## HORACE

Will teachers
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and control over
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How can they
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in fields outside
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## Teaching in the Essential School

IT HAS BECOME A TRUISM IN education that the classroom teacher is at the heart of effective school reform. In the Essential Schools movement, this takes the form of a commitment to personalized learning—the teacher as coach to no more than eighty students. rather than as deliverer of instructional services to a larger, continually changing group. In order to achieve this more intimate studentteacher ratio, the Coalition of Essential Schools believes, teachers must assume multiple obligations, viewing themselves as generalists first as they help students learn to use their minds well. This often means that curricula and schedules in the Essential School reflect an interdisciplinary philosophy, with teachers designing and leading classes in fields outside their specialization.

At least as important, Essential Schools aim towards an integrated curriculum from a conviction that students deserve a unified approach to their studies. With the possible exception of the librarian, students are the only ones in high school who are expected to be generalists-math teachers need only do math; history teachers only history, and so forth. It is a faculty's intellectual responsibility, the Coalition of Essential Schools holds, to mend the fractured school day into a sustained interdisciplinary inquiry that provides students with the scholarly model they need.

But how does such a commitment work in practice? Most

teachers come to their profession trained in only one field, and have little incentive or opportunity to expand their education later. As well, the very notion of "teacher empowerment" now fashionable implies a kind of autonomy within the classroom, a support for individual professional judgment that could be shaken by an interdisciplinary model. Teachers who are asked to transform themselves into generalists in the Essential School, then, face a variety of troubling questions. Will team planning or team teaching result in a loss of control over their own classes and curricula? Will they embarrass themselves in front of their colleagues through a lack of knowledge in another field, or will preparations for interdisciplinary courses take an impossible amount of extra time? Can they effectively lead discussions in fields outside their own?

How such change is introduced and developed is a central issue with which Essential Schools continue to wrestle. Some 400 teachers and principals who are in the midst of the process met recently at CES's Fall Forum, and their conversations—electric to a degree unusual at any educational conference, and necessarily limited in their representation here—described in fascinating detail the ways schools have found to build consensus and cooperation as an Essential School program takes hold.

#### Is Teaming Essential?

Some unusual teachers have always stood out within their schools for a comprehensive approach to their disciplines-history teachers who require, for example, that students analyze the literature and art of the period. In that sense, there is nothing "essential" about team teaching or even team planning; the nine common principles of Essential Schools ask only that teachers be regarded as generalists. But for most teachers beginning such an approach, the only practical way to learn to be a generalist is to join other teachers in curriculum planning or team teaching.

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At Central Park East Secondary School, a New York City public high school started as a Coalition school four years ago, a broadly interdisciplinary curriculum with a stripped-down character is designed by teams of five teachers. Teachers then work largely on their own, in individual classrooms, with small groups of students over twohour class periods. Principal Deborah Meier sees this system as a way of giving teachers a great deal of autonomy while at once keeping them accountable for what they do. "A teacher must answer to the whole team for what he's doing," she says, "so there's little chance of someone doing outlandish things." At the same time, Meier says, "the discrepancy between the best and the worst teachers in the school is not so great as it may be else-

Team planning also works at Central Park East as a method of coaching new teachers, who can share ideas and experiences with stronger or more experienced teachers. And it can be used to train teachers unfamiliar with Essential Schools principles. This year, for example, a new teacher hired suddenly to fill an unexpected opening is co-teaching one of her two courses with Mike Goldman, who leads CPE's humanities team.

Teachers at CPE belong either to the humanities or the math and sciences team; they meet daily and weekly to plan their courses on several levels. In the particular area they choose to explore over a year-"Strands in American History" is an example—they devise "essential questions" ("What is the nature of power?"); and then work together to come up with answers themselves. After an initial overview of the subject matter, students spend their time seeking out answers to the essential questions through a combination of readings, small group discussions, and written research projects.

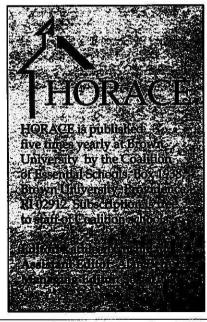
#### Student-As-Worker Is Key

The system depends, Meier and Goldman both point out, on the metaphor of "student-as-worker," another of CES's nine common principles. And that relates directly to how teachers in this and many Essential School programs manage to become generalists in the classroom, by developing the idea of each student as an individual expert, a resource to the group as a whole. Students and teachers then work out ways to find out what they need to know-so in coming to understand a subject from various perspectives himself, a teacher serves as an active and powerful scholarly model.

