were categorized based upon teachers' observations of their behaviors in the classroom over a three week period at the beginning of the fall semester. Teachers were first asked to independently assign all participating students to either the behaviorally honorable group or behaviorally dishonorable group. Once group assignments had been made by teachers independently, teachers came together to discuss each of their decisions. Honorable students were those who attended to course content in questions and discussions; consistently turned in homework; brought required materials to class (e.g., notebooks, paper, pencils, pens); followed teacher directions; and arrived to class in a timely manner. Teacher criteria for student assignment to the dishonorable group were based on behaviors such as verbal outbursts during classroom activities that were directed toward other students and teachers and were not related to learning content; consistent absence of homework, coming to class unprepared for reading and writing; inattentiveness to teachers' directions; frequent absenteeism; and consistent tardiness. Students perceived as dishonorable were coded a 1 for the statistical analysis, and those perceived as honorable were coded 2.

Of the 50 students selected for participation, independent group assignments were consistent across all participating teachers for 44 students (88% agreement).<sup>23</sup> Those six students for whom agreement did not occur were categorized as "mixed honorable" and were not included in the study. This category described students whose teacher-perceived problem behaviors were not apparent across all teachers and were a topic of ongoing, teacher-university faculty, and work team discussions.

Demographic variables, such as family SES, parental education, parental employment status, and family constellation were not used as variables in the study because there exists mixed support for their inclusion in the literature. Some recent studies have noted a significant relationship between demographic information and academic persistence and academic success,<sup>24</sup> whereas others note weak or no relationship at all.<sup>25</sup> Second, these typically noteworthy variables were very sensitive issues within the community and school setting. Third, their limited variance within the sample would have limited utility with multiple regression analysis. Fourth, the researchers chose only research variables that might be affected by either a behavioral or cognitive intervention, which would not include demographic variables. Consequently, student behaviors, teacher perceptions, academic competence, and academic preparedness were selected for inclusion in the study.

### *Hypothesis and Statistical Analysis*

Given the current body of literature, the authors hypothesized that teacher perceptions of student honorability and preparedness would explain a significant amount of the variance found in GPA. Descriptive statistics were calculated for students' GPA and WRAT-R scores.

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Statistics: Student Grade Point Average and WRAT-R Scores**

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.
Grade Point Average (4.0 scale)	0.00	3.66	1.63	0.66
WRAT-R Arithmetic Score	4.00	13.00	6.33	1.66
WRAT-R Spelling Score	2.00	13.00	6.49	2.48
WRAT-R Reading Score	2.00	13.00	6.59	2.99
n = 44				

Note: WRAT-R scores refer to grade levels, i.e., second grade (2.00) to college freshman (13.00).

To examine the degree to which students' academic competence predicted their GPA, multiple regression analysis was used. Multiple regression analysis was also used to examine the influence of teacher perceptions of student honorability and academic preparedness on GPA.

### Results of the Analysis

Means, standard deviations, and ranges for students' grade point averages and WRAT-R subscores are presented in Table 1. The average cumulative GPA in the four core courses at the end of the first six week grading period was 1.63 on a 4.00 scale, ranging from zero to 3.66. The mean arithmetic grade level score for the WRAT-R was 6.33, ranging from 4.00 to 13.00. The mean spelling grade level was 6.49, ranging from 2.00 to 13.00; and the mean reading grade level was 6.59, ranging from 2.00 to 13.00. Arithmetic grade level scores ranged from the fourth grade to freshman college level. Spelling and reading skill levels ranged from the second grade to freshman college level.

Twenty-five students (60%) were identified by teachers as academically unprepared, and 19 (40%) were identified as academically prepared. Approximately 75% (n = 33) were identified as honorable and 25% (n = 11) were identified as dishonorable. No significant correlation was found between students' GPA and the WRAT-R subscale scores: Arithmetic (r = .16; p = .24); Reading (r = -.06; p = .65); and Spelling (r = -.01; p = .93). These results indicate that student GPA and knowledge base, as measured by standardized test scores, were not related.

Table 2 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis that examined the degree to which student academic competence accounted for the variance in student GPA. Academic competence was found not to be a statistically significant predictor of GPA ( $R^2 = .04$ ; p = .55).

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis that examined the degree to which academic preparedness and teacher perceptions of student honorability accounted for the variance within GPA. Approximately 16% ( $R^2 = .164$ ; p = .03) of the variance in students' cumulative GPA could be predicted by this set of independent variables. Student honorability was found to be a statistically significant and positive predictor of GPA (Beta = 0.36, p = .02) while academic preparedness was not. Therefore, students whose teachers perceived them as honorable were more likely to have higher GPAs than those who were perceived as dishonorable. However, it should be remembered that overall teacher perceptions explained a small percentage of the variation in GPA.<sup>26</sup>

**Table 2**  
**Results of Multiple Regression Analysis:**  
**Academic Competence as Predictor of GPA**

Academic Competence	B	Std. Error	Beta
Arithmetic	0.14	0.11	0.19
Spelling	0.01	0.07	0.03
Reading	-0.05	0.06	-0.15
Constant	0.93	0.62	

$R^2 = 0.04$

F = 0.70

p = .55

**Table 3**  
**Results of Multiple Regression Analysis:**  
**Academic Preparedness and Teacher Perception**  
**of Student Honorability as Predictors of GPA**

Independent Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta
Academic Preparedness	0.22	0.25	0.13
Teacher Perception of Honorability*	0.60	0.25	0.36
Constant	1.08	0.19	

\* Statistically significant (p = .02)

Note: Academic preparedness refers to academic competence at or above the sixth grade level on at least two of the three WRAT-R test subjects.

