

# HORACE

## Teacher Renewal: Essential in a Time of Change

***As the student population grows, Essential schools are facing critical issues of teacher preparation, turnover, retention, and leadership. Four new and veteran teachers talk here about their own experiences of building a professional life in this time of change.***

THEY COME FROM PLACES AS various as the earth itself, some still rough at their edges, some polished by the tumble of the machine. As different as onyx and quartz, ruby and amber, they make the linked chain that holds a school together, steadies it against the winds, inches it toward change.

And so they are more precious to their Essential schools than any gift of money, these teachers who spend their days and years doing what is perhaps the hardest job around for a person of ambition and intelligence these days.

In his landmark study *School-teacher* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), sociologist Dan Lortie described an occupation isolated by its workplace structures, and without a strong career trajectory to reward experience and skill. The teachers he surveyed, though they come across as conservative and even ambivalent in their attitudes, found their chief motivation and inspiration in the daily satisfactions of reaching and changing kids.

Almost three decades later, the statistics tell much the same story. The teaching profession today, stripped of its once reliable corps of educated females with few other job prospects, is staggering under the needs of a global economy and a burgeoning student population. Math and science teaching positions go begging as industry snaps up qualified graduates; and teachers for students with limited English or

special needs are scarce as hens' teeth. Urban schools lose teachers to the whiter, higher-paid suburbs. And when they look toward a career where they will make only a fraction of what their classmates do for comparable effort and skill, even young teachers with high ideals often decide instead on management, medicine, or law.

Yet HORACE's interviews with Essential school teachers around the country still consistently reveal the same motivations and satisfactions that Lortie found in his much larger and more rigorous study. Moreover, they suggest that even as schools' social context has altered, a new and promising factor has crept into the professional lives of those who teach in Coalition member schools.

Again and again, these teachers speak of emerging from the isolation of their classrooms into partnerships, teams, and networks marked by collaboration among peers. Such initiatives have their tensions and costs, they acknowledge; and at every stage of their careers teachers require explicit supports to carry them out. But they also yield intellectual and personal rewards, which often renew their energy and commitment to continuing in a profession under siege.

Might this tiny sample of teachers' voices—rookie and veteran, black and white, urban and suburban, older and wet behind the ears—actually signify an important shift in what we know about getting

and keeping teachers in this time of stress and change? Rather than presume to make that leap, HORACE here presents the voices themselves.

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*Raised in North Carolina and with a degree from Kenyon College, David Ansbacher, 28 and white, plays guitar well enough to have had a career in music or anything else. But a post-college teaching stint in Namibia led him into a master's program in teaching at Brown University. From there he took a job team-teaching English and history at Irvington High School in Fremont, California, a 1700-student urban school with a strong commitment to Essential school principles.*

I went into teaching for the intellectual satisfaction—pushing kids into discussing things that they haven't thought before, really thinking and challenging themselves. We are just finishing a unit on Vietnam in which the kids have worked to create a mural that portrays the different periods of the war across the entire back wall, with a continuous timeline on top. They had to explain it to each other, and we saw them come to understand a very complex topic in a deep way. We had veterans come visit, and the kids really knew what had happened. At those moments, the feeling is almost tangible of kids thinking in the room and being proud of their own thought.

What I didn't expect was how quickly I was called upon to take a position of leadership in the school. In my third year I already have the responsibilities of a senior teacher, not just teaching in the classroom, but also a lot of whole school change, which I enjoy. I coordinate our "family teams" for ninth and tenth grades—several teachers who have the same students for three periods—and that puts me in the center of a lot of things. Coming out of graduate school you're not really sure how respected you should be, and it's great when you're given responsibility; you rise up to it and it

makes you want to stay.

When I first got into teaching I thought I would eventually be an administrator, but that's changed—even though I like a big-picture job, I wouldn't take it without having classroom interaction with kids. I enjoy the challenge and chaos of administrative work, but it doesn't give me peace. Being in a classroom gives me peace; I walk around smiling and having a great time.

