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Harris Sockel

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“Endemic Uncertainties”: Teachers’ Professional Lives in the High-Stakes Reform
Movement

Harris Sockel

Bernadette Anand
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Abstract

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Teaching practices advocated by Teach For America and high-profile charter school networks focus on ways to assess learning and teaching to ensure certain “results” and “achievement.” These practices, espousing certain and measurable outcomes, overlook many aspects of teaching that make it inherently uncertain. The purpose of this paper is to explore the effects that principles of certainty have on teachers’ professional lives and their attitudes toward their work. More broadly, this paper uncovers the tension teachers experience between being procedures and management structures that allow for certain outcomes and the inherent uncertainties of the educational situation. Through research into seminal educational philosophers and social thinkers (including John Dewey and Lisa Delpit) this paper critiques today’s emphasis on accountability-driven education. Pushing back on reformers’ tendencies to focus on management and uniformity of “results” in contemporary low-income urban schools, this paper advocates instead for building relationships between unique teachers and individual students, and for increased sensitivity to teachers’ uncertainties.

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“Endemic Uncertainties”: Teachers’ Professional Lives in the High-Stakes Reform Movement

“Endemic uncertainties complicate the teaching craft and hamper the earning of psychic rewards. Intangibility and complexity impose a toll; built-in difficulties include assessing performance, balancing demands and relationships, and managing the self under provocation” -Dan Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*

I. Introduction

As an undergraduate, I delighted in abstraction. I engaged in the arts, was an English major, and spent most of my days at the library, writing critical essays. I appreciated the feeling of wonder and calm after reading an enigmatic line in a poem by William Carlos Williams. There was excitement and comfort in that uncertainty; I knew that, if such uncertainty existed, then I could never quite know where I would end up. Uncertainty was connected, in my mind, to possibility. However, as I continued to develop my own analytical sense as an English major, I began to crave the practical predictability of social change, especially the change involved in middle-school education, as children are growing into their adult selves.

In my sophomore and junior years, I taught eighth-grade algebra -- one of the most certain disciplines, with its formulas and right-or-wrong answers -- in Philadelphia, as part of a summer enrichment program for talented middle-schoolers.¹ I felt, in those summers, the palpable power of real social change. Through a barrage of factor trees, butcher paper, and mornings spent by the copy machine, I felt that I was able to reach my students -- to change them, through a kind of alchemy, into critical thinkers and lifelong learners.

As I reflect on those summers, I realize that my experience -- and the way I felt about my impact -- may have been skewed by inherent differences between my summer teaching

¹ The program was Breakthrough of Greater Philadelphia (formerly “Summerbridge of Greater Philadelphia”); <http://breakthroughphilly.org/>

responsibilities and the roles of year-long teachers. As a summer “teaching intern” (my official title), I was responsible for administering a set curriculum (sixty percent of lessons had been created by my supervisors) within a short span of five weeks. Further, students in the program had each shown a track record of success, and had -- perhaps most importantly -- been self-selected to participate in the program. These were students who enjoyed reading, writing, and thinking; they wanted more of it in July and August. Despite these significant differences, I ended each summer convinced that I had made a significant impact and that I was ready to manage a traditional classroom in a year-long teaching role. When I returned to campus, re-reading *Mrs. Dalloway* and the full suite of canonical Western novels became, to my twenty-two year-old self, trivial -- it was acceptable as a means toward self-discovery, but definitely the wrong way for me to spend my time as a post-graduate adult. I was eager for a firm call to action; a way to definitively and certainly make an impact.

Enter Teach For America. As a former summer teacher, I was targeted and recruited by Teach For America’s forceful recruiting arm; in my senior year, I received twenty-five emails from the organization’s recruitment director. The first framed Teach For America’s mission, and its absolute certainty that its goal of “address[ing] the educational injustice affecting millions of children in low-income communities” was possible (Enzerra, 2008). As I explored the organization’s promotional materials, I was inspired by a similar certainty that its ideals could be turned into realities. For example, Teach For America’s website advertises the organization as one that remedies “A Solvable Problem.” Dave Levin, a 1992 Teach For America corps member and co-founder of KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) charter schools says, on the organization’s website, that “there is no longer any doubt that revolutionary schools can exist in every single neighborhood in this country, regardless of demographics” (Teach For America,

2005). Jodi Romero, a former corps member, testifies that she “ha[s] seen the achievement gap close for [her] students.”² These testimonials made for an incredibly powerful call to action -- especially for a college senior who had become disillusioned by the academy. The testimonials centered on one clear and reachable end goal: closing the achievement gap. It was exactly what I needed after college and its abstractions.