$R^2 = 0.16$

F = 3.53

p = 0.03

## Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study of a sample of 44 urban high school freshmen, neither academic competence nor preparedness was found to be a statistically significant predictor of cumulative GPAs for the first six week grading period. However, teacher perception of student honorability was—although it accounted for only a small portion of variance in GPA. These findings raise concerns about the emphasis often placed on GPA as the sole reflection of academic competence and preparedness. Below key findings of the study are highlighted with recommendations for counselors who work with urban, at-risk high school students.

- Descriptive statistics revealed that there was a great deal of variation in students' academic competence, preparedness, and honorability. The existing within-group diversity may suggest the need for more sensitive use of assessments to procure a more accurate understanding of at-risk urban high school students in order to develop and implement the most effective guidance and counseling interventions.
- The statistical independence of GPA and academic competence in this sample of a population perceived to be most at risk within an urban community may begin to explain negative outcomes in traditional interventions within this setting. Identity development and the facilitation of a future orientation, which have been found to be associated with African American students' perceptions of education usefulness, valuing of academic work, and GPA, are the most important points of intervention in all high school populations.<sup>27</sup>
- A small, but statistically significant, portion of GPA was explained by the variation in students' honorability or adherence to the "rules of school" as defined by teachers, while academic preparedness did not. Academic competence, as measured by standardized test scores in reading, spelling and arithmetic were not related to GPA either. These results reinforce the need for counselors to individualize assistance to and support for academically at-risk students. For example, a student with a high GPA, but low standardized test scores, requires a different intervention than one with a low GPA and high standardized test scores, and so forth.<sup>28</sup> Still other students may need interventions regarding classroom behavior. Interventions need to be designed to address the point of deficit. Current literature supports this recommendation, particularly in the case of in-school misbehavior.<sup>29</sup>
- The findings highlight the importance of considering academic performance norms in studies of urban, at-risk students. In this sample, students were performing on average almost three grade levels below their assigned grades, and the classroom behavior of 25% of the sample were was perceived by teachers as dishonorable. Under these circumstances, teachers would be challenged to find a level of instruction that would be suitable across a wide range of academic knowledge. In addition, teachers and school counselors likely would spend a significant amount of time responding to in-class disruptions and disciplinary activity.<sup>30</sup>

In summary, findings from this study support the notion that grading practices are multidimensional, influenced by a number of variables, and in some settings may not accurately reflect actual academic competence. In such settings, administrators, teachers, and school counselors must be appropriately prepared to attend to all of

the previously mentioned negative implications associated with the disconnect between the two variables. However, the noteworthy good news is twofold. First, in spite of the absence of such a relationship, GPA, even in such settings, remains as a meaningful and important construct in assessing, understanding, and responding to students' unique experiences within their school environment. Second, other means of assessing academic competence, such as the WRAT-R, do exist and can serve as viable alternatives for inclusion in assessment of academic competence, program development, and interventions within certain student populations. Nevertheless, in the current climate wherein teachers, administrators, and politicians alike are raising questions about the utility of GPA as a predictor of academic competence, future research that continues to add clarity to our understanding of grading practices across school settings and student populations would continue to add to the literature in a meaningful way and is very much needed.<sup>31</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Larry Brody and Jerry Rimbach, "At Many Schools, 'A' Stand for 'Average,'" *Lansing State Journal*, May 2, 2005, Section D.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie M. Gutman, Arnold Sameroff, and Robert Cole, "Academic Growth Curve Trajectories from 1st Grade to 12th Grade: Effects of Multiple Social Risk Factors and Preschool Child Factors," *Developmental Psychology* 39 (July 2003): 777-790.

<sup>3</sup> Donald F. DeMoulin and Robert J. Walsh, "Comparing the Personal Development Test Scores Against GPA, Grade, and Age of Typical High School Students," *Journal of Instructional Psychology* 29 (March 2002): 22-24.

<sup>4</sup> Heinrich Stumpf and Julian C. Stanley, "Group Data on High School Grade Point Averages and Scores on Academic Aptitude Tests as Predictors of Institutional Graduation Rates," *Educational & Psychological Measurement* 62 (December 2002): 1042-1052.

<sup>5</sup> Gutman et al., "Academic Growth Curve Trajectories."

<sup>6</sup> Frank Linnehan, "The Relation of a Work-Based Mentoring Program to the Academic Performance and Behavior of African American Students," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 3 (December 2001): 310-325.

<sup>7</sup> Trina R. Williams, Larry E. Davis, Julie M. Cribbs, Jeanne Saunders, and James H. Williams, "Friends, Family, and Neighborhood: Understanding Academic Outcomes of African American Youth," *Urban Education* 37 (May 2002): 408-431.

<sup>8</sup> Cecil L. Powell and Kimberly R. Arriola, "Relationship Between Psychosocial Factors and Academic Achievement Among African American Students," *Journal of Educational Research* 96 (January-February 2003): 175-181.

<sup>9</sup> William T. Brown and James M. Jones, "The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Study of the Future Orientation, Minority Status Perceptions, Academic Engagement, and Academic Performance of Black High School Students," *Journal of Black Psychology* 30 (2004): 248-273.

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Alvidrez and Rhonda S. Weinstein, "Early Teachers'



Perceptions and Later Student Academic Achievement," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 91 (December 1999): 731-746.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Andrea Hopmeyer-Gorman, Janna Kim, and Anne Schimmelbusch, "The Attributes Adolescents Associate with Peer Popularity and Teacher Preference," *Journal of School Psychology* 40 (2002): 143-165.

<sup>13</sup> DeMoulin and Walsh, "Comparing the Personal Development Test Scores."

<sup>14</sup> Mark A. Zimmerman, Charles H. Caldwell, and David H. Bernat, "Discrepancy Between Self-Reported and School-Reported Grade Point Average: Correlates with Psychosocial Outcomes Among African American Adolescents," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 32 (2002): 86-109.