Goldman sees this process of discovery as the heart of his approach, and works hard to show students how to do it. At the start of the term he and other teachers model a student-led discussion in front of the class; students then analyze and criticize how it is done, make up rules, and try it themselves. Focusing on content and evidence, students ask questions and research the answers, then summarize and report on their findings.

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"At first you feel that you're losing control," says Goldman. "But when you give over this kind of power to students, you still can step in when necessary. It's a technique you need to learn." His co-teacher Dina Hirsch, who came to CPE from a New York high school for gifted students, agrees. "I used to give a verdict at the end of a student-led discussion," she says. "You did a great job!" I'd say. Now I ask instead for student feedback on how each other did. It takes away the role of teacher as judge."



Craig Simpson, a social studies teacher who coordinates the Odyssey program at Andover High School in Andover, Massachusetts, also speaks of shifting the teacher's role to the role of arbitrator, not lecturer, with the focus on student group work. "Seven years after I began this, the information I used to give in a 45-minute lecture takes ten minutes," he says.

Unlike CPE, though, the Odyssey program puts strong emphasis on team teaching. "I mean team, not turn teaching," Simpson says, "with the teachers in the room together and actively participating at all times, although one teacher may have the main responsibility for overseeing a discussion." Even though the ratios may be the same, Simpson would rather have two teachers in a class of 60 students than one teacher with 30. Alone in a classroom, a teacher can never create the additional inspiration and support another teacher provides, he says.

# Initial worries about the extra work of planning are made up for, say teachers, by the support they give each other.

Classes are planned daily at Odyssey—"horrendously rigorously," Simpson says—in a 45-minute planning period. "It takes that long to keep ourselves in unison and flowing," he says. Initial worries about the extra work of planning were made up for, says one English teacher who works with Simpson, by the support teachers give each other. "I have people around me who aren't going to let me fail," she says.

#### To Fail Is to Succeed

"I feel we have to learn how to give people the *right* to fail," Simpson says in quick response. The ques-

tion of failure, which arises from both teachers and students thinking in terms of performance, is an interesting side issue in many of these redirected classrooms. Teachers often express concern, for example, that their lack of expertise in a field will cause them embarrassment or undermine their authority. But Kathy Cook, who teaches art on Andover's Odyssey team, says that her early performance anxiety soon gave way to a feeling that team teaching was "fun, supportive, and enabling." In her view, "the key is that students see the teachers interacting with each other" in a highly structured but open atmosphere. This models a kind of inquiry for the students, where goals are shared.

In addition, Andover principal Wilbur Hixson points out, Odyssey allows students to perceive "wrong" answers as paths to thinking through problems. "Too many of us for too long didn't see the value of an incorrect answer," he says. "It tells us something important about how the student is thinking and about how we are teaching." His point may be a critical factor in why Essential Schools programs so often energize and motivate students at lower academic levels. A traditionalist who once served as vice-principal in charge of student discipline, Hixson gives high marks to the Odyssey program in this area.

The sense a teacher develops of himself as a learner, not a master, also mitigates initial fears of failure. "I had to learn how to become a student again myself," says Fran Flynt, one of four team teachers in a small Essential School program within Springdale High School in Springdale, Arkansas. "You have to drag out and dust off those traits and attitudes that you once had." She speaks as well of the "parity of insecurity" that develops among a team when everyone involved is on new ground. "I may have to read history," she says of her team's joint efforts, "but the history teacher also

has to read Melville." As with many teachers who take such risks, Flynt has found herself continually rewarded by her forays into unfamiliar material. "I find I am able to draw some conclusions, help to direct discussion, and make assignments," she says. "I couldn't go back to teaching in a traditional classroom. But that change in my attitude came with a lot of struggle."

