



Meeting Summary

Teaching Quality

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What Will Prepare our Students for Success?

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How can students be prepared for success? How can one best determine what will prepare students for success? Richard Elmore, Professor of Education and Co-Director of CPRE, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, finds that observing real-world interactions in the classroom is a tremendous way to determine effective means of educating our nation's children and examining the interactions between teachers and students. He said he's long desired to be on the ground in the classrooms on regular basis, and his length of career has freed him to do that.

He then noted what he views as a huge strategic error that has taken place in American education: Violating basic understandings of reciprocity — an over-emphasis has been placed on testing and sanctions without a concomitant effort at improving and supporting the human capital of teachers and school leaders. He explained that, for the United States to reach its full potential, it must balance these two spheres. School systems in Victoria, Australia and Ontario, Canada have done this more effectively.

"We're asking people to jump higher without giving them the support they need to get there."

The drop-off in student achievement that begins in 6th grade impacts student achievement through high school and on to the postsecondary level in the form of high remediation rates — even for students who have met the requirements that have been asked of them. For example, many students who have completed the core high school A-G curriculum in California still need remediation upon enrollment in state universities.

Invest in adult workforce

Elmore's work outside the United States informs his views of society, government and professional culture of teaching. He has found that the best indicator of student success is the teacher's performance on core subjects as an undergraduate. Training has less impact, and training in schools of education should not be viewed as the final preparation. Teaching should be viewed in the same light as other occupations, where the accepted reality is that much will be learned on the job.

The most successful local jurisdictions have broken the existing monopoly on teacher preparation. Enabled by the state, Boston, for example, runs its own teacher preparation program. While Boston doesn't meet all of its staffing needs in this manner, the approach sends a clear message to the traditional programs that provide the rest of their teachers.

Elmore noted that "education, as a sector, is *amazing* for its capacity to resist technology." He contends that the time spent in formal institutions called "schools" will decrease as this century moves on, something already being realized by today's students. The increased use of open-access frameworks for providing teachers with online instructional resources and models must be supported by policymakers, as is being done in Victoria, Australia and in the UK through Teachers TV.

Perceptions

"If you're not outraged by what we're doing to adolescents, you're not paying attention," Elmore said. The concept that kids have to master certain content to get access to higher level work is broad in our education culture. But many students only have *holes* in their knowledge. We have to address those holes. But we have to give all kids access to high-level work. Too often high schools function as a sorting mechanism. Kids are being denied access to high-level content due to teacher judgment.

A second broadly held concept is that there's a natural predisposition to be a good teacher. In Japan, it's all about "Ordinary people doing extraordinary things." The Japanese, for example, believe that the teaching force mirrors society at large: there will be some fantastic teachers, and there will be many that are not. Building a system around this belief helps to ensure that students can learn even if they are not assigned the best teacher. We've paid dearly for the belief that teaching skill is an attribute of the individual, he notes. Japan has streamlined curriculum and invested in professional development. They give people support in their work.

Funding

While Elmore acknowledges that some states fund schools at a third-world level, the rest of the schools typically have adequate funds available to vastly improve student learning. Dumping money into a horribly inefficient system is not the answer. There is no point to it. Instead, he suggests that examining the base funding and human resource expenditures reveals places where improvements can typically be made. Dr. Elmore notes that he typically works with a school for two to three years to improve learning without ever asking for additional funds, and has found that it takes three to five years of working with schools before staff members have the ability to make good decisions about how to redistribute resources.

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