

A CLEAR CHOICE

Gene Goldwasser



By the time you read this issue of the newsletter, it will be approximately one month before the presidential election. That is one month to decide not only between two candidates, but one month to decide between two distinct philosophies of governing that could have a profound influence on our country over the next several decades.

It is highly likely that several Supreme Court judges will be chosen by the next president, decisions that could move the court in a more liberal direction or reinforce the conservative majority. *Obamacare*, a.k.a. the Affordable Care Act, will either be strengthened and most of its provisions implemented by 2014 or, as Governor Romney maintains, be repealed and replaced with something else although he has not specified what that something else might be. Economic policy as determined by the Fed will also be influenced as Ben Bernanke will complete his term as chairman during the next administration, and the next president will choose his replacement. Will it be someone who would continue the Fed's determination to keep interest rates low while providing periodic stimuli for the economy or a "supply-sider" who would allow market fluctuation to dictate economic policy? Who will the next president select as his advisors – the "neocons" who played such a major role in the Bush administration promoting confrontation with our "enemies" or will we continue with advisors like Hillary Rodham Clinton, tough but moderate in their views?

It's interesting how Republicans have distanced themselves from programs they supported at one time. According to Eduardo Porter, who writes the "Economic Scene" column in *The New York Times*, if you go back four decades to Richard Nixon's administration and examine policies that were implemented then, you would think he was "left of center." He supported such "liberal" initiatives as the Environmental Protection Agency, the Clean Air Act, and the Occupational Safety and

Health Administration (OSHA). He also favored an increase in Social Security benefits, and a proposal which would have required employers to buy health insurance for all their employees, which failed at that time because of Democratic opposition. Why did these ideas flourish during the Nixon administration? Why were they promoted by Republicans then, but reviled now? Why has the Republican Party been hijacked by extreme elements unwilling to compromise on almost any issue? And, in determining what America is all about, should we not support the idea that the purpose of government is to take care of those who can't help themselves? Or instead do we subscribe to Ronald Reagan's mantra that "government is not the solution to our problems, government is the problem?" Whichever you believe, this election provides a clear choice – the results of which will resonate for years.

In Memoriam

We mourn the passing of Mario DiSciullo, who served our association for many years as an active executive board member. I first met Mario when, as an elementary school principal in Nassau County, I visited his school in search of new ideas and innovative practices. Since that time, we continued our relationship first at CAS meetings and later, when we both retired, at NYSRSAS executive board meetings. As an executive board member, treasurer and newsletter chair, Mario was an essential and contributing member of our organization. He developed his desktop publishing skills to enable him to prepare the newsletter, accepted more than his fair share of responsibilities and was able to inject his ideas and opinions into our discussions and activities. We will miss Mario's presence, his sense of humor and his interest in keeping our association relevant, honest and meaningful.

Gene Goldwasser

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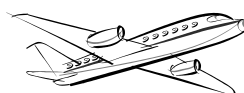
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FROM THE DESK OF: *The Reflective Retiree*

Corine Lipset-Huberman



Yes, summer is indeed over and the children are all back in school, and with them almost all of my former colleagues and friends, except for several who live in other cities or states. By now, having been retired for six years, I have made many new friends and developed several new interests, but I could not help but think back to September of 2006 when, newly retired, I was desperately worried about how I would fill my days.

I had spent the summer of 2006 enjoying time with family and friends and getting reacquainted with my husband. It was comforting to learn that our mutual love had survived the many years of 24/7 and we spent long hours talking about the trips we would take and the time we could spend with our grandchildren. But travel was expensive and tiring, and I recognized that we couldn't travel all of the time and that 24 hours with grandchildren were enough – until the next visit. And so, in search of that somewhat fleeting state of personal “busyness,” I set out to find those activities that would interest me, him and/or us, assuring us of what existentialists might describe as a “meaningful” life.