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At the Brimmer & May School, a small private school in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, the team approach is distilled in a carefully orchestrated plan worked out by faculty over the summer before. Together they decide on an intellectual theme—this year it is "Searching for Solutions"—to become the major organizing principle for the year. Each week a different aspect of this theme—the role of evidence, say, or of hypothesis-is emphasized in various fields during regular class hours; and every Wednesday faculty and students gather in a cooperative inquiry led by two teachers and drawing together several disciplines.

On a recent Wednesday, for example, the point of emphasis was "evidence," to be explored using Chaucerian England as its subject. Students looked at paintings, historical documents, and literature from the period, to discover and then to interpret the evidence. The groundwork was also laid for the school's emphasis on character building, through a Hogarth painting ("Gin Alley") portraying the despair caused by drug abuse—which itself will later be linked to classes in health as well as art.

Finally, the Hogarth painting was analyzed both as historical evidence and as a model piece of propaganda. Throughout the class, teachers who were not directly involved came in and out, keeping tabs on what was going on and balancing other responsibilities at the same time.

This sort of team teaching sounds just short of perfect on paper, and Brimmer & May teachers are clearly inspired by their cooperative efforts. Still, even in the rarefied air of a small private school it can be a scheduling nightmare, they admit. And the ambitious program keeps students and faculty both stretched to the limits of their time and energy.

#### Who Has the Time?

In fact, time is a key factor in how well teachers can adapt to the new demands of becoming generalists in the classroom. Only with substantial planning periods can they work with teachers in other fields to design interdisciplinary curricula; and if a course is also actually taught by more than one teacher, the planning may be even more detailed. At the very least, everyone who tries this agrees, one 45-minute planning period daily is essential; two is considered more reasonable, most say, and a longer time block reserved weekly is just as important. "We've got to find a way to

## Essential Math and Science: How Can It Work?

PROBLEM: YOUR SKATEBOARD is stuck under a dumpster. To get it out, you have a 4' by 6' sheet of plywood and a curb. You weigh 150 pounds. Can you lift the dumpster to get it out, and how?

Faced with this question, students confront several of the Coalition's nine common principles at once: they must take steps on their own, with their teacher as coach, to solve a problem that calls on math and science together. The key to making it work is adopting the central Essential Schools metaphor of "student as worker," says CES's Amy Gerstein, a former science teacher herself. In summer workshops and regional symposia, she is pressing teachers to abandon lecture-demonstrations so that students arrive at the principles of math and science as the fruits of their own reasoning through a series of problems.

"It's harder than in the humanities," she says, "but there are plenty of teachers out there proving that it can be done." She points to Fox Lane High School in Bedford, New York, where math teacher Glynn Meggison is continually developing new ways to turn students into workers without compromising a course's content. Teachers leave the workshops Meggison helps lead with a new sense, Gerstein says, that any traditional lesson plan can be converted into a more active learning model. And they can call on a growing CES "curriculum bank" of examples drawn from successful classroom trials.

Problems like the skateboard one above usually start with the assumption that scientific inquiry demands mastery of certain math skills. Still, some teachers express worries that sequential skill development may suffer in an integrated class, and many Essential School programs still use conventional math and science classes instead.

"It didn't quite work for us at first," says Steve Hoffman, a math teacher at the Alternative Community School outside Ithaca, New York, whose "Inquiry and Tools" program devised the skateboard problem. "For some kids, it was still too abstract; even in small groups, they couldn't focus for ten to fifteen minutes at a time. And especially on standardized tests, their basic sequential math skills were low."

To solve the problem, teachers at his school separated math skills development into a separate period, identifying fifteen skill areas that students must master by the end of middle school. Working in small collaborative study groups, students have some choice as to the sequence of what they learn; and each student's progress is tracked with a folder of work. "It's a big management task," Hoffman says.

Designing exhibitions of mastery that bring math and science skills together is a particular challenge. Hoffman envisions an eighth-grade exhibition where students choose a place within 500 miles of home and plan a trip there, complete with budget, mileage, routes, and library research on cost-efficient transportation and lodging.

At Central Park East, writing, research, and art are integrated into science exhibitions at either a "competent" or an "advanced" level. For example, students compile data on themselves in a "Me Book," analyze fitness tests they carry out in class, research some family medical trait or condition, or interview a fitness specialist.