As I entered the world of education reform, and the province of Teach For America specifically, I realized that the specific responsibilities of educators often take a back seat to the more politicized and lofty rhetoric surrounding inequality and “closing the achievement gap.” This is true for Teach For America and a few high-profile charter management organizations, which, as Achievement First’s mission statement makes clear, focus on “deliver[ing] on the promise of equal educational opportunity for all of America’s citizens” (Achievement First, 2012). The goal of equal education for all, or of “closing the achievement gap,” is politically charged -- Race to the Top and state testing mandates lend legitimacy to the war-against-the-achievement-gap approach, and thus heighten its power and certainty. If this goal of ending educational inequity is a national one, then it must be important, real, and ultimately achievable. Rather than, for instance, the amorphous and continually changing goal of “address[ing] the...emotional, social, and physical well-being of a child,” (Bank Street School for Children, 2012) I was immediately taken with the idea that I could, hopefully, someday pat myself on the back and think, “mission accomplished.”

² The “achievement gap” is defined by Teach For America as “the damaging disparities in opportunity that exist between wealthy and poor children in our country.” Specifically, Teach For America and like-minded organizations target the following statistics as their enemies: “children in poorer communities where families make less than \$35,000 a year are *seventeen times* less likely to go to college than children of families who make more than \$90,000. By the time they reach grade eight, students from low-income communities are *three years behind* their peers in math and reading.” Taken from “Leading Your Students Toward Dramatic Gains In Achievement,” Chapter 1 in *Teaching as Leadership*; published by Teach For America in 2009.

I began my formal teaching career as a sixth-grade English Language Arts teacher at P.S. 212 in Morrisania, Bronx, and I was steeped in the anti-achievement-gap rhetoric that had been instilled in me by Teach For America's training program. With my fellow corps members, I was committed to "clos[ing] the achievement gap once and for all."³ I remember walking to school on the first day behind teachers carrying enormous posters in large white plastic bags, water bottles poking out of their backpacks, and coffee spilling on the sidewalk behind them. They looked more like athletes than educators, and I think I realized, that morning, how much of a test my first year as a Teach For America corps member would be. I rode the subway with a suitcase full of books and handmade handouts I had printed on colored paper -- color-coded to match the small themed teams of students I was going to assemble for one of my first-day activities. I think I took up three seats on the subway that morning, at six a.m., amid a throng of construction workers and nurses. I held my lesson plan in my hands, which shook as the subway car rattled, and tried hard to stay calm.

I don't quite know how I survived that first day. Yes, I had taught for two short five-week stints, but those summers were insulated from the standards-based systems of accountability I experienced in my Teach For America training and placement school. My teacher training -- a four-week summer program (Teach For America's "Summer Institute") in which I taught summer school with a partner teacher four days each week, and took classes/seminars on teaching at night and on Fridays -- emphasized remediation, standards, testing, and data. My training was laden with acronyms for different pieces of a lesson: INM ("Intro. to New Material"), which was supposed to be a five to ten-minute teacher presentation; GP ("Guided Practice"), which was an opportunity for students to apply what the teacher had

³ Jason Kamras. (2009). "Foreword." *Teaching As Leadership*. [NOTE: This was part of Teach For America's pre-institute training materials, which corps members are assigned to read prior to induction and training.]

taught in groups; IP (“Independent Practice”), a chance for students to independently apply skills the teacher had taught. There were acronyms for ambitious quantitative goals for student reading growth and percent proficient (“BG,” or “Big Goals”), for specific named goals students were to accomplish in one lesson/day/period (“SWBAT” or “Students Will Be Able To”), and for the subjects they were assigned to master (“ELA” or “English Language Arts”; “SS” or “Social Studies”). It was a highly codified world, with established protocols, processes, and hierarchies through which to guide students toward “success,” a term that seemed to equate with strong performance on paper (grades, standardized tests, performance reviews), and ultimately economic success. Some of Teach For America’s training even explicitly mentioned the salary bump that comes with meticulously measured “success.” I was convinced, through all of these acronyms and systems, that education was a certain enterprise, with reachable goals and clear pathways toward them.