I turned first to my daily newspapers – *The New York Times* and *Newsday*. *The Times* provided me, as always, with lots of wonderful goings-on in New York City – theatre, auctions, concerts, art events, as well as quirky happenings of all sorts. *Newsday* provided me with more local activities – craft shows, flea markets, special events, as well as information about a variety of group meetings. But the best informer of local activities that might lead to ongoing interest groups was that marvel of sales pitches for all sorts of paraphernalia and dispenser of very local news – *The Pennysaver*.

Gathering information from all sources, I began to cull a variety of clubs and interest groups and found that they fell into one of several categories. The first category was based on medical crises, ailments or needs. The more esoteric of the support groups available (and I list them with no sarcasm intended and with full appreciation of the problems they present for those troubled

with such concerns or afflictions) were: parents of run-away children, erectile dysfunction, dealing with climate crises, eating right for your blood type, guide dog training and the La Leche League for nursing mothers. The second category included a variety of what might be termed as physical, emotional or cognitive self-improvement groups and had numerous possibilities, depending upon one's interests. This group included meetings, committees and/or lectures on the following: detoxification as a prelude to weight loss, memory workshop for Alzheimer's patients, introduction to Sudoku to sharpen thinking skills, cosmetic dentistry to improve your smile and an invitation to learn more about Botox. Of course, included in this group were numerous book clubs, writers' groups and lectures on travel to various locations. The third category was generally a conglomerate of miscellaneous interests that ranged from: New Yorkers against the death penalty, preserving your family heirlooms, an exhibit of small boat building, the Sons of Norway (aren't there daughters in Norway?) and learning the workings of a bee hive.

Six years later, my husband and I have selected from among the array of possibilities that are available to retirees. The above listings were, of course, written tongue in cheek. There are, in fact, many possibilities from which to choose, including wonderful programs for seniors at several local universities. Both of us are kept so busy with our many varied activities that our children often complain that they don't see enough of us, to which I say to my husband, “Better that way than the other way around.”



HAVE AN OPINION?

We welcome your reactions to the ideas expressed in this issue. Please let us know your thoughts.

E-mail

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MAMAS, DON'T LET YOUR BABIES GROW UP TO BE TEACHERS

Don Murphy

"Those who can't do, teach. Those who can't teach, teach gym." Recite this classic Woody Allen punch line to Ivy League grads who have taught in the "Teach for America" program before fleeing in exhaustion and frustration after a year or two in the trenches to less demanding, more remunerative fields. I'll bet they don't laugh.

No other profession receives the constant scrutiny and criticism that befalls teaching. Not even close. This almost daily judging comes from many sources: parents, school boards, politicians, voters, the press and, of course, the students themselves. When it comes to teaching, we are all experts.

. . . the fact is that evaluating teachers fairly is an enormously complex and frustratingly difficult proposition

After all, everyone has the background and experience to evaluate teachers. Haven't nearly all of us sat in classrooms for at least 13 years watching pedagogy at its best and worst? Hasn't each of us logged thousands and thousands of hours being subjected to good, bad and indifferent instruction served up by that iconic figure – the American school teacher?

It's not surprising then that many of us feel quite comfortable judging teachers. But the fact is that evaluating teachers fairly is an enormously complex and frustratingly difficult proposition, like teaching itself. Frankly, if it were easy to empirically judge teachers, a standardized evaluation system would have been put in place long ago. Yet, we've never had one.

For starters, what I don't hear coming from the mouths of politicians and pundits is that one size will not, cannot, fit all. How do you compare the teaching style, performance, methods and results of a physical education teacher to a calculus teacher? An "alternate-setting" Special Education teacher to an Advanced Placement/Honors teacher? A third-grade teacher who has seven special-education students "mainstreamed" into her class of 29, versus a third-grade teacher who has only two special-education students mainstreamed into her class of 22?

Granted, some components of good teaching (energy, patience, humor and rapport with students) are constant, regardless of the subject being taught. However, is the challenge of teaching 25 eighth graders the art of preparing a complete turkey dinner in a mandatory Family & Consumer Science course equivalent to the challenge of teaching the genius of Shakespeare to 25 highly-motivated A.P. English Lit. students, most of whom are bound for elite colleges? You can make a convincing argument for either proposition.