Brimmer & May's ninth-grade science teacher, Jennifer Prileson, teaches science in a historical perspective that involves its social and cultural sides. And because math is central to what she teaches, she spends time on it alone, dealing with algebra in physics expressions, for instance. In chemistry, Prileson uses "Structured Pacing in Chemistry Education" (Kendall/Hunt), which abandons the lecturer role of the teacher in favor of individually structured laboratory-based activities. Writing and data analysis skills are an essential part of its method; so is individual teacher feedback as students progress through their chosen activities.

Team teaching can be a scheduling nightmare, with students and faculty both stretched to the limits of their time and energy.

give these teachers time to think," says one frustrated principal. Such arrangements translate into a constant management chore for principals and coordinators, one reason that beginning an Essential School program takes far more than a summer to plan.

"Don't undertake this unless you're going to fight like hell to make sure that somebody is providing time," says Marilyn Hohmann, principal of Fairdale High School in Louisville, Kentucky, a large urban high school which last year adopted an Essential Schools program for its ninth grade. "If teachers have to work evenings and Saturdays in order to do it, it's not going to work."

#### Autonomy Is an Issue

It takes time as well for a faculty to believe that it will gain power in a system that focuses on generalist education. To shift towards team planning or teaching from a tradition of strong department heads, for example, can spark considerable resistance. Principal Craig Larson of Parkway South High School in St. Louis, Missouri, whose faculty will vote in January whether to move towards a school-wide Essential program, says that "going slow is a real strong message. Department heads do lose some control when they go to teams, but the teams end up working so well that it works out okay." In general, most teachers concur, thinking through their curricula and classes in a team increases their sense of involvement with the material and makes their

work more interesting. And the support of a team encourages them to take intellectual risks, they say.

Hohmann has won the strong support of her powerful teachers union by creating a decision-making model that puts control firmly in teachers' hands. "We have an elected steering committee made up of faculty, students, parents, and administrators, with task forces to address certain issues," she says. "That committee is involved in every significant decision about our school. When a change like this is really school-based, it is a very powerful force."

Many teachers involved in Essential Schools programs echo that satisfaction in being able to make curriculum and materials decisions themselves. At Brimmer & May, for example, a science teacher notes that she has control over all science expenditures from equipment to trips. And at New York's Central Park East, that kind of decision is similarly in teachers' hands.

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#### Staff Development

Still, many teachers moving towards a generalist approach want outside training and support for their new roles. Staff development is a major issue in Essential Schools, and this too is most successful when it is designed by the teachers themselves.

"Everyone affected by a decision should have input into it," says Pat Ciabotti, who coordinates a comprehensive Coalition program at the Nova Schools, a complex of K-12 public schools in Broward County, Florida. That is the major principle guiding Nova's sweeping professional development program, which has involved teachers in continuing training as they moved towards an interdisciplinary plan. Nova recommends starting with a cooperatively devised "needs assessment," and then moving through a cycle of in-service activities, classroom trials, and evaluations as teachers and other staff continually monitor their own growth.

The ideal such program, many teachers agree, is built into the school day; the degree to which a school can do so is indicative of its support for change. "Without your principal's support you're doomed," one teacher says.

Alan Guma, the principal of Bronxville High School in a suburb of New York, points out that teachers need a regular, structured way to collaborate and confer with each other if they are to move towards an interdisciplinary approach. "They have to overcome not only their fears but also their training to work solo," he says.

#### Write to Us . . .

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"Probably most teachers do more talking to each other at conferences than they do in their own schools."

At Adelphi Academy, a private Coalition high school in Brooklyn, each teacher chooses two others to work with closely, observing and coaching each other. "It's scary, new, and uncomfortable at first," says Gregory Borman, the Essential School program coordinator there. "Trust is a big part of it, and so is time."

Start small and move slowly, experienced Coalition schools advise. "The worst mistake you can make is to mandate instant change," says Bronxville's Alan Guma. "You have to allow time to bring people along."

#### **Teachers Who Resist**

Still, resistance from within is a common phenomenon in Coalition schools, especially if a program's staff is seen as an elite group with special privileges. One young teacher tells how 15 to 20 teachers at her school met to explore Coalition ideas in after-school sessions. "We were regarded as traitors," she says. "My department wanted to arrange for four teachers to plan together in a common period. By the time September rolled around, the plan had been scrapped because 'other teachers wouldn't like it.""