<sup>15</sup> Gail Gumora and William F. Arsenio, "Emotionality, Emotion Regulation, and School Performance in Middle School Children," *Journal of School Psychology* 40 (September-October 2002): 395-413.

<sup>16</sup> Alvidrez and Weinstein, "Early Teachers' Perceptions."

<sup>17</sup> This high school is a Professional Development School with a well-established, long-term relationship with Michigan State University.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph F. Jastak, Gary S. Wilkinson, and Sarah Jastak, *Wide Range Achievement Test—Revised* (Wilmington, DE: Jastak Associates, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> The administration time for the WRAT-R is 15-30 minutes. The test is designed to measure basic school codes rather than comprehension, reasoning, and judgement processes. See Jastak et al. (1995) for further information on its recommended uses, internal consistency, test-retest reliability, construct validity, and standardization.

<sup>20</sup> Due to sporadic student attendance, a common problem among students in general and particularly within this sample, a three week period of administration was necessarily. Although most students had completed the assessment process by the second week of classes ( $n = 34$ ), the final ten completed the testing during the third week.

<sup>21</sup> In exchange for teacher participation, researchers engaged classes in mini-workshops addressing the development of problem-solving skills and coping styles after the collection of packets.

<sup>22</sup> Readers must be cautioned to recognize the limitation of addressing only teachers' perceptions of students in an equation to understand the influence of students' behaviors on GPA, which may also be influenced by teacher variables beyond students' control. Oates found that the impact of teachers' perceptions of test performance may show signs of being pronounced in racially dissonant white teacher/black student context where teacher perceptions seem likely to be unfavorable. (See, Gregg L. Oates, "Teacher-Student Racial Congruence, Teacher Perceptions, and Test Performance," *Social Science Quarterly* 84 (September 2003): 508-525.) In addition, Ferguson provided evidence for the proposition that teachers' perceptions, expectations, and behaviors interact with students' beliefs, behaviors, and work habits in ways that help to perpetuate differences in Black-White academic performance. (See, Robert F. Ferguson, "Teachers' Perceptions and Expectations and the Black-White Test Score Gap," *Urban Education* 38 (July 2003): 460-507.)

<sup>23</sup> Although much care was taken in this study to control for inter-rater reliability given that three of the four teacher participants were white and one was African American, other means of assessing inter-rater reliability are available. For example, future research might include students' perceptions and evaluations of other students' in-class behaviors. Although some believe that the most valid strategy is to include students' self-evaluations, Morgan and Hehta found that African American students' self-evaluations were more weakly associated with their measured academic performance. (See, Stephen L. Morgan and John D. Mehta, "Beyond the Laboratory: Evaluating the Survey Evidence for the Misidentification Explanation of Black-White Differences in Achievement," *Sociology of Education* 77 (January 2004): 82-101.)

<sup>24</sup> Rodney Clark, Randolph R. Dogan, and Nadir J. Akbar, "Youth And Parental Correlates of Externalizing Symptoms, Adaptive Functioning, and Academic Performance: An Exploratory Study in Pre-Adolescents Blacks," *Journal of Black Psychology* 29 (May 2003): 210-229.

<sup>25</sup> Nicole M. Attaway and Breanna H. Bry, "Parenting Style and Black Adolescents' Academic Achievement," *Journal of Black Psychology* 30 (2004): 229-247.

<sup>26</sup> Because only 16% of the variance within GPA was explained by student honorability, future researchers may want to consider using a measure which assesses a broader base of academic knowledge or learning, e.g., critical thinking, reading comprehension, etc. than the WRAT-R.

<sup>27</sup> Brown and Jones, "The Substance of Things Hoped for."

<sup>28</sup> Focusing on GPA alone as the best predictor of future academic success in college and academic persistence of urban high school students while ignoring standardized test scores (and vice versa) may result in and increased probability of academic and/or life failure. Two possible errors could be made by school staff, parents, and students. For the purpose of discussion, the authors will borrow from statistics and use Type I and Type II errors for explanatory purposes. A Type I error in counseling and program development would be made when academically prepared students are directed toward post-graduation educational options, careers, or jobs that have lower status than their ability or intellectual capacity warrants because of a relatively low GPA. A Type II error in counseling and program development would be made when academically underprepared students are directed toward post-graduation educational options, careers, or jobs that exceed their ability and/or level of intellectual capacity because of a relatively high GPA. In either case, the probability for academic dissatisfaction, boredom, and failure would likely increase.

<sup>29</sup> Deryl F. Bailey and Pamela O. Paisley, "Developing and Nurturing Excellence in African American Male Adolescents," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 82 (Winter 2004): 10-17; Ron L. Mullis, Robert Rathge, and Ann K. Mullis, "Predictors of Academic Performance During Early Adolescence: A Contextual View," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 27 (2003): 541-548.

<sup>30</sup> At the same time, researchers must be aware that the effects of "stereotype threat" may be a major influence on academic success. There is support in the literature for remediating this environmental influence in program development as a means for increasing positive academic adjustment and higher standardized test scores within urban, at-risk communities. (See, Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson,

"Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69 (November 1995): 797-811.) However, even within schools that overtly express a strong commitment to creating a positive and self-affirming learning environment for African American students, studies have identified co-existing practices that impede academic affirmation. (See, Carolyn Tyson, "Notes from the Back of the Room: Problems and Paradoxes in the Schooling of Young Black Students," *Sociology of Education* 76 (October 2003): 326-343.)