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The year before I was hired, the school had a big retirement buyout and 30 percent of the staff was new. I was hired the next year, with not quite so many new teachers; and now this year we've had a lot of new ones. All of the nine "families" in the school have at least one new teacher, and some have two or three. And we're looking at a big retirement next year. Also, because we have so many young teachers we have a lot of turnover as they make changes in their lives. This year four teachers are getting married and leaving, or going to graduate school, and five older teachers are retiring either by choice or by incentive.

The biggest thing for me about teaching in an Essential School is working in teams with other teachers, which goes hand in hand with knowing kids well—partly because there are fewer kids to know and partly because you get the benefit of what your partner notices about the kids. I am on two teams, which can be problematic; I share 60 kids with another teacher in the same classroom for two periods, and I'm also part of a ninth grade family, where

kids have the same teachers and we have a common prep but don't share a classroom.

New teachers in Essential Schools need models from other teachers. The school is not a simple place; there are an overwhelming number of catchwords and different programs and things to understand. It's really hard for new teachers, who are overwhelmed anyway and being called on to be on this or that committee and be responsible for outcomes. We need support from a teacher or administrator whose job is to work only with new teachers and acclimate them. We need time for reflection. We had a new teacher support group, but it met sporadically—and there were fifteen teachers, which was too many, and we had too many needs, and it was not focused enough. New teacher meetings should revolve around topics and norms, like the critical friends groups we've started here since then. Now we have only seven people and a topic we focus on each week, and a structure set up to support people.



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For a list of back issues or for information about the Coalition, write to CES, Brown University, Box 1969, Providence, RI 02912.

**Editor:**  
Kathleen Cushman

My best preparation for teaching was the Summer High School at Brown's graduate school program. We taught as part of a team all morning, and then directly we met with the cooperating teacher and our professor. It was overwhelming, intense, and darn good practice for the real world. We *needed* to feel blown away, because that's what it's like; and it got us used to the difficulty of team teaching. In the midst of the hecticness we had to debrief every day—even when what we just

did stunk and our immediate reaction was to run. It got us used to debriefing as support, inquiry, and reflection, and I still do that debriefing with my teaching partner every day.

I never think of doing anything else but teaching. I do think about starting my own school. I'd like to make a place where size does not inhibit the things that should be working; where the district doesn't restrict academic freedom; where you can require teachers to share work and be open about what goes

on, so you can have a common understanding of standards; and where all teachers can meet for a discussion about kids and not fill a huge auditorium.

*Until she was a junior in college in 1968—one of five black students at Yankton College in South Dakota—Rhenette Preston aimed to become a doctor, but a summer job tutoring low-achieving high school students in her home town of Chicago changed her*