As I reflected on these structures and codes, I began to question what education means for teachers and administrators, particularly within the context of Teach For America and other like-minded reform organizations. As a former English major and avid reader (as mentioned above, my college career centered on abstruse literature), I would have never expected myself to measure my students by, for example, how many “text-to-self connections” they made, or how many sentences (or periods) they had placed in each neatly positioned paragraph. My school, though public, was -- like many public schools -- adopting charter practices that were in vogue throughout New York City under Joel Klein’s leadership (and later under Dennis Walcott’s). As Diane Ravitch notes, Klein’s administration “decided they could get better results by replacing supervision with a tightly aligned accountability program of incentives and sanctions.” This program centered on assessment, particularly reading and mathematics assessment (“Test scores

in reading and mathematics became the be-all and end-all of public education in grades three through eight”) (Ravitch, 2010, p. 76). As a Teach For America teacher with training in “closing the achievement gap” through meticulous planning and assessment, I sensed that I was valued because of my training’s focus on data-driven instruction. I appreciated the admiration and “incentives” behind the data push, and I assumed the mantle of certainty. I embraced it, and it was the “be-all” and “end-all” of my classroom, especially in my second year. I consistently tracked my students’ progress on standardized assessments, posted their gains on our classroom corkboard, and celebrated their incremental improvements on school-wide assessments. I began to believe that an increased number of “text-to-self connections” attested to real learning.

However, even as I drank the kool-aid, I harbored doubts. As much as I hungered for the certainty of quantifiable “results” and that elusive feeling of “mission accomplished,” I almost never felt satisfied. I could never trust that what I saw was true learning. Ironically, I gained more satisfaction in writing subtle and obscure analyses within the halls of academia than I gained throughout my entire tenure as a middle-school English Language Arts teacher. As much as they were meant to increase my certainty that I was having an impact, the valorization of these codes and methods of assessment -- particularly the way English Language Arts was compartmentalized and itemized into specific indicators and tasks -- made me begin to appreciate how invisible and nebulous the processes of teaching and learning really are. As a teacher, it is difficult (some may say impossible) to know what your students have learned. Paul Hirst, in his essay, “What Is Teaching?” highlights the disconnect between teacher intentions and student learning. “If teaching activities are intentional,” Hirst writes, “what are we to say about all the learning that goes on in a classroom, or anywhere else, which is not intended by the teacher?” (p. 449). Learning is a personal process, and a difficult one to define and measure.

Later in his essay, Hirst elaborates on concerns raised about the relationship between teaching and learning to note that the intention of teaching is to bring about learning, although the aims of learning are multifarious and diffuse; learning drives toward a desired “end state,” but these “new states...differ radically from each other.” Learning pervades life; we are constantly in a state of growth and learning, and as Hirst goes on to explain, “we seem to be under a perpetual temptation to think that all learning results in knowledge. Clearly this is false” (p. 450).⁴ As much as I appreciated the contradictions and reductions inherent in my teacher’s sense of the word “learning,” I also continually looked toward definition and measurement as my guiding principles throughout two years of teaching. There is much, as a teacher, to be uncertain about (Lortie, 1975).⁵ As a kind of psychological safeguard, I constantly defined exactly what I wanted my students to do, and how I wanted them to accomplish it. Understandably, I experienced a great deal of cognitive dissonance during my tenure as a teacher -- on the one hand, appreciating that I had scant knowledge of what was going on in my my students’ minds, and on the other, pushing myself to define what “learning” should mean to them, and to measure their mental progress.