<sup>31</sup> Although not addressed in this study, given the well-documented gender differences in patterns of academic performance and persistence among African American youth, the authors recommend attention to gender in the future study of this construct with larger sample sizes. (See, Jeanne Saunders, Larry Davis, Trina Williams, and James H. Williams, "Gender Differences in Self-Perceptions and Academic Outcomes: A Study of African American High School Students," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 33 (February 2004): 81-90.) The authors also recommend replication of this study with students in different community settings, e.g., general urban high school student population, suburban high school population, rural high school population. Such studies could add clarity to our understanding of the construct of GPA and how to develop the most effective programming addressing high school student academic success and persistence.

# Florida's Class Size Amendment and Co-Teaching: An Uneasy Partnership

**Lenford C. Sutton, Phyllis Jones,  
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For nearly four decades, school finance has become progressively more central in school reform efforts aimed at improving student performance. At the same time, the focus of many school business officials and policymakers has turned to efficient uses of current resources in lieu of uniform increases in school funding. With regard to improving student achievement, class size reduction has become a popular state policy tool, but it remains one of the more costly education reforms, given the need to hire additional teaching personnel and provide additional classrooms. However, if co-teaching were allowed, capital costs associated with new classroom space could be reduced, or even eliminated. At the heart of this issue are two major concerns. While co-teaching as a class size reduction strategy may save money, does it provide the same educational benefits to students as a class half its size with a single teacher? In other words, is co-teaching more cost-effective? If not, across-the-board policies that restrict the use of co-teaching for class size reduction purposes may appear justifiable; but, on the other hand, do such policies have unintended, and possibly negative effects on other educational strategies, such as inclusion, where there is evidence that co-teaching can be effective? These are questions Florida educators and policymakers have struggled with in the wake of the passage of Amendment IX in 2002.<sup>1</sup>

Given the popularity of class size reform, costs for implementation, and fiscal concerns of school business officials and policymakers, this article briefly reviews the literature on the efficacy of class size reduction, describes the context of Florida's adoption of a Class Size Amendment (CSA), and examines the benefits and challenges related to co-teaching instructional strategies. The final section discusses implications for other states considering class size reform.

## Efficacy of Class Size Reform

In spite of mixed research evidence on the efficacy of class size reform, a number of states, including Florida, have adopted class size reduction measures. Some of the most widely cited empirical evidence supporting class size reform as a tool for enhancing student performance is found in the evaluation of the Tennessee's Project STAR study conducted by Word and colleagues in 1990.<sup>2</sup> This study of

some 6,000 students assigned to small and large K-3 classes revealed that students in small kindergarten classes on average outperformed those in larger kindergarten classes and continued to do so throughout their elementary school experience. In 1996, the state of Wisconsin implemented the Student Assurance Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program, which attempted to increase student achievement, particularly for low income children, by reducing K-3 class sizes to a 15:1 ratio, along with other reforms.<sup>3</sup> Smith, Molnar, and Zahorik tracked the performance of SAGE students in 30 schools across 21 school districts between 1996 and 2001 by comparing the academic performance of SAGE students with the performance of comparable groups of students from non-SAGE schools within the same district. Overall, they found that SAGE students in grades 1-3 scored significantly higher on the reading, language arts, and mathematics subtests of the California Test of Basic Skills than did those in non-SAGE comparison groups.<sup>4</sup>

Conversely, in 1997, Hanushek reviewed 277 studies concerning the effects of classroom size in American public schools and found that only 15% of studies revealed a statistically significant, positive benefit from reducing classroom size.<sup>5</sup> He noted that 72% of the studies found no relationship between student achievement and reduction of classroom size while 13% found unintended adverse effects. In a 1999 review of the Tennessee STAR evaluation, Hanushek challenged its methodology, concluding that any derived benefits from class size reduction were minimal.<sup>6</sup> He maintained that the problem with the STAR project centered on its comparison of "something" to "nothing," and argued the large amount of funding used to reduce class size might have achieved greater utility if spent instead on maximizing teacher quality.

## Florida's Class Size Amendment (CSA)

### *Background on the Florida Public School System*

Section 1008.31 of the Florida Statutes establishes the mission and goals of Florida's K-20 education system and calls for a seamless and efficient system where all students, teachers, and parents work together to increase individual student performance.<sup>7</sup> The public school system employs approximately 161,000 certified personnel who provide educational programs and services to over 2.6 million students at an operating cost of approximately \$18 billion annually.<sup>8</sup> The system has approximately 3,600 schools buildings and, as expected, the passage of Amendment IX has created the need for additional classrooms above previous state long-term projections.<sup>9</sup> It is estimated that by the year 2050, over 40% of the state's students will be racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse.<sup>10</sup> In Florida, the definition of student diversity includes those who have been identified as having special needs, approximately 20% of the state's student population.

### *Description of Florida's Class Size Amendment (CSA)*

Over the last 15 years, more than 20 states have enacted constitutional and/or statutory provisions that in some way reduced the number of students assigned to teachers and classrooms.<sup>11</sup> In 2002, Florida voters joined their ranks by approving an amendment to the state constitution to reduce class size.<sup>12</sup> Under Amendment IX, class size reduction will be phased in between 2003-2004 and 2010-2011 through an annual two-student decrease in average number of students per classroom in a school district, until all classrooms in all school districts are at or below the constitutionally-mandated maximum class sizes: 1:18 in PreK-3 classrooms; 1:22 in grades 4-8; and 1:25 in grades 9-12.<sup>13</sup> A subsequent law stipulated that compliance with

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average number of students per classroom would be measured at the district level for the period 2003-2006, school level for 2006-2008, and classroom level for 2008-2009 and beyond.<sup>14</sup>

Statutory provisions enacted after the passage of the amendment offered school districts 13 "implementation options":