Certainly, it would be unfair to compare the performance of teachers of elective courses to the performance of teachers who, for example, teach five sections of an algebra course required for graduation. The elective is chosen by students who are interested in

the subject, while the required course may be populated by many students who have failed the course before due to an inherent problem with abstract thinking or math conceptualization. As a former guidance counselor, the toughest calls for me to make were to parents whose children had failed the Sequential I or Algebra Regents for the second or third time and, consequently, wouldn't graduate.

Tell me, can students' Regents results for teachers in Jericho, Syosset or Roslyn, for example, be evaluated in the same manner as the Regents scores of students who attend solidly middle-class or lower middle-class schools? And, what standard measure will the state employ to judge teachers, both at the elementary and secondary levels, whose courses/grade-levels do not culminate with the administration of a standardized state exam in June? By the way, that would be the majority of our teachers.

So, although we can and should standardize certain elements of the teacher-evaluation process (attendance, consistent contact with parents when warranted, conscientious grading/record-keeping, etc.), there always will be subjectivity involved when school administrators evaluate teachers. After all, good teaching is as much art

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as it is science.

For example, although teachers certainly don't have to be eccentric, "crazy," or funny to be effective, these traits can be helpful. Timely humor and some occasional zaniness woven into the instructional process helps hold students' attention. Look no further than Robin Williams' character in "Dead Poets Society." He suddenly hops up on a desk and mesmerizes the class with his animated recitation of poetry. A little theatricality, especially in a culture where students are more distractible than ever, goes a long way. Remember, teachers of yore never had to contend with the constant threat of surreptitious texting during class. But I digress. The huge issue of the negative impact of cell-phones and texting in our schools is a topic for another day.

One change that definitely would improve the evaluation process and, more importantly, instruction would be to hire a small group of evaluators/mentors, whose sole role would be to observe teachers, and then work with them, both in and outside of the classroom, to improve their teaching. This group of professionals would be composed exclusively of master-teachers, i.e. very highly-rated teachers who have taught for a minimum of 10 years. This new category of educator must fall outside the domain of teachers' unions. As the system stands now, there is a conflict of interest when department chairpersons, who are nearly always members of teachers' unions, evaluate fellow union members.

Our current evaluation system finds harried build-

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WHAT IS THE COMMON CORE? OR: SO, I THOUGHT I HAD RETIRED. WAS I MISTAKEN!

Victor Jaccarino

On June 30 of 2011, I retired from public education, thinking that I might do some consulting, might do some traveling, and spend a great deal of my time catching up on my reading and maybe taking some courses. I was already an adjunct professor, so I figured the rest would fall into place. Simultaneously, President Obama's Race to the Top and the Common Core Standards dominated the educational news. Having had a hand in writing the first set of New York State Standards and writing what we thought was to become the new New York State Standards, I had been asked to review the Common Core for New York and to help add New York's 15% to the document. This all led to working for BOCES, and consulting in many districts on Long Island, Westchester and Putnam counties. Wow! So this is what retirement is like!

So what is this Common Core that 48 out of 50 states have adopted? We now have the same standards for ELA, literacy in all subject areas and math across the country. Basically, the Common Core shifts our emphasis from fiction in English, elementary, and content area classrooms to a balance of informational texts, particularly argument, and literature. This shift also means that our content area teachers are now teachers of literacy.



Why did this happen? Well, the answer is simple. Internationally, the United States has not been doing as well as some other countries in the world in promoting literacy and mathematics skills.

The idea of the Common Core in literacy is to emphasize text-dependent responses to our reading and to emphasize the formulation of persuasion and argument in writing.

School districts across the country are reworking their curricula in all subject areas to align with the Common Core. The question that comes up often is, "Is this just another pendulum swing or another way of repackaging what we already do?" I hope not. If it is, then we have a problem. As other countries in the world move forward with literacy and math skills, we need to find ways of competing in a global economy. Our students must become critical thinkers, literate in the many forms of communication, and writers and speakers who can present a point of view based on evidence.