## Who's Teaching What, and to Whom?

- By 2207 our schools will enroll nearly three million more students than today, a total of 54 million youngsters.
- More than one quarter of all teachers are over 50, and teacher retirements are accelerating. Over the next decade, more than two million teachers will need to be hired to fill elementary and secondary teaching positions. Over half of these will be first-time teachers, who will need to pass new, more difficult certification requirements. (National Center for Educational Statistics)
- Thirty percent of new teachers leave teaching within three years; forty percent within five years. Attrition rates for new teachers in some urban districts reach 50 percent in the first five years of teaching. Urban eighth graders are twice as likely as their suburban or rural peers to attend schools where at least one teacher leaves before the end of the year. (*Education Week's report Quality Counts; 1996 Digest of Educational Statistics*)
- Less than 75 percent of American teachers are fully qualified; more than 12 percent enter the classroom with no formal training, and another 14 percent without fully meeting state standards. One quarter are teaching outside their fields. Fewer than 30 percent of high school physics students have teachers who majored in physics in college; over 30 percent of math teachers have not even a college minor in that field. In virtually every subject area, more affluent students get better teachers. Urban schools are twice as likely to hire unlicensed or underqualified teachers. (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future; *Education Week's report Quality Counts*)
- One third of American students belong to a minority group, but only 13 percent of teachers do; and the gap is growing. (National Center for Educational Statistics)
- Eight out of ten beginning teachers are female.
- It will cost nearly \$5 billion a year for the next decade in new federal, state, and local money to successfully upgrade teacher education, subsidize people to teach in high-need fields and locations, reform the teacher licensing and induction process, and provide better professional development. (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future)
- Urban districts have a harder time filling teaching vacancies, especially in such sought-after fields as biology, mathematics, bilingual education, and special education. Finding enough minority teachers is also a challenge; in 1997, 92 percent of the largest urban districts reported an immediate need for teachers from minority races and ethnic groups. Minority students make up 75 percent of urban enrollments, but only 20 percent of undergraduates in teacher education are minorities. (Recruiting New Teachers, Inc.)
- Newly hired teachers in urban schools are more likely than their counterparts in suburban and rural districts to have no teaching license or an emergency or temporary one. Of the 2,966 K-12 teachers the Los Angeles Unified School District hired to fill its vacancies for the 1997-98 school year, roughly 60 percent had emergency teaching licenses. (Recruiting New Teachers, Inc.)
- Most elementary school teachers have only 8.3 minutes of preparation time for every hour they teach, while high school teachers have just 13 minutes of prep time per class hour. Teaching loads for high school teachers generally exceed 100 students per day and reach nearly 200 students per day. (Recruiting New Teachers, Inc.)
- School districts spend only 1 to 3 percent of their resources on teacher development, as compared to much higher expenditures in most corporations and in other countries' schools. (Recruiting New Teachers, Inc.)
- Average salaries for teachers range between \$20,354 in South Dakota to \$43,326 in Connecticut, with salaries in affluent suburban districts much higher than those in cities or rural communities within the same area. (1996 Digest of Educational Statistics)

## What Do Essential School Teachers Want Most?

What matters most to teachers in an Essential school? Asked to reflect on how to improve the conditions and effectiveness of their daily work, the faculty of one of "Horace's schools" came up with four common concerns:

- **Knowing students well.** To improve the quality of their teaching and assessment, teachers wanted a smaller number of students overall. To achieve this they favored team teaching of integrated subjects, as well as longer schedule blocks, more time with the same students over several years, and a sustained advisory relationship over time.
- **Support for curriculum development.** Though they liked the freedom to design their own curriculum, teachers wanted more time to do it ahead of time. They might charge curriculum subgroups with that task, they said, with the aim of assembling a made-to-order shared curriculum library.
- **Communication, collaboration, leadership.** Working together better in fewer, more focused meetings was important to teachers, and they asked school leaders to balance school-wide participation in decisionmaking to reflect this. At the same time, they wanted more support and guidance in the arts of dialogue, collaboration, teaching and learning, and advisement. And they pushed for a meaningful part for both teachers and students in school governance.
- **Structures and schedules to support their goals.** Everything in the school should contribute to making the above goals happen, teachers said, while acknowledging that some adjustments work at cross purposes to others. When in doubt, simplify, they suggested, keeping the top priority as more sustained time with fewer students.

*mind. The daughter of a teacher and a police officer, and with masters degrees, from Governor State University and Roosevelt University, she has a 30-year career in several Chicago schools behind her. Though she has been both a counselor and an assistant principal, she now teaches and coordinates science at Lindblom Technical High School, which serves grades seven through twelve.*

The summer tutoring job I had in college was my first time being close to any children who were active in gangs. I had a reading group with several gang members—ninth graders who were reading on a third-grade level. I saw those guys achieve that summer, helped them to get into reading by playing simple games with them, and by the end of the summer they had finished the eighth grade. Most gang members don't take to strangers that way but they were really receptive with me. My worst student became one of my best students; later on I

found out that he graduated from high school and became a police officer. My senior year I decided to come home and teach before going to medical school. That was 1969, and I never went back.

At first I thought teaching would be like glorified babysitting—an easy job for easy money. But as I went in I found I could not sleep at night thinking about some of the problems the kids had and what I could do to help them. I knew those kids had the potential to be achievers and get straight As, and I was constantly encouraging them, spending money on trips—I definitely feel that kids learn by doing, and the Board of Ed was not supplying money for them.