- 1) Provide dual enrollment courses at community colleges.
- 2) Provide for enrollment in courses offered by the Florida Virtual School.
- 3) Repeal school board policies that require students to have more than the state-required level of 24 credits to graduate from high school.
- 4) Allow students to graduate from high school as soon as they pass the grade 10 FCAT and complete the courses required for high school graduation.
- 5) Use methods to maximize use of instructional staff, such as changing required teaching loads and scheduling planning periods, deploying district employees that have professional certification to the classrooms, and using adjunct educators.
- 6) Use innovative methods to reduce the cost of school construction.
- 7) Use joint-use facilities through partnerships with community colleges, state universities, and private colleges and universities.
- 8) Adopt alternative methods of class scheduling, such as block scheduling.
- 9) Redraw school attendance zones to maximize use of facilities while minimizing the additional use of transportation.
- 10) Operate schools beyond the normal operating hours to provide classes in the evening or operate more than one session of school during the day.
- 11) Use year-round schools and other nontraditional calendars that do not adversely impact annual assessment of student achievement.
- 12) Review and consider amending any collective bargaining contracts that hinder the implementation of class size reduction.
- 13) Use any other approach not prohibited by law.<sup>15</sup>

Co-teaching, an instructional strategy that positions two instructors within one classroom, quickly became a popular strategy for school districts.<sup>16</sup> However, in June of 2005, Florida's State Board of Education adopted measures which effectively eliminated co-teaching as an acceptable method of complying with the CSA. The board prohibited any increase in the percentage of co-teaching classes utilized for the 2004-05 school year, and, commencing in 2006-07, school districts were no longer permitted to use co-teaching models for the purpose of complying with class size laws.<sup>17</sup>

The amendment also states that the cost of class size reduction was the responsibility of the legislature, not local school districts. School districts receive state funding through a categorical aid program, and their allocation is calculated via a special formula. However, the related law stipulates that school districts that do not meet the phase-in benchmarks set out in the amendment face a financial penalty for noncompliance.<sup>18</sup> Under this law, the Florida Department of Education is empowered to remove a percentage of the school district's class size operating categorical aid "proportionate to the amount of class size reduction not accomplished" and transfer it to an approved capital

outlay fund for class size reduction within the same district.<sup>19</sup> As late as February 2007, over \$5 million affecting 135 schools had been transferred for noncompliance.<sup>20</sup>

### **Benefits and Challenges of Co-Teaching**

The current research base on collaborative and co-teaching practices, although small, suggests these practices are potentially effective in improving the performance of all students in a class.<sup>21</sup> For example, in 1996, Winking and colleagues found that effective inclusive teaching in the early years was characterized by collaborative classrooms where special education and general education team-teaching occurred in a heterogeneous mix of students with developmentally appropriate instruction, authentic assessment, and parent partnerships.<sup>22</sup> In 1997, Ferranti applied this model to classrooms of older students and affirmed that co-teaching had the power to transform students and teachers alike.<sup>23</sup> In a 2006 study, Barnitt studied one Florida school district and found collaborative teaching increased the numbers of schools that reached federally mandated Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).<sup>24</sup>

Tilton defines co-teaching as an effective inclusive practice where general and special educators collaborate and teach together to meet a wide range of diverse learning needs in a classroom.<sup>25</sup> There are a variety of co-teaching approaches that can support the meaningful participation of students with diverse learning needs in the general education classroom:

- One teaches and one observes;
- One teaches and one supports in same curriculum content area;
- Station teaching of different curriculum content areas;
- Parallel teaching of same curriculum content area;
- Alternative teaching of same curriculum content area;
- Teaming on same curriculum content area.<sup>26</sup>

In reflecting upon classrooms that are inclusive of students with diverse learning needs, Lipsky and Gartner identified five essential elements needed to respond to change in a positive way: partnership; collaboration; leadership; training; and flexibility.<sup>27</sup> In addition, Kluth, Straut, and Gartner found skilled and responsive teachers, effective partnerships with families, and visionary leadership were integral to effective instruction in an inclusive context.<sup>28</sup> These characteristics form the foundation of effective collaborative teaching and learning in a co-taught classroom. Collaborative practice can be viewed along a continuum of teaching practice. At one end of the continuum, there are simple consultative partnerships among professionals. At the other end are more involved partnerships which evolve through joint planning, teaching and evaluation, and shared responsibility for all students in the class.

According to Banks, co-teaching requires that teachers be open to inclusive pedagogical methodologies modeled after his levels of multicultural pedagogy: Contributions level; additive level; transformational level; and social action level.<sup>29</sup> Teachers who plan transformative lessons with the purposeful intent to co-teach can structure them in ways that are differentiated to meet the diverse needs of all students in the classroom.<sup>30</sup> In these classrooms, co-teaching is a marker of a caring community in which diversity is honored, the competence of all students is presumed, and general and special education resources are shared.

Co-teaching and the opportunity for reflective planning that accompanies this approach bring organizational challenges that require systemic facilitation. Arguelles, Hughes, and Schumm analyzed

effective co-teaching models and highlighted particular characteristics, such as common planning time; flexibility; risk-taking; defined roles and responsibilities; compatibility; communication skills; and administrative support.<sup>31</sup> According to Thousand and Villa, it is a challenge for school administrators to create a school environment where such characteristics are nurtured and celebrated.<sup>32, 33</sup> The infusion of multiple instructional agents in a classroom, such as co-teaching, must be supported in sensitive and creative ways. These involve ongoing, high quality professional development and sustained district and school level administrative support. This is most effectively done through the creation of a professional learning community environment where teachers, administrators, and policymakers can develop understandings and sensitively apply and evaluate skills and knowledge in their current contexts.<sup>34</sup>