So, that is the essence of the Common Core. I continue to have a pretty full schedule as a retired educator, working almost every day with teachers, both experienced and inexperienced, in order to help them align what they are doing in their classrooms with the Common Core State Standards.

MAMAS, DON'T LET YOUR BABIES GROW UP TO BE TEACHERS *(cont'd)*

ing administrators, who shoulder a million responsibilities, and frazzled chairpersons, who teach 2-3 classes of their own in addition to their department leadership and evaluation responsibilities, racing around the building every spring to make sure they finish all required observations. This is not fair to teachers, students, chairpersons or administrators.

Furthermore, many administrators haven't taught for ten-or-more years; and more than a few are former technology, business or physical education teachers who are now responsible for improving the performance of

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chemistry or French teachers, for example. Wouldn't it make much more sense to have a former, stellar high-school science teacher evaluate and work with the school's science department? Or, to have a gifted, multi-lingual foreign language teacher work with members of the LOE (Languages Other Than English) Department?

So, although I endorse Governor Cuomo's position that standardized teacher evaluation is long overdue, considering the enormity of the challenge, it must not be rushed into. Yet, that's exactly what is happening. So, I say unto the governor, if it takes another 12-24 months

to get it right, and to get teachers to buy into a standardized teacher evaluation plan, albeit with some understandable anxiety, so be it.

One thing's for sure. It is educational malpractice to continue giving the overwhelming majority of teachers a lifetime guarantee of employment at age 25 when they have 30 years left in their careers. As it stands now, to be removed from the classroom after earning tenure, one must commit an egregiously foolish or inappropriate act. It is disingenuous for teacher-union leadership to continue to insist otherwise. Statistics tell the story. Almost no tenured teachers are removed from the classroom simply for being very poor teachers, year in and year out.

There is no more demanding, noble and important profession than teaching. If you are among the overwhelming majority of Americans whose life, or whose child's life, has been profoundly changed by a teacher, this is not a revelation. Precisely because of the daily, life-altering potential of teachers, our outdated system of evaluating and retaining them needs to be changed.

The majority of teachers are dedicated, hard-working and effective. These talented professionals, despite the ever-increasing demands and scrutiny to which they are subjected, continue to pour their hearts and souls into teaching our kids every day. The very least we can do is to ensure that they are fairly and consistently evaluated.

CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?

Martin Mandelker

Historically, the art of politics has changed very little. Controversial issues facing one generation invariably face others. One of our current debatable issues is that of immigration policies. Their intricacies and their impact upon education in our country are too complex to be addressed here. What can be said with some level of certainty is that the often referred to "melting pot" metaphor has rapidly been replaced with a more "tossed salad" comparison. Our American "salad" consists of a variety of clearly distinguishable elements blended together that precede our main democratic "entrée." The problem that schools and society then face is how can we respect each ingredient while using its individual taste and texture to enhance our country. Perhaps part of the solution is using curricula and teaching methods that embrace multicultural themes, the foundation of which must be built upon the principles delineated in the "Bill of Rights" covered with a "dressing" of culturally relevant teaching. How then should we prepare such a salad? Culturally relevant teaching is not a new concept in education. It essentially helps students answer the question, "Where do I fit in?" However, culturally rele-

understanding of and respect for cultural differences.

As with immigration, the concept of multiculturalism is controversial. For example, in the December 2010 issue of the conservative magazine, *American Spectator*, an article entitled "Multiculturalism R.I.P." by Roger Scruton appeared in which the author contends that multiculturalism is a *recipe for disaster*. Mr. Scruton reminds us that, while we don't require everyone to have the same faith, to lead the same kind of family life, or to participate in the same festivals, we have a shared moral and legal inheritance based upon Judeo-Christian ideals. Although cultural differences do exist, our ideals require each of us to respect the freedom and sovereignty of other cultures. Our society, therefore, depends upon a culture of law and openness which have shaped our common curriculum. It enables us to privatize our beliefs. He emphasizes that distinguishing between and among cultures is not equivalent to being racist. Mr. Scruton notes that our political institutions and our legal order are ours. They form part of what made us, and convey the message that it is right to be what we are.