Coming up at a time when teachers had to have seniority, I was bumped around quite a bit—South Side, North Side, the gang-infested schools of the inner city. I had a chance to teach children of all races, including a lot of students whose

parents were not citizens. Some of them would take turn wearing shoes to school, and so I bought them shoes, socks, clothes, coats. If they know you care about them, all children are receptive to whatever you want them to know.

God sent me here to Lindblom just as I was getting quite discouraged, not feeling that I was able to give to students in the capacity I was in. I had been an assistant principal in an elementary school, having to evaluate teachers who lacked creativity or who were burned out. I was helping teach science classes where we couldn't "do" because we had no lab equipment, and I was buying things myself, and bringing in "kitchen chemistry" from home.

As a mentor teacher here at Lindblom, I work with three brand new teachers right out of college. Teachers should do their student teaching in many different settings, I think—not just eight weeks, and not just observation hours, but the whole four-year gamut in actual schools. When I kept getting bumped from school to school I thought it was the worst, but it actually was the best thing for me—it gave me a sense of what teachers really were about, the good side and the negative side. I could interact with all types of teachers and that helped me tremendously.

Networking is one thing I like about Essential schools that I like—both within a school and between schools. It's definitely a support when you can feel comfortable with people who are not there to evaluate you but to help you unwind, tell your fears, your ideas, without repercussion. This is my second year as a mentor but I have always helped new teachers. And I get help, too—my mentees come in with fresh approaches I may not have had as a student, new philosophies, new ideas. I see them working in their classrooms and I have tried some of their techniques and found them really helpful. Also I go to other schools and talk with other teachers

and administrators, through the CES critical friends group that I coach. And the CES workshops at Fall Forum are very important to me.

I keep teaching because children are depending on me for their success. If I am going to help them succeed, I've got to be there. I make a contract with my students that they can and will achieve in my class. We have no failures; they're going to learn something from each other as long as they come to class. If they don't make a passing grade, it's because they chose not to work. I let them know I too am learning from them; they're giving me ideas I can pass on to the next class, more ways of restructuring their classes. They evaluate themselves after they do oral presentations; they discuss their findings with their groups, and then other groups evaluate them. Nothing is a failure unless you did not do the experiment.

I thought administration was something I wanted to do, and I was motivated by money. But I found that you can't do both teaching and administration; you cheat your kids. So I took a pay cut and went back to teaching. I'm not so much dissatisfied with my occupation as a teacher, but with society. We lost a lot when we began to not require students to achieve the best, giving excuses like "these kids have a reason for not achieving." That's not so. But the political side of education has put so many demands and paperwork in the game of teaching that we don't have enough time in the day to do all that we'd like to do in order to achieve; and the social problems with drugs, alcohol, and gangs put so much pressure on our students. In the old days teachers lived right in the neighborhood, and knew the parents—it really made a big difference. Now it's rare for a teacher to live in the neighborhood.

*A 25-year-old African American, Mike Harrison decided to go for a Harvard masters degree in teaching mathematics*

*after graduating from Brown and working for a year and half at an engineering firm in Florida. He chose a two-year option in which he would combine his studies with a three-fourths time teaching internship at the Parker School, a new Essential school in central Massachusetts. Working with a teaching partner who specializes in science, Mike teaches seventh- and eighth-graders in a multi-age heterogeneous classroom that combines math, science, and technology in two-hour blocks four days a week. This is his first year in the classroom.*

During college I did community service and tutoring with kids, and I coached a swim team, which I still do. I got hooked in by the feeling that I could somehow push the right buttons for the kids and trigger some moment of discovery, or a

great performance in swimming, or even just a smile. And I recognized I had the ability and desire to make teaching my career.

