

Portraits

Portrait of Madeline Hunter

At the age of 12, Madeline Hunter made up her mind to become a psychologist. After graduation from UCLA, she found the work at Children's Hospital and Juvenile Hall disheartening. So she became a school psychologist and thus began to define her mission: translating psychological theory into the language of teachers. Later at UCLA Lab School, she refined and elaborated her translations. Today, more than any other name, the name of

Madeline Hunter is a household word in education: she has indeed created a common frame of reference for describing the art of teaching.

Over the past 20 years, Madeline Hunter has, in her own words, "spawned an industry." The so-called Hunter model has been presented to tens of thousands of educators concerned with curriculum, research, and teaching. Her "principles of instruction" have been adopted by thousands of teachers and hundreds of school districts across the land. People trained in the model speak of being "Hunterized."

And when they do, they sometimes assume that the model carries the approval of an organization, perhaps UCLA or a Hunter Institute. But, in fact, Hunter works independently, although there are dozens of "Hunter" trainers all over the country, most of whom Hunter herself does not know, some of whom she has trained, and none of whom have any official certification or stamp of recognition.

Hunter the individual works from the basic convictions about teaching she has developed and modified over her career. She calls her famous model "a teacher decision-making

model" and explains that "all of the 5,000 decisions a teacher makes every day fall neatly into three categories: what you're going to teach, which we call a content category; what the students are going to do to learn it and to let you know they've learned it, which we call learning behavior category; and what you as the teacher will do to facilitate and escalate that learning, which is called a teaching behavior category."

She has divided this generic and comprehensive framework into dozens of subcategories as her "translations" of research have progressed. These translations—on such important topics as motivation, retention, anticipatory set, Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, hemisphericity, closure, task analysis, and discipline strategies—have produced practical lists and sublists that have great appeal to



teachers. And all of this has made her respected, revered, well paid, and sometimes roundly criticized.

Criticisms aside for the moment, Hunter's brilliant achievement prompts a look behind the model at the person whose name has become so famous. My conversation with her provided at least a glimpse.

Pivotal Experiences

When Madeline Hunter was 12 years old, she told me, she sat in a junior high school auditorium waiting to be assigned to her 7th grade class. The principal stood up to read the lists of names for the classes. One by one the names were read, and she watched as most of the best students left the auditorium. She was perplexed, this child who had excelled in six years of elementary school. The principal droned on, and virtually every able student left the auditorium. Hunter cowered in her seat.

Reflecting on that day, Hunter said, "Six years of being successful was destroyed when a person of authority said 'You're dumb.' I have never forgotten what that can do to a child." She paused, said a few more words about that day, and then stated in a firm, even tone, "You never put a kid down. You always build a kid up."

But the 7th grade story had a happy ending. Along with 15 other children, Hunter was assigned to an experimental class taught by Christine Cook, who turned out to be a "fantastic teacher—and a psychologist." Hunter loved the class, and Cook became her ideal. "Naturally," she said, "I decided as a 7th grader I was going to be a psychologist."

Hunter went to college and majored in psychology. She recalled, "I was trained impeccably at UCLA as a psychologist. I had the giants of the time training me—Dunlap, Gordon, Gillhausen, Franz—the really great names in psychology at the time." After graduation she continued her training in psychology at Children's Hospital in Los Angeles where, she said, "Ellen Sullivan took me under her wing." This work—often preparing a child and his or her parents for

Teaching is an action performance behavior like music, like dancing, like athletics, like surgery.

the child's death—she found very depressing. Next she worked at Juvenile Hall, where "at least what those kids had was curable." However, the young psychologist soon found that interventions in that setting were "too little, too late."

The Beginning of a Lifework

"So that I could work at the preventive rather than the remedial end of things," Hunter said, "I decided to become a school psychologist." Going to work for the Inglewood, California, schools, she found the teachers dedicated, intelligent, and even intuitively good in the classroom. But too often, Hunter said, "teachers didn't know much about cause-effect relationships between teaching and learning." They often failed to see relationships between poor behavior and a child's need for attention. Moreover, they didn't ask enough questions, such as why the boy who kept books for his complex counterfeit coin business was failing math in school. And when Hunter asked about "distributing practice" and "massing practice" or mentioned names like Thorndike or Guthrie, no one responded.

"So," she said, "I began working with teachers to translate psychological theory into language a teacher could understand. My mission has been simply to take theory, much of which has been around a hundred

years—since Wundt's first consciousness lab—and translate it for classroom teachers."

After 13 years in the Inglewood and Los Angeles City school districts, Hunter became a professor at the University of California at Los Angeles and principal of the UCLA Lab School. Twenty years at the Lab School gave her the time and the place to develop, articulate, and implement her ideas. She continually read research and translated what she read into practice. To illustrate the need for translation, for example, she characterized Benjamin Bloom as a person "whom I admire extravagantly" but added that Bloom did not write for a teacher audience. The researchers "often didn't know what the teacher was facing in the classroom. They're *researchers*. The research is impeccable research done by brilliant people, but it needs translation before it can affect the classroom."