Resistance from within is common, especially if a program's staff is seen as an elite group with special privileges.

Teachers who must continue to struggle with 150 students in five periods daily often do look with resentment at those who are freed for regular planning periods to work with fewer students. And to make matters worse, a school's interdisciplinary program sometimes results in the regular program's teachers having added students in their sections, or losing favorite sections that they would otherwise teach. Elective courses often suffer when a school moves to the more strippeddown Essential School program, and teachers outside the program worry about losing their jobs. For this reason among others, more schools are coming to believe that the school-within-a-school model is less effective than converting a whole school into an Essential School, one grade at a time.

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Some of education's finest teachers, of course, have long been quietly practicing as generalists without fanfare or even notice. Older teachers who have built interdisciplinary themes into their courses can feel ignored and unappreciated as younger colleagues are swept away by "new ideas." The extent to which a school recognizes and uses these teachers in developing a new program can be a useful measure of its success.

The key to a comfortable faculty, says Brimmer & May's coordinator, Judy Guild, is not to impinge upon their course material but to support them by making bridges and connections that don't yet exist within a program. This may occur on both administrative levels—by scheduled time for faculty workshops, as Nova Schools recommend—or on the grass-roots level, as teachers talk with other teachers about their Essential School classes.

"I've sat and listened to teachers wrassle with concepts that we've fooled around with forever," says Louisville's Marilyn Hohmann, whose faculty hone their instructional skills in professional development schools she started with the help of her district. "If you have confidence in your people, even a bad idea can be worked on until it becomes a good idea."

#### Hiring: A Means for Change

A school looking for teachers who are generalists, of course, can also make this a priority when hiring new staff. When a principal has total autonomy in hiring, this is more pleasure than problem; Brimmer & May, for example, seeks out teachers with broad backgrounds and a strong commitment to teaching across the disciplines. But many larger public schools, such as Louisville's Fairdale High School and New York's Central Park East, must work with district rules that allow teachers to transfer automatically into an opening in their preferred school after a number of years in the system. This may mean teachers who arrive at the last minute un-prepared and even unwilling to teach as generalists in an Essential School program.

"I now have a committee of teachers that sits in with me and quizzes an applicant for transfer," says Marilyn Hohmann. "I never before was able to turn down a teacher who wanted to transfer, and now they don't come on their own." Central Park East's Deborah Meier has had the same experience, and argues for "informed choice" regulations that would require a teacher to visit her school before being allowed to request transfer to it. "I talked two teachers out of it this year," she says wryly, "who wanted to transfer here because they thought it would be less work "

In the end, teachers in Essential Schools say, their additional work pays off in a new sense of excitement about their work. "The stu-

"The kind of education we're talking about," says Deborah Meier, "most kids experience only in kindergarten and in the most elite graduate schools in this country."

dents become like first graders again," says a teacher in Andover's Odyssey program. "They bring things in before class to show me and to talk about in class. Their enthusiasm is so infectious."

"The kind of education we're

talking about," Deborah Meier told the Coalition's Fall Forum, "most kids experience only in kindergarten and in the most elite graduate schools in this country. Teacherstudent interaction is personalized; the kids have choices and so do their teachers; their interests are taken seriously. Students are active agents, not passive recipients; and the teacher is coach, critic, editor, nurturer, watcher."

Change in schools will occur, says Frank Newman of the Education Commission of the States, because teachers and principals desperately want to be part of—not the object of—a reform movement. "We cannot depend on heroic teachers and principals," he says. "We must create a system that works not just for the pioneers, but for the ordinary, good teachers and principals."

### Designing Assignments Across Disciplines

THE CHALLENGE TEACHERS face in integrating their course work across the disciplines is often a matter of coming up with the right questions. At Brimmer & May School, the faculty uses Bloom's theory of the six levels of cognition—knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation—as they design tasks for students. The result is assignments like this one from a ninth-grade literature class:

"In all literature there is nothing that touches or resembles the Prologue. It is the concise portrait of an entire nation, high and low, old and young, male and female, lay and clerical, learned and ignorant, rogue and righteous, land and sea, town and country, but without extremes . . . . The tales the pilgrims tell come from all over Europe, many of them from the works of Chaucer's near contemporaries. Some come from further afield, from the ancients, from the Orient. They exemplify the whole range of contemporary European imagination . . . " (From "Chaucer's Works," by Neville Coghill, tr., Canterbury Tales (Penguin Books, 1984).