Teaching is incredibly challenging, even more than I expected. Tutoring was definitely not as difficult—you're working one on one, or maybe with two kids. Now it's leading the class through difficult material and making sure that everyone is with you along the way—which may mean explaining it in different ways, or structuring the classes so they can do hands-on investigation, so the kids are psyched on learning.

Classroom management has not been what I expected, either. It's a whole new experience managing a class, shifting from activity to activity, asking the right kind of open-ended questions to get them to

### **Teachers Choosing Peers as Leaders of Change**

To launch a major new "critical friends project" in a dozen Michigan Essential schools, teachers filled out an unusual survey recently, which asked them to choose four peers from whom they felt they could learn most effectively. Developed by Fran Vandiver, a veteran Essential school principal who now heads Fort Lauderdale High School in Florida, the survey defines such a "teacher leader" as someone who:

- Learns and tries new ideas; is a risk taker.
- Helps other teachers solve instructional problems.
- Provides technical assistance.
- Influences other teachers to perform better and improve their own instructional practice.
- Possesses an ease of personal interaction with colleagues.
- Bases instructional decisions on what will be effective for students.
- Contributes to school-wide improvement within and outside the classroom.

"Once everyone had listed their top four choices in order, we weighted the responses accordingly and gave the results to the principal," says Barb Bleyaert, who heads the Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools. Those at the top of the list then receive training as "coaches" or facilitators of the "critical friends groups" that will bring teachers together to help each other improve learning for their students. "It's a very powerful boost," says Bleyaert, "to know that these teachers have been named by their peers to lead them through the change process."

In the new Critical Friends Project the Michigan CES Center allied with the "Middle Start" school reform project, which focuses on educational change for young adolescents. A two-year grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation will support the initiative, which will involve nearly two dozen Michigan schools representing a cross section of urban and rural districts.

plunge deeper, having tricks in your back pockets. What do you do when a class is more or less comatose?

In other ways it's better than I expected. The kids have surprised me by the things they come up with in activities, or when they are given the opportunity to take something home and play around with it and investigate. My style fits well with an Essential school, because inquiry is very important to me; it's how I learned engineering. I like to put math in context, where kids solve real problems that may be of personal interest, or maybe begin to inquire on their own about things they see every day around them.

Now that I have had an advisory group, wherever I taught I would want to know my students better and in a different setting, so I could get to know their behavior and support them better in class. Performance is also important to me—mas-

tering something and showing what you know. Being a generalist is not so important to me right now.

New teachers in Essential schools would benefit by first being coaches in some situation. Ultimately the athlete is the one doing the work—you monitor them, you motivate them. I had to be there for the kids, and I had a set structure for how I wanted my training program to be, how the season should progress. And I had to deal with kids' emotions going up and down—things like "I don't like swimming, I don't wanna be here, my parents are making me." I had to learn from watching and listening to them what they needed to work on.

I think new teachers in Essential schools need more professional training in issues of adolescent psychology. Many of these kids are dealing with tough issues. We need to be aware of it and identify warn-

ing signs of trouble, to help find out what is the problem and recommend the next step.

Also, new teachers need more professional development in inquiry teaching. It's very difficult and time-consuming to structure your curriculum for that; we need resources, summer institutes, any help we can get. Also, we are working on creating an integrated math-science curriculum, which tries to come out of the science curriculum at the same time that it covers all the necessary math concepts. In some ways we're on a ship that can't see the horizon from day to day, and that can be frustrating.

My colleagues have helped me tremendously. We meet for two hours a week and talk about the next week's curriculum, share ideas and brainstorm. I talk with my teaching partner throughout the week about how math and science are going to come together, and I get feedback from her and other colleagues that helps if I have a problem not understanding something I'm about to teach, or I'm not clear on how to assess a piece of work.

That's in contrast to a more frustrating thing, which is how many hours we spend in whole-faculty meetings when we could be planning or assessing in our domains. I value having input, but I don't always see where that input fits into the picture. Maybe faculty doesn't need to be in on so many decisions.