As Hunter's skill at translation became known and appreciated, the use of the translations sometimes became limiting and ritualized. "Because the model has been so successful in helping teachers plan lessons," she explained, "unfortunately it has become a checklist."

Hunter had not anticipated nor intended such effects. She supports the value of translations and at the same time powerfully underscores the infinite complexity and unpredictability of teaching: "When you're working with humans, you're always working with probabilities, never certainties, and there are always exceptions." She has come to understand that "teaching is an action performance behavior like music, like dancing, like athletics, like surgery. You have to automate many behaviors so you can perform them artistically at high speed."

The Requirements of Artistry

When Hunter talked about artistry in teaching, she explained the program's limitations and its frequent modifications, which one must understand before it can be internalized, and she peppered her remarks with colorful metaphors. When I asked her about

the sameness in lessons based on checklists, she pointed out that both the Taj Mahal and the Lincoln Memorial use principles of parallel lines and symmetry "but do not look alike." She added, "People aren't used to looking at underlying principles." At one point, in some exasperation, she said, "I am now on a one-woman broom all over the world saying there is absolutely nothing you should expect to see in every lesson and nothing you have to do in education—except think." She kept emphasizing many routes to the same goal; for example, "Raw fish, dried caribou, and peanut soup are all proteins. They're all going to give you good protein." When I questioned her about the currency of her ideas, she used the continual refinements of cardiac bypass surgery as her example to illustrate evolutionary development within a profession. She was anxious, through these examples, to defend her basic model as she presents it and not as it has been represented or misrepresented in articles or classrooms.

If you look at Hunter's work, the reason for the "misunderstandings" is apparent, even graphic. *Seven* factors to increase motivation, *six* attributes of an effective example, or *five* characteristics of retention—these lists are eminently useful, even seductive. However, it may be more a comment on inservice education than on the Hunter model that so many educators have taken the model to task for being inflexible and limiting. Hunter was quick to point out that the necessary training in her model should take at least two years of dedicated work, not two hours of lecture with two handouts for follow-up.

Hunter used the example of her own ballet training to show how internalized learning happens. As a teenager, she "fell in love with ballet." But it took years to learn to dance well, to make dance a natural part of her being. And it was hard work. "My ballet training stood me in good stead. For one thing, I learned that rigor undergirds artistic performance."

Rigor and time are the two things she requires if a school district is to

I would hope my work would help move teaching from a craft to a profession based on research translated into artistic practice.

take her model seriously. "Two months is a drop in the bucket in terms of what we know about learning." Districts must send their staff members to valid workshops time and time again, provide continual support in the home district, and send the trainees back for research updates as often as possible. "If you don't have time for follow-up, you're wasting my time and your money," she asserts.

But she is quick to accept part of the blame for inadequate training; for example, she said, "One of the egregious errors on my part is that when I was teaching principles of learning, I never taught under what conditions you should *not* use them." She explained that if a student should make a very perceptive remark, there are conditions under which it should not be reinforced, even though positive reinforcement is usually desirable. She said, "If it's blurted out, or if it's going to move the class in an unproductive direction, or if this is a shy boy who can't stand public approval, a kid who's looked upon as a brain, when reinforcement from the teacher will alienate him further from the group, or if it's a kid who habitually does this, I would not reinforce the remark."

As Demanding as Surgery

Justifiably proud of her accomplishments, Hunter recalled a few indicators of the quality and popularity of her work. "Teachers from the Lab School have graduated into superintendents, principals, directors of inservice; several of them are free-lance consultants." She points with satisfaction to her efforts in the inner-city Los Angeles school that improved to the satisfaction of the California State Department of Education and of independent researcher Rod Skager. She cites with equal pride her work in such disparate places as Wilmette, Illinois, and San Bernardino, California. Hunter remains in demand all over the country. Each January, from the 500 or more requests she receives to speak or to do workshops, she selects commitments for the following year. She takes special pride in the teachers who return to her workshops to increase their skills and the districts who apply her ideas with integrity.

Repeatedly in our conversation, Hunter mentioned complexity. "I hope I live to see public recognition of the incredible complexity of teaching." Most people believe "teaching is just telling kids what to do and maintaining discipline." Hunter believes it's more like surgery, "where you think fast on your feet and do the best you can with the information you have. You must be very skilled, very knowledgeable, and exquisitely well trained, because neither the teacher nor the surgeon can say, 'Everybody sit still until I figure out what in the heck we're gonna do next.'"

I asked Hunter what she hopes people will say years from now about her influence. Without a pause she replied, "If I could have my wish, I would hope my work would help move teaching from a craft to a profession based on research translated into artistic practice, where the professional is a decision maker and where that professional never stops learning." □

Mark F. Goldberg is Associate Principal, Shoreham-Wading River High School, Route 25A, Shoreham, NY 11786.

Copyright © 1990 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.