A major challenge to the practice of co-teaching in Florida, and thus, to inclusion, relates specifically to the State Board of Education's 2005 change of policy no longer permitting co-teaching as a method of class size reduction. Even if the teacher/student ratio in a co-taught classroom fell within the CSA mandate, the class would not be recognized as being in compliance with the law, and the district could be subject to a financial penalty for noncompliance. In some instances, schools committed to continuing the practice of co-teaching have developed "creative" approaches, like coding students through scheduling method codes for support facilitation, such as "S" (self-contained) for the general education co-teacher and "I" (in class one-on-one)<sup>35</sup> for the special education co-teacher. However, it appears that school districts may be reducing or eliminating co-teaching particularly where a general and special education teacher are teamed. In the 2002-2003 school year, 61% of classrooms that used the co-teaching model did so with a general and special education teacher. In 2003-2004, the percentage dropped to 44%; and in 2004-2005, it dropped further to 43%.<sup>36</sup>

### Discussion and Implications

Probably the most gratifying aspect of Florida's struggle with the implementation of class-size reduction is that the passage of Amendment IX represented the expressed will of Florida voters. Floridians, like those in many other states who have considered class size reform, are highly concerned about improving academic achievement and understand the enhanced quality of life education provides. However, the altruistic nature of voter support for public education evidenced in the passage of Florida's class size reduction amendment must be juxtaposed with the realities of the state's reluctant tax-paying citizenry. This has created a conundrum for legislators who must fund the initiative and school district officials who must implement it.

Adequate funding of the operational and capital construction needs for the implementation of Florida's Class Size Amendment remains a critical concern for education stakeholders. The limits on utilization of co-teaching models for CSA compliance may further increase school districts' facilities needs, while state-imposed financial sanctions on school districts for noncompliance, in the form of transfers of operating dollars to capital outlay reserves, may limit their ability to address projected teacher shortages.

Even in the face of mixed research evidence on the ability of class size reforms to improve student achievement and the significant new costs to implement such reforms, other states may find themselves faced with similar, voter-driven mandates. Class size reform can be expensive, a phenomena other states should consider before under-

taking it. Co-teaching is not a panacea for reducing class size and costs. In order to be effective, co-teaching, like inclusive practice, demands purposeful and meaningful planning, professional development, administrative support, and evaluation/quality assurance.<sup>37</sup> It is essential that if collaborative practices are to be utilized in class size reduction efforts, systems need to be developed to support the development of shared understandings by all involved, including policymakers, of what collaborative teaching and learning encompasses.<sup>38</sup> In the manner, they will realize that short-term expenditures for professional development, systemic planning, and evaluation will be offset by the long term-benefits of improved outcomes for all learners.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Fla. Const., amend. IX, <http://www.fldoe.org/arm/class-size.asp>.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Word, John Johnston, Helen Bain, Dewayne Fulton, Jayne Zaharias, Charles Achilles, Martha Lintz, John Folger, and Carolyn Breda, *Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR): Tennessee's K-3 Class-Size Study* (Nashville, TN: Tennessee State Department of Education, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Russ Kava and Layla Merrifield, *State Aid to School Districts*, Informational Paper 27 (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau, January, 2007), 18-20.

<sup>4</sup> Phil Smith, Alex Molnar, and John Zahorik, "Class Size Reduction: A Fresh Look at the Data." *Educational Leadership* 61 (September 2003): 72-74.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Hanushek, "Assessing the Effects of School Resources on Student Performance: An Update," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 16 (Summer 1997): 141-64.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Hanushek, "Some Findings from Independent Investigation of the Tennessee STAR Experiment and Other Investigation of Class Size Effects," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 21 (Summer 1999): 143-63.

<sup>7</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1008.31.

<sup>8</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Florida Education Finance Program Statistical Report* (Tallahassee, FL: Financial Management Section of the Bureau of School Business Services, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Florida Department of Education, *Florida Inventory of School Houses* (Tallahassee, FL: Office of Educational Facilities, August 2007), <http://www.fldoe.org/edfacil/fishreports.asp?style=normal>.

<sup>10</sup> Gwen Cartledge and Scott A. Loa, "Cultural Diversity and Social Skill Instruction," *Exceptionality* 9 (June 2001): 33-46.

<sup>11</sup> Caroline Hoxby, "The Effects of Class Size on Student Achievement: New Evidence from Population Variation," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115 (November 2000): 1239-85.

<sup>12</sup> Fla. Const., amend. IX.

<sup>13</sup> Note that Amendment IX defines class size as the "maximum number of students assigned to each teacher."

<sup>14</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1003.03(2).

<sup>15</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1003.03(3).

<sup>16</sup> Since the adoption of Amendment IX, the use of co-teaching instructional models has escalated 260%, with more than 58 of the 67 school districts reporting its use to meet CSA requirements. See, Florida Department of Education, *Statistical Brief Series* (Tallahassee, FL: Bureau of Education Information and Accountability Services, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Linda Champion, Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Operations, Florida Department of Education, Memorandum to District School Superintendents, "Use of Co-Teachers to Reduce Class Size," July 13, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1003.03(4).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Linda Champion, Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Operations, Florida Department of Education, Memorandum to Select District School Superintendents, "Class Size Reduction Transfers," February 28, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> In addition, both the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* and *No Child Left Behind Act* endorse the use of co-teaching to provide students with disabilities access to the general curriculum with their nondisabled peers. See, *Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400-1485; and *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Public Law 107-110.

<sup>22</sup> Deborah Winking, Joanne Farley, Heather Schweder, and Linda Mabry, *Learning Together: Children's Progress in Integrative Early Childhood Education*, New York City Early Childhood Initiative Year II Evaluation (Oak Brook, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1995), ED 462 398.

<sup>23</sup> Jim Ferranti, "Finding a Common Ground: Special Education and General Education." *Primary Voices k-6* 5 (August 1997): 30-34.