I try day in and day out for students to become confident learners. Someone has to swing the pendulum for it to move, but my goal is for them to eventually initiate their own movement, take it and keep going. I'm never satisfied—but I've learned a tremendous amount about kids, and about mathematics. I haven't even taught for a year now and I feel that it's been a natural progression from my previous profession.

I do wish to teach in a more diverse community. A mostly white school is a disservice to kids whose images come mostly from the media

### **'Design Studios' Foster Teacher R and D**

How can a professional development event best stimulate and support teachers, administrators, parents, and students in making serious whole-school change, while connecting them with the work of colleagues in other schools? Teachers at the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (the Met) in Providence, Rhode Island and educators at the affiliated Big Picture Company think they have found an answer in "Design Studios."

In the first of these, the Met recently welcomed a team of colleagues from the St. Louis Career Academy for several days of gathering evidence, meeting with people in different positions in the school community, and sharing the insights each school's faculty has for the other. Visitors and hosts together observe student learning, interview faculty, review key documents, and participate in conversations between local site and district people. Out of this experience, each school then develops action plans for its own setting. Both schools belong to the federally funded New Urban High School project, five of whose six demonstration schools are members of CES.

"The idea of design studios reflects our school's philosophy," says Elliot Washor, who co-directs the Met's personalized, project-based program in which a student's curriculum is tailored to his or her interests and needs. "We learn best when we're motivated by our interests and by hands-on application to real work." Because they take place in real schools and ask teachers from different sites to engage in the give and take of professionals, such studios can serve a sorely needed research and development function, says New Urban High School project director Rob Riordan.

Design studios cover learning through internships, standards and assessment, family engagement, student support, leadership development and community-building, and new school design. Each studio is tailored for the particular needs of the visiting school, and can last from two to five days.

or the mall. And that's going to cause some pain down the road for them and for the people of color they run into. Our curriculum does address issues of racism, and I try to do whatever I can do. But until people's eyes open to these issues, you feel pretty unsupported.

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*Raised in Southern California in a Latino family, Christelle Estrada began teaching humanities at Pasadena High School six years ago after a 20-year career in Catholic schools and a stint as a teacher educator. For three years she has been coach for a critical friends group there; and this year she is acting assistant principal in a period of administrative change. She holds a Ph.D. in education and religion from Claremont Graduate University.*

I was very influenced by the model of really excellent teachers in my early school years. Based on that, I expected teaching to be about helping kids become independent thinkers, to love learning, to question the social order. For many years, I've used the essential questions "How can the individual change the community they live in?" and "What is political leadership?"

Teachers coming into any school need several kinds of preparation. First, they need help questioning their own assumptions about the relation between how students learn and how teachers teach. Teacher education has to make that connection between our teaching and students producing results—if the results are not good work, we must adapt our practice based on how students are learning.

Second, new teachers need help looking at content in a very broad way, so that they can honor the prior knowledge of student and bring it into the classroom. A classroom is not an isolated environment where certain kinds of knowledge get transmitted, but rather a place where the experience of the learners themselves, and the resources of the community, are brought to bear to

apply that knowledge in the world.

Third, they need to understand the relation between structure and creativity. Children need a safe place to develop the skills of creative and independent thinkers—well-established routines that help them feel a measure of comfort and less anxiety. It could be simply the clear expectation that when class starts everyone is ready, because time for learning is precious. Or that when students

speak you listen actively, take them seriously.

Teachers also need the support of ongoing, consistent, and coherent professional development. For me, the critical friends group is the best example—teachers inside the school working collaboratively to focus on how to adapt their teaching. But we also need other opportunities, provided by a professional development academy or a district office.

