

What Would Madeline Hunter Say?

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Researcher and UCLA professor Madeline Hunter was the dominant voice on instructional practice during the latter part of the 20th century. Her genius was her ability to review the research on effective teaching practices, synthesize it, and then translate it into practices that teachers could use to inform instruction. She had a profound respect and admiration for the profession, and she herself would teach elementary students in her UCLA lab school whenever she had a chance. She often said that she hoped to see the day that teaching would be recognized as a complex practice worthy of great respect.

I often wonder what she might think of today's emphasis on detailed, prescriptive rubrics, and the evaluation of teachers by test scores. I had the pleasure of being taught by Dr. Hunter and I suspect that she would be horrified to find that the art and science of teaching has been reduced to a number in many of the evaluation systems now in vogue.

Hunter only had one absolute rule when it came to teaching. She said that the only thing that every teacher had to do during every lesson was "to think." She was appalled when others insisted that teachers incorporate every aspect of

the model she developed into every lesson, trying to turn her model into a checklist.

This is not to say that Hunter believed that one should "teach on the fly"--quite the contrary. She would often say that it took four times as long to plan a good lesson as it did to teach it. She recognized, however, that the master teacher was the one who could monitor and adjust based on the observation of student learning. She would be appalled by the scripted lessons that can now be downloaded and taught as if all students and teachers were the same.

Madeline Hunter also insisted that the supervision of instruction, which focuses on the lesson observation process, was very different than teacher evaluation. She wisely observed that if teachers saw every observation as evaluative, they would not be as open to coaching, but would instead, hunker down and be on the defense. She was right. In this sort and select era of evaluation we can observe first hand the foolishness of disregarding her advice.

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This issue makes an important contribution because it presents a variety of perspectives on how we can use the process of supervision and/or evaluation to continue to learn what matters in teaching. The authors do not purport to know all of the answers but rather they enter the dialogue of what effective teaching and productive supervisory relationships might be. Hunter believed in research as an integral part of advancing the profession. This issue continues that tradition.

About the Author

Carol Burris, EdD, is principal of South Side High School in the Rockville Centre School District. In 2010, she was recognized by the School Administrators Association of New York State as their Outstanding Educator of the Year, and in 2013 she was again recognized by SANNYS as the New York State High School Principal of the Year. She is a Fellow of the National Education Policy Center, a think tank dedicated to high quality research on public schooling. She is co-author of the letter of concern regarding evaluating teachers by test scores, which has been signed by nearly 9000 educators and parents, including over 1/3 of the principals in New York State.