

The Pudding's the Proof

The reason so many educators at all levels swear by Hunter is that her model is clear, is immediately applicable, and provides a common language all can understand.

We had not seen Susan, the teacher, since the summer of 1985 when she was a student in a graduate class we taught based on the work of Madeline Hunter. When she appeared in our offices this summer, her face was wreathed in smiles as she reported on her "best year" ever in the classroom. She had left our class, after studying and practicing Hunter's principles and being coached in their use, with a rather severe self-analysis. During her years of teaching, she said, she had asked children to learn things they could not learn; she had failed to provide her students with a sense of the meaning of what she

had taught; and she had maintained generally disorderly classrooms.

In the final paper Susan had submitted in class, she proposed a broad plan to rectify these problems and goals for attacking the worst ones. She would use task analysis to ensure that her students were learning "the next thing." She would use her knowledge of students' lives to give personal meaning to their learning tasks. And she would use reinforcement theory to help create an orderly classroom environment.

Sam, a professor of biological sciences, had participated in a seminar on college teaching, which was also

based on Hunter's work. Concerned about less-than-positive student evaluations, Sam experienced a different kind of joy. After years of college-level instruction, he told us the seminar brought him face to face with the designing of instruction. Prior to our course, he had viewed instruction as a simple matter of transferring knowledge from his mind to his students' minds. Now student evaluations of his teaching were showing that he had become more captivating and interesting and was using a variety of approaches. His students were performing better on tests, too. No intellectual flyweight, Sam now could see the

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value of studying the process of teaching as well as the content to be taught.

We remember a short conversation we had with a local superintendent of schools, which may sum up much of the grassroots feeling about the Hunter model. We asked, "Warren, you have been superintendent for three years, and the district is viewed as one of the best in the state. What made it that way? Was it the new reading curriculum, teaching to classroom management, the adoption of clinical su-

pervision with teacher growth plans ...?" "Somewhat," he said "but the single biggest positive thing that has happened to us is Madeline Hunter."

Susan, Sam, and Warren are typical of educators who have been exposed to Hunter's tenets. Their experiences are only a sample of what we have heard from student after student. Why do these differently placed practitioners believe that Madeline Hunter has helped them so much? Three reasons seem to surface most often.

1. The model is clear. The teachers we've talked to say that they learn its basics quickly. Its utility and systematic approach to lesson preparation make sense to them, yet it doesn't bind them into teaching the "Hunter Way." Rather, it provides the template for thinking about the process of teaching and lesson preparation versus the prescriptive "do this—say that" of most teachers' guides.

2. The model can be applied almost immediately. Teachers at all levels tell us that many of the principles exemplify approaches they have used successfully but in willy-nilly fashion. Training, then, appears to capitalize on a transfer of learning, which aligns old and new practices in more logical and productive ways.

3. Although the model promotes a common vocabulary, practitioners see that as a benefit. To them, teaching, supervision, and just plain talking about teaching are immeasurably enhanced when the conversants speak the same language. They believe they have the tools to think together about the process of teaching.

There exists a vast chasm, which educators have called the theory-to-practice gap. Madeline Hunter has been busily filling it for years with propositional and conditional knowledge, based on research, subject to further testing, but joyfully recognized as truth by administrators and teachers afflicted with a pragmatic hunger for practical approaches. Personally, we do not care, nor do our students, that Hunter's bibliographies are not yards long. Dewey's weren't either. □

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