<sup>24</sup> Vikki Barnitt, *F.A.C.T. Folio* [Fostering Achievement and Community Together] (Tallahassee, FL: Florida Department of Education/Florida Inclusion Network, 2006), 17-19.

<sup>25</sup> Linda Tilton, *Inclusion: A Fresh Look—Practical Strategies to Help All Students Succeed* (Shorewood, MN: Covington Cove Publications, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Victor Barnitt, *F.A.C.T. Folio* [Fostering Achievement and Community Together] (Tallahassee, FL: Florida Department of Education/Florida Inclusion Network, 2006), 13; Marilyn Friend and Lynne Cook, *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals* (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Dorothy Lipsky and Alan Gartner, *Inclusion and School Reform: Transforming America's Classrooms* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> Paula Kluth, Diana Straut, and Douglas Bilken, "Access to Academics for All Students," in *Access to Academics for All Students: Critical Approaches to Inclusive Curriculum, Instruction, and Policy*, ed. Diana Straut, Paula Kluth, and Douglas Biklen (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003), 1-32.

<sup>29</sup> James Banks, "Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reforms," in *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, ed. James Banks and Cheryl Banks (New York: Wiley & Sons, 2001), 225-46.

<sup>30</sup> Luana H. Meyer, Jill Bevan-Brown, Beth Harry, and Maron Sapon-Shevin, "School Inclusion and Multicultural Issues in Special Education," in Banks and Banks, 327-52.

<sup>31</sup> Maria Arguelles, Marie Hughes, and Jeanne Schumm, "Co-Teaching: A Different Approach to Inclusion," *Principal* 79 (March 2000): 48-51.

<sup>32</sup> Jacqueline S. Thousand and Richard A. Villa, "Organizational Supports for Change Toward Inclusive Schooling," in *Creating an Inclusive School*, ed. Richard A. Villa and Jacqueline S. Thousand (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005), 57-80.

<sup>33</sup> It is also important that administrators and staff who choose to implement co-teaching be committed to parity and role sharing, shared leadership, which includes shared facilitation of team meetings, and shared responsibility for all students in the classroom in the service of thoughtful and meaningful implementation of access to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (See, Paula Kluth, "You're Going to Love This Kid!" *Teaching Students with Autism in the Inclusive Classroom* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Richard Dufour, Robert Eaker, and Rebecca Dufour, *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* (Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> This code indicates that the teacher is responsible for one student, or a small group of students in a general classroom.

<sup>36</sup> Jeanine Blomberg, "Update on Co-Teaching" (Tallahassee, FL: Florida Department of Education, 2005), <http://www.fldoe.org/arm/pdf/81605sbe.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> A significant issue that policymakers and administrators must consider is that of quality assurance. Currently, collaborative practices are being promoted in the name of CSA compliance with little or no systemic processes of evaluation apart from student head count. Clearly, for an initiative such as CSA, that has major fiscal implications, evaluation processes must relate to quality as well as quantity issues. Quality indicators need to be developed that evaluate collaborative practices across a school and district related to improved student learning and performance outcomes. Such an evaluation of student performance has to integrate multiple dimensions of assessment and evaluation that measure student growth and teacher success from a holistic perspective for all students in the classroom.

<sup>38</sup> A natural consequence of this greater understanding will be an acknowledgement of the need to provide effective professional development, both at the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate levels. For many teachers, teaching has historically been a solitary experience, and a move towards effective collaborative practices signifies a major change in professional roles and responsibilities in and across schools. For some, this will be a natural progression of their current roles and school contexts. Many special education teachers have experienced elements of collaborative teaching in their own practice, and some general education teachers have teamed together around curriculum content.



## Commentary

# Is Ontario Moving to Provincial Negotiation of Teaching Contracts?

Anne L. Jefferson

In Canada, the statutes governing public school teachers' collective bargaining are a combination of the provincial Labour Relations Act or Code and the respective provincial Education/School/Public Schools Act.<sup>1</sup> As education is within the provincial, not federal, domain of legal responsibility, the specifics of each act or code can vary. Consequently, when the respective acts are combined, the result has yielded some provinces with provincially negotiated teachers' contracts while others have negotiations occurring at the local level. These agreements, as with any collective agreement resulting from union and management negotiations, address a number of employment considerations, such as working conditions, salaries, benefits, leaves, layoff, recall, discipline, and dismissal.

The local structure for negotiations is what operates within the province of Ontario.<sup>2</sup> As Brown explains:

*The School Boards and Teachers Collective Negotiations Act* governed... collective negotiations from 1975 until the end of 1997. ... As a result of the *Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997*, teachers and boards [began bargaining] in accordance with the *Education Act* which incorporates the provisions of the *Labour Relations Act, 1995*. (p. 91).<sup>3</sup>

Teachers are represented by two separate teaching unions—the Ontario elementary school teaching federation (OESTF) and the Ontario secondary school teaching federation (OSSTF). Given that the province operates public and separate school systems, each system would have parallel but separate teachers' unions for its elementary and secondary school teachers. Each union negotiates independently of the other. This situation has deep roots in tradition within the province, but discussion of this tradition is beyond the scope of this commentary. Consequently, school boards, which operate both elementary and secondary schools, will have more than one collective agreement with their teachers. Of importance to this commentary is the acknowledgement of parties to the collective bargaining process. Thomas clearly outlines the situation: "The basic bargaining situation is that the representatives of the local Board of Trustees [school board] are on one side of the table and the representatives of the local Branch Affiliate [teachers' union] are on the other."<sup>4</sup>

Although the collective bargaining process can be a very labor-intensive and emotional process for both sides, there has been no indication that a substantial change in the process is desired. The Ministry of Education has no formal role and therefore does not normally become involved in the process. Exceptions have occurred.