In each group follow the format of searching as stated below:

- 1. Search for facts about the various people and how they fit into society. List them on a sheet of paper.
- Interpret the collection of facts and try to determine the expected role or behavior of each person.
- 3. What does the Prologue tell you about society and human behavior?
- 4. Do you see any patterns of this type of social condition in the art you have observed or the history you have read?
- 5. If you were on a pilgrimage, what social statement would you be making?

"Not only are we crossing disciplines in the content of these questions, across art, history, and English," says Guild, "but we are crossing them in skills as well. In math and science as well as in the humanities, we are practicing looking for patterns as a way of problem solving."

#### Information and Resources

For more information on the Breenth Schools programs referred to in this issue, contact:

Alternative Community School 111 Chestnut Street Ithaca, NY 14850 (607) 274-2183

Andover High School Andover, MA 01810 (617) 470-1707

Adelphi Academy 8515 Ridge Boulevard Brooklyn, NY 11209 (718) 238-3308

The Brimmer & May School 69 Middlesex Road Chestnut Hill, MA 02167 (617) 566-7462

Bronxville High School Pondfield Road Bronxville, NY 10029 (914) 337-5600

Central Park East Secondary School 1573 Madison Avenue New Yor<sup>1</sup>. NY 10029 (212) 860-8935

Fairdale High School 1001 Fairdale Road Louisville, KY 40118 (502) 455-8248

Fox Lane High School Rte. 172, So. Bedford Rd. Bedford, NY 10506 (914) 241-6070

Nova Middle School 3602 S.W. College Avenue Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314 (305) 475-7758

Parkway South High School 801 Hanna Road Manchester, MO 63021 (314) 394-8300

Re:Learning: From Schoolhouse to Statehouse Coalition of Essential Schools Box 1938, Brown University Providence, RI 02912 (401) 863-3384

Education Commission of the States 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300 Denver, CO 80295 (303) 830-3631

Springdale High School Springdale, AR 72764 (501) 751-4838

## What About Teacher Education?

THE SCHOOLS AND NOT THE ed schools are the real training ground for teachers who would be generalists, says Theodore Sizer, who heads Brown University's education department and the Coalition of Essential Schools. That "tough and realistic" assessment, he says, comes from a sense that the problems involved are so immediate that "we can't wait for them to be solved at the university level."

Sizer is sharply critical of colleges and universities that reward future teachers for being narrow specialists. "In Europe, teachers expect to expand their scholarship throughout their careers," he says. "Only in America do we think that a teacher is supposed to endlessly repeat what he specialized in at the age of 21 in college."

Many teachers are bound by a cultural stereotype, he argues, that assumes that teachers are not

scholars. This is directly contradicted, he points out, by the growing number of inquiring teachers who may even have chosen to teach in high school precisely so they can think and teach more broadly than at a higher level.

Efforts to put a generalist philosophy in place must start, Sizer says, at the in-service rather than the pre-service level. Schools should encourage their teachers, with money and time, to investigate fields related to their specialties, he says. "If I'm a math teacher, I should be able to work up some physics or astronomy."

Many programs, such as the Holmes Group (based at Michigan State University) and the Carnegie Forum's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, aimed to address this problem by reforming both teacher education and the professional system in which they work. And

some programs do exist that spur teachers to develop interdisciplinary approaches. At Framingham State College in Massachusetts, for example, the Schweitzer International Resource Center brings teachers together to develop cross-cultural perspectives in a variety of courses. And Brown's own teacher education program sends M.A.T. candidates and undergraduates into Rhode Island public schools with support from "clinical professors" in various academic disciplines. This is only part of a larger Brown institute offering programs to teachers and administrators throughout the state.

"The incentive is that it's great fun to teach broadly," Ted Sizer says. The Coalition's job, as he sees it, is to make that possible from the front lines of teaching first, and let the education schools follow as they will.



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