Reflecting upon my experiences as a principal in both inner-city and suburban school districts has led me to conclude that reducing the humiliation of students' feelings due to cultural differences will have a positive impact on violence reduction. Teachers on all levels know that establishing a classroom atmosphere that respects the rights of all is an important aspect of developing a constructive learning community. Collaboration among students provides not only for learning factual information but also for the often more powerful learn-

We need to look beyond the "holidays and heroes" common approach to teaching students to respect cultural differences.

vant teaching goes beyond learning about and valuing cultural differences among students.

"Bullying" and "discipline" are hot topic issues addressed in schools throughout the country. I suggest there is a positive connection between culturally relevant teaching and a decrease in these two detrimental influences upon classroom instruction. By focusing upon cultural similarities and differences, we begin to build a better understanding of the "human rainbow" and strengthen relationships among children. Horace Mann was correct when he called education "the great equalizer." Politicians often call for increased investment in education, but greater understanding of one another is probably an equally appropriate goal and money well spent. Understanding and respect for each other should lead to a reduction of bullying and the need for disciplinary action.

We need to look beyond the "holidays and heroes" common approach to culturally relevant teaching. Starting with the premise that *humiliation leads to rage* (stemming from feelings of ineptitude, unworthiness, isolation, etc.) we can more readily address building

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ing of "unintentional knowledge." There is an American Indian proverb -- "knowing in part may make a fine tale, but wisdom comes from seeing the whole." "Seeing the whole" requires a careful examination of historical events as a framework for better understanding behaviors and actions that influence various cultures. Consider, for example, how Lincoln's views regarding racial equality can be part of students' discussions/reactions to a statement that he made in the famous 1858 debates with Stephen Douglas when he said "...I am not nor have ever been in favor of bringing about in any way the social

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CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG? (cont'd)

and political equality of the white and black races." (Pascoe, p. 27) When researching this statement, it became clear that Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation because he felt that slavery was immoral, but he really did not envision that people of the black race would attain the same social and political status as whites. If teachers modify Lincoln's language to be age/grade appropriate, the information conveyed in this quote can certainly be used on many grade levels to encourage discussion of Lincoln's statement in 1858 vis a vis current civil rights achievements.

Building upon students' feelings of self-worth . . . is an important part of increasing cross cultural acceptance.

As we continue to reduce students' stereotypes based upon inaccurate generalizations, we must respect and understand that students are simply trying to make sense of their environment. The dilemma that remains is how teachers can best reduce the cause and effect relationship between humiliation and rage. Focusing our attention upon the concepts of "esteem," "empathy," and "equity" as vehicles for developing better understanding between and among our students may help. Building upon students' feelings of self-worth and self-esteem in both student/student and teacher/student interactions is an important method of increasing cross cultural acceptance. Similar comments and thoughts pertain to issues of equality and social justice. Of primary importance is building upon a feeling of "empathy" that people, regardless of age, bring with them to all situations.

Throughout this article, I have used many terms related to culturally relevant teaching. These include: "holidays and heroes," cultural awareness, empathy, equity, self-esteem, social justice, stereotyping and diversity. Addressing each of these aspects within cultur-

ally relevant teaching, curriculum development and classroom instruction certainly is a tall order. This can be accomplished by focusing on three broad teaching methodologies. These are "synthesis", "dialogue" and "caring." Simply put, helping students understand similarities and differences among and between cultures will help them build broad understandings. Encouraging participation in dialogue among students presented in an atmosphere of concern and caring for each individual is essential. Thus, students may become more reflective when dealing with their peers and society. What a delicious addition to our "tossed salad!"

When examining causes of bullying and violence which we unfortunately read about too often in our newspapers, the title of this article, "Can't we all just get along?" is clearly evident. An answer may be in additional emphasis upon culturally relevant teaching with its goal of reducing humiliation and resulting rage by increasing understanding among and between students, teachers, and parents. Perhaps culturally relevant teaching will help us better appreciate Maria Montessori's contention that "...it is easier to build a perfect child than repair a broken one".

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HEALTH COVERAGE CHANGES

During the last week of September, Medicare-primary NYSRSAS members probably received a mailing indicating that effective January 1, 2013 they will automatically be enrolled in Empire Plan Medicare Rx. This will be a Medicare Part D plan but it will carry expanded coverage. There will be no "donut hole" and co-pays will remain essentially the same as they have been in the past. (Of course, each year there are usually some changes in the specific drugs at various levels of co-payment. Check the annual Empire Plan update you'll receive in January for specific information regarding these changes.)

In December a new Empire Plan Medicare Rx Card will be mailed to those who are Medicare-primary. This will supplement the Empire Plan Benefit Card you already hold and will be used exclusively for prescription drug purchases. More details will accompany the card.

By law, the Empire Plan is required to provide an "opt out" option to those affected by this change. The notices received in September include a Cancellation Form for this purpose. **Submitting the Cancellation Form will cancel ALL Empire Plan coverage for yourself and any dependents covered by your policy. To keep your Empire Plan coverage do nothing— do NOT submit the Cancellation Form.**

WHAT DO YOU THINK ?

In "Mamas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Teachers," Don Murphy raises some interesting and potentially controversial issues.

How do you feel about peer coaches (the experienced teachers he mentioned) actually conducting evaluations rather than simply supporting the instructional process?

Should some form of "renewable" tenure replace the current system he labels "educational malpractice?"

Let's start a discussion; write to us at

NYSRSAS@optonline.net

PORT CITY PONDERINGS*Joe Marchese*

There is much concern today about the lack of social and communication skills among many young people in the workplace. Some businesses find a need to provide training sessions for novice employees in proper dining etiquette. Job interviewers find applicants for professional positions showing up clad in tee shirts or wearing flip-flops. A recent article in the *Wilmington StarNews* by

Frances Baynor Parnell addresses this situation, especially regarding the so-called "opportunity gap" between young adults approaching the world of work.

Ms. Parnell, a retired family and consumer sciences teacher with 52 years of experience, states that she and her colleagues spent their careers teaching what she terms "soft skills" like social graces, accentuating positive personality traits, and communication, skills which many of today's youth now lack, thereby contributing to this opportunity divide. During her last two years as a teacher, she was involved in a federal research program which compared the relationship of family skills to work skills. It found that family skills and work skills are interchangeable. She emphatically states, "Don't ever underestimate the value of success in the family to success in the workplace."

Noting that Ellen Swallow Richards, a chemistry professor at MIT, first promoted the teaching of family and consumer sciences in 1909 as Home Economics,

Ms. Parnell presents Richards' belief that people "must first learn to live, so that they can learn how to make a living." Of course, in the minds of many, the term "Home Economics" mistakenly meant merely courses in cooking and sewing which concerned mainly girls. Yet, to the teachers in the subject area, they encompassed much more.

Parnell decries the tendency over the years to brand the curriculum in family and consumer sciences as suitable merely for poor students, when the "soft skills" which comprise it are critical for all students to succeed at any level of employment. Stressing that such training begins with the family, she proceeds to maintain that more formal education in these skills should be ongoing from preschool through high school and even college. Among the topics she lists as important to success in the workforce and to quality of life in general, in addition to those listed above, are: career preparation and relationships, resource management, child care and guidance, wellness and nutrition, finance, and fashion and apparel.

It is interesting to note that with so much emphasis placed today on attempting to explain the opportunity gap in employment and family success merely in terms of racial or socioeconomic factors, Parnell presents a more nuanced evaluation of the situation and offers an educational approach not only to help alleviate the problem but also to benefit all students. Moreover, she points out that many, if not all, of the topics mentioned are taught in the Family and Consumer Sciences Department of most local secondary schools.