The primary exception has involved strike action by the teachers. As noted by Thomas: "A strike is widely defined and includes walkouts, slowdowns, work-to-rule campaigns and mass resignations and rotating strikes."<sup>5</sup> The rationale for the intervention has rested on the claim the strike placed in jeopardy the successful completion of courses of study of affected students.<sup>6</sup> The normal result of the ministerial intervention was legislation ordering the teachers back to work, but a definitive answer on whether teachers in Ontario could legally strike never existed prior to 1975.<sup>7</sup> In 1975, the government of Ontario passed Bill 100. Prior to the passage of Bill 100, "teachers had... the ability to strike and exert other forms of pressure, without regulation and mandatory procedures."<sup>8</sup> Bill 100 dealt with the issue of strikes by teachers by "rigorously regulat[ing] negotiation disputes through a... set of dispute settlement procedures."<sup>9</sup> The teachers' unions were not silent, by any stretch of the imagination, on these government interventions in the collective bargaining process. At least, this has been past practice.

On June 2, 2005 the Ontario Ministry of Education released the following:

QUEEN'S PARK, ON, June 2 /CNW/ - The Ministry of Education released a preliminary status report this morning on the status of negotiations by school boards with the province's teachers in relation to the provincial framework. As of midnight last night, some 95 agreements had been successfully concluded, while another 18 boards and bargaining units will receive extensions for varying lengths of time suited to their circumstances. In addition, up to nine school boards and bargaining units have had their access to the provincial framework suspended.

"The school boards and teacher federations that have reached agreements are to be congratulated for some truly outstanding efforts to ensure long-term peace and stability for students," said Education Minister Gerard Kennedy.

"This is tremendous news for Ontario education. Despite the difficulties experienced at a minority of boards in finalizing their terms, a great deal of progress has been made in almost all cases."

Extensions have been made where school boards and teacher federations have agreed to continue to meet the conditions set under the provincial framework. The provincial framework is suspended in nine locales for not maintaining the agreed-upon structure, largely due to the acceleration of work-to-rule conditions by the teacher federation.

Nine bargaining units, all in the elementary public panel, are currently seen as not in keeping with the conditions of the provincial framework that was agreed to by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) and the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO), subject to final verification. These are:

- Algoma District School Board (DSB)
- Avon Maitland DSB
- Bluewater DSB
- Halton DSB
- Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB
- Lakehead DSB
- Limestone DSB
- Renfrew DSB
- Thames Valley DSB

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"Our absolute goal remains to have all students and teachers benefit from the provincial framework," said Kennedy. "It is vital, however, that the original conditions are upheld by all parties."

The Ministry will now seek immediate discussions with ETFO and OPSBA to see if conditions can be met at the suspended school boards and bargaining units.

After a series of first-ever provincial dialogues on collective bargaining issues, the Ministry, ETFO and OPSBA signed a framework agreement in April. Similar dialogues subsequently took place with public secondary and Catholic teacher federations and school board associations that also shaped provincial framework policy. Final discussions are also underway to fully incorporate francophone public and francophone Catholic systems.

The provincial framework provides boards with assured funding for four years of salary increases at 2 per cent, 2 per cent, 2.5 per cent and 3 per cent, a one-time teacher development allowance for 2004-05 and funding for additional teachers that will benefit students, but also assist with teacher workload and preparation time.

The provincial framework resources are contingent upon local collective agreements that:

- Are for a four-year period (school years 2004-05 to 2007-08 inclusive);
- Include salary increases no greater than the provincial guidelines announced last spring;
- Are not conducted under sanctions by either side, i.e., no strike or significant work-to-rule or lockout;
- Deploy new teachers consistent with provincial objectives;
- Were to be reached by June 1, 2005.<sup>10</sup>

Have the parties to collective bargaining increased by one-the Ministry of Education? If so, the expansion at the negotiation table has occurred without legal consent or mutual consent of the two legitimate parties, namely, the school board and the teachers' unions. There has been no legislation change to move the party number from two to three. Even Bill 100 kept the parties involved during the collective bargaining process to the school board and the teachers' unions. Furthermore, the ministry has moved collective bargaining discussions to the public arena by naming nine elementary school panels that were apparently not on board, as of June 2, 2005, with the ministry's mandate. In doing so, has the ministry introduced yet another party to the negotiation table?

The situation is alarming if not critical. Collective bargaining is governed by labor law, and the apparent interference of the process by the ministry is a serious matter. If Ontario wants to alter the parties who engage the negotiations of collective agreements, then this should be undertaken following proper legal process—but perhaps what is even more remarkable is the silence that greeted this intrusion on collective bargaining.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See, *Statutes Governing Public School Teachers Collective Bargaining in Canada* (Government of Canada, Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2005), <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca>.

<sup>2</sup> See, Government of Ontario, *Labour Relations Act* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1995); Government of Ontario, *Education Act*, Part X.1 (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2001); Government of Ontario, *School Boards and Teachers Collective Negotiations Act* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1975); Government of Ontario, *Education Quality Improvement Act* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Anthony F. Brown, *Legal Handbook for Educators* (Toronto: Thomson Canada Ltd., 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Alan M. Thomas, *Teachers' Collective Bargaining in Ontario: An Introduction* (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1976), 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Bryan M. Downie, *Strikes, Disputes and Policymaking* (Kingston: IRC Press, 1992), 70.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>10</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education, "Government Reports Major Progress Made on Teacher Agreements," June 2, 2005, [http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario/GPOE/2005/06/02/c6900.html?lmatch=&lang=\\_e.html](http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario/GPOE/2005/06/02/c6900.html?lmatch=&lang=_e.html).



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