## Support for Teachers As a National Investment

Keeping the teacher corps strong and well qualified will cost up to \$5 billion annually, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future says in its 1996 and 1997 reports, but it will pay off handsomely. Among its points:

- **Money spent on supporting and educating teachers pays off in student learning.** Teachers who know a lot about teaching and learning, and who work in environments that allow them to know students well, are the critical elements of successful learning, a number of recent studies suggest. An analysis of 900 Texas districts by Ronald Ferguson found that student gains in math and reading were influenced more by better teachers than by any other factor. Small schools and lower class sizes in elementary school also contributed significantly—and when those three factors combined, they made more difference than even the students' backgrounds. Another study in Alabama, by Ferguson and Helen Ladd, bore similar results; and so did a review by R. Greenwald, L. V. Hedges, and R.D. Laine of 60 studies on the effect of school resources on student achievement.
- **Aspiring teachers who have the time to master academic areas as they learn teaching skills will perform better on the job.** Four years of college that ends with a teaching degree gives short shrift to both practice teaching and to subject-area understanding, studies show. But programs that combine college with a fifth year of teacher education, or one- to two-year graduate programs for college graduates or mid-career recruits, turn out a more diverse group of teachers who are often as confident and effective as their senior colleagues. Just as important, they are much more likely to stay in teaching after the first few years—so investment in their education pays off.
- **New teachers do better with mentor support.** To get through the tough first years without leaving in dismay, beginning teachers need ongoing support from a skilled mentor in their academic field. If they have it, attrition rates drop dramatically (often to about 5 percent, even in cities). If they don't, upwards of 30 percent of new teachers will be gone after three years.
- **Teachers express more satisfaction in restructured schools.** When schools give them more time to work and learn together, and when teaching teams can work with groups of students over more extended periods of time, teachers report not only better student performance but better working conditions, better relationships with principals, and more career satisfaction, according to a 1993 Harris survey for the Ford Foundation.

For the two reports *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* (1996) and *Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching* (1997), both by Linda Darling-Hammond, call the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future at (888) 492-1241 or visit [www.tc.columbia.edu/~teachcomm](http://www.tc.columbia.edu/~teachcomm)

My most influential experiences have come from working closely with colleagues—whether through peer observation or talking about what's happening in classrooms and planning classes together. I have continually sought out opportunities to do team teaching, and I've always been given the opportunity to do innovative things with other people that would help student learning. Also, getting feedback not just from colleagues but from students and parents has been very important. I always get evaluations from students throughout the semester, not just when it is over. And I take parents' questions as a way to reflect on my practice.

My own critical friends group does two things more and more consistently. We observe each other—two peer observers in one person's class. We have a common inquiry question, about how students use evidence. For example, three science teachers are gathering data on what our students do well in biology lab, and how they use evidence there to understand it as scientific evidence. They get the data, and then they get the student work, and then they work on how to adapt their teaching based on

what they see, through this common experience they have designed.

I just moved into an administrative position, which has its unique challenges and is sometimes very discouraging. An administrator has to focus on incredible amounts of detail that impact large groups of people—counselors, department chairs, even the whole student body—decisions about curriculum and instruction, and how to teach adults with very different roles how to work together well. Adult learners aren't as open and hopeful as kids are. They have a whole history, and they frame the way they see things in a particular way, thinking they aren't possible.

But as a teacher, I am extremely satisfied. Even though kids may be influenced by their parents' values and by teenage norms, they are very interesting thinkers, often more open to thinking in different ways than adults. It takes a long time—in the beginning young people are set in their ways—but a classroom is more of a controlled learning environment. You can actually do things to create a place where people are safe to explore new ideas.

I would be *more* satisfied if communities and state and federal gov-

ernments would fund public schools so there's a teacher-student ratio that creates an actual learning community in the classroom. Forty kids in a classroom is too many. But people won't do that until the media stops focusing on negative things, when only five or ten percent of young people do destructive things. My students are going to make a huge contribution—to do interesting, innovative things, to achieve great things for other people. □

### Let Us Hear Your Voice

You can lend your own voice to the Essential School conversation about teacher renewal, by going to the CES Web site at <http://www.essentialschools.org>

There you will find not only the text of this issue, but additional interviews with teachers; helpful resources on teacher recruitment, retention, and renewal; suggestions as to how to use this HORACE as a tool for further discussion with teachers and the public; and even the opportunity for an electronic conversation with other teachers about the issues raised here.



**HORACE**

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