



Courtesy of Stanford News Service

# PREPARING TOMORROW'S TEACHERS:

Linda Darling-Hammond on the Role of Collaboration in Our Schools

Nationally known researcher Linda Darling-Hammond will tell you it's a "no-brainer" that the single most important determinant of what students learn is what their teachers know. "A big flaw of one of our images of teaching for most of this last century is that single, isolated teachers may go through a teacher education program, learn everything they need to know in the one experience, and they'd be 'baked and done,'" says the Stanford University education professor. "That's not an image that imagines teachers could learn from each other's practice, that there could be many, many ways to teach something, and that there's a need for advice and counsel when you're confronting the different learning needs of students."

Darling-Hammond, who served as executive director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, sees that image changing among both beginning and veteran teachers. The author of more than 200 articles and monographs, Darling-Hammond spoke to *Northwest Education* Editor Rhonda Barton about designing collaboration into teacher education programs and the American school system, plus fine-tuning the notion of "highly qualified" teachers.

**Q** • *How are schools of education breaking down the classroom isolationism of the past?*

Teacher education programs have undergone a lot of change and reform in the last 15 years or so—really since the Holmes group and other reforms were started in the late 1980s. Most operate now on a strong cohort model where teachers are preparing together, where they're often working in groups with one another. ... So, the notion that collaboration is at the heart of professional practice is definitely reinforced and is really at the core of many teacher education programs. Certainly not all, but the majority of programs prepare teachers to be members of a collaborative learning community.

*How do you convert veteran teachers who weren't exposed to that thinking and may be overly protective of their turf?*

Exhortation is not the most effective way to get people to change! Just telling people to change usually doesn't do it; you have to change the context, the experience base that they have. When schools become more collaborative, people who haven't had the opportunity before to work with other teachers can find it very productive if it's introduced in the right way.

For example, I know of a number of schools that have introduced peer coaching models where teachers have the opportunity to go into each other's classrooms and see what their colleagues are doing. Often, the peer may say, "While you're in here, I'd really like you to look at X"—so it's defined by the teacher what they want to talk about, what they're interested in collaborating on or thinking about together. It's not threatening, it's not an evaluation, it's not about who's better than whom—that there's something wrong with you if you have any questions about teaching. You're able to use your colleague as a source of information that you'd like to have. I think quite often veteran teachers who have not had that opportunity before find it incredibly useful when they're able to be initially in control of the process, to use it for their own purposes, rather than have it foisted upon them.

*One of the most common barriers to collaboration is finding time. How do you get around that?*

If you go to schools in most European and Asian countries, the school is designed to allow for teacher collaboration and teachers will typically have at least 10 hours—sometimes as many as 20 hours a week—to plan lessons together, to observe each other teaching, to work on assessment. It's partly that we need to design schools to allow for that and [schools that are] restructuring in the U.S. have done that. There are a lot of schools that have redesigned their schedule,

their staffing, the way they organize adults together, and adults and children together to allow that time to be built in—not added on, not purchased with additional dollars. Typically that can be done for very close to the same per-pupil expenditures as the models we have now.

So, we have to think what is it that's different? One of the key things is that in most countries about 80 percent of the education workforce is classroom teachers. In the United States, only 43 percent of the education workforce is full-time classroom teachers. We have hired a lot of other people who supplement and augment, control, or support the work of teachers. The bottom line is until we rethink our staffing and invest more of our resources in classroom teachers, we won't be able to give teachers the routine opportunities for collaboration and learning that are expected and provided in other countries.

*What impact will the No Child Left Behind mandate for highly qualified teachers have in developing a workforce that can meet every student's educational needs?*

The notion that all kids, including those in high-need schools, should have teachers who are fully prepared is an important one. There are states that have really used the No Child Left Behind requirement as a way of putting in place incentives for ensuring that qualified teachers are hired in urban centers and poor rural areas. So that's been good; it's raised the issue to attention.

On the other hand, there are lots of states where the response has been more to try to game the requirements. In California, when it first came out, the first definition of "highly qualified" was teachers on emergency credentials because those teachers were allocated to so many city schools. And, the [U.S.] Department of Education has been much more willing to allow states to slide on the requirements for highly qualified teachers than they have been to let them slide on the requirements of the student testing. So, there's been an imbalance in that regard.

There are also some issues in the way highly qualified teachers are defined in the law that need to be worked out: The notion that a teacher should have a major or pass a test in every single subject area that they teach has been really a nightmare for teachers in small schools (such as) in northern Montana where you might have a one-room schoolhouse with a K–12 teacher teaching every subject area. Teachers who teach in interdisciplinary contexts in middle and high schools—where they teach math and science together or English and social studies—it's been a problem there. Those kinds of things need to be worked out. You want a reasonable standard you can

---

*[I]n most European and Asian countries ... teachers will typically have at least 10 hours—sometimes as many as 20 hours a week—to plan lessons together, to observe each other teaching, to work on assessment.*

---

enforce well rather than an unreasonable standard that then becomes difficult to enforce and doesn't achieve its goal. As states move toward thoughtful certification that is more common across the country, you ought to be able to say simply that a teacher who is fully certified by the state standards for the position they hold ought to be highly qualified.

*What's the one lesson you hope your students walk away with as they prepare to enter the teaching profession?*

We really hope that our students not only believe that all children can learn, but really have the skills and tools to enable all children to learn. They have the disposition to teach all kids well, and they also have a knowledge about teaching strategies and learning approaches that enables them to teach students who learn in a variety of ways.

I think if there's anything we strongly believe it's that quite often there's an emphasis on the disposition to want to teach all children well or the notion that all children can learn, that comes up empty if we don't give people the skills and tools to allow them to do that. The other disposition and skill that we want our student teachers to have is to continue to look for answers and to collaborate with other teachers and colleagues in continually improving their practice. You need to know how to access the resource of other colleagues if you're going to continually improve your practice and become more professional. ■

➤ [The Case for a National Teacher Test \(Q&A with Linda Darling-Hammond continued\)](#)