After an initial year of espousing certainty but suspecting that, in reality, the codes and structures of teaching may not actually measure true learning and growth, I began my second year as a Teach For America corps member with the utmost resolve to, “once and for all,” end the achievement gap. I created elaborate tracking systems and pasted them onto the walls of my classroom, I hauled cases of colored paper from Manhattan to the Bronx, and spent the month of

⁴Hirst also highlights the importance of unintentional learning, “...where as the result of a causal process as in hypnotism, conditioning, sleep-teaching, or even the unconscious acquisition of something, the intention of the learner is not involved.” As Hirst continually reiterates, learning is not dependent on teaching, and it happens constantly and subtly. It cannot usually be perceived, even by the learner.

⁵ Dan Lortie, in his *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (1975), devotes an entire chapter of his analysis to “Endemic Uncertainties.”

August immersing myself in Doug Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion*, a comprehensive catalog of "49 techniques that put students on the path to college." Lemov is managing director of Uncommon Schools, one of the high-performing charter networks akin to Achievement First and Teach For America. The book advocates, for example, that teachers employ a technique called "cold call," in which "questions come at students quickly, clearly, and calmly, in clusters directed to multiple students, in multiple locations around the room" (Lemov, 2010, p. 111). It is an incredibly process-driven book; these processes, the book argues, can be mastered to ensure certain success. They will, if done right, enable the teacher to direct student efforts toward real learning.

With *Teach Like a Champion* and a host of Teach For America training materials at my disposal, I walked into my classroom in September 2010 with a sense of ownership, anticipation, and absolute certainty in the power of my own leadership.⁶ I introduced students to the rules of my classroom, our communal procedures (for entering and exiting the classroom, sharpening pencils, asking to leave for the bathroom, and for circulating materials), and to the mission of our classroom community: to eliminate the achievement gap. An intricate PowerPoint I had prepared introduced students to the tenets of our classroom, taken directly from the charter playbook: "Work Hard. Be nice. No excuses."⁷ I was certain that, if we adhered to the guidelines set forth in this first day, my students would make dramatic gains in assessments, and would be inspired to "work hard" to achieve our shared goals. After all, I had been repeatedly told -- by Teach For America, my school, and by federal policy -- that clear and ambitious goals along with a strong and clearly articulated plan would lead to "success."

⁶ My first day that year was featured in the New York Times:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/09/nyregion/09backschool.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁷ The slogan "Work Hard. Be Nice." is taken from Jay Mathews' book detailing the origins of KIPP (*Work Hard. Be Nice.: How Two Inspired Teachers Created The Most Promising Schools In America*).

Of course, that isn't quite what happened. When did I go astray, and when did I begin to question myself? I'm not exactly sure, but I do remember one particular moment, in October of that second year, when a hint of self-doubt began to erode the shield of certainty that I had built around me. It was picture day, and I was in line to lead my class to the stage so our photo could be taken as a group. I had been instilling in our class, since September, a sense of camaraderie, shared culture, and shared goals, and picture day was -- as I had explained to my class -- our opportunity to show our solidarity to the school. As we left our seats to approach the stage, two recalcitrant students remained in their seats, immovable. Though I tried to coerce them, they adamantly refused to stand up and walk to the stage. They declared, through their actions, that they were no longer a part of our class, and that all of the carefully crafted lesson plans centering on classroom culture, along with all of my meticulous curation of our classroom environment, were for naught. It was a watershed moment, one that led to a rush of self-criticism, self-doubt, and wrenching questions about my goals as a teacher, and about the steps I had been taking to reach those goals. My certainty was shattered.

As I continued to work through my Bank Street program -- specifically, courses like "Teaching Reading & Writing in the Content Areas" and "Children's Literature in a Balanced Reading Program" -- I began to realize why my "one-size fits all" methodology was not having the impact I had hoped. I was spending too much time emphasizing the ways in which my students should be similar to one another, and not enough time appreciating their differences; I was not meeting them where they were. Beers' description of the "struggling reader" resonated with me: "We cannot make the struggling reader fit one mold or expect one pattern to suffice for all students. Not all struggling readers sit at the back of the room, head down, sweatshirt hood pulled low..." (p. 14). Similar to how Beers describes herself during her initial years as a

teacher, I was viewing my students as a homogenous group of “struggling readers” or “troubled kids” rather than seeing them as individuals with their own strengths and quirks.

When Marcia Singer, my Bank Street advisor, would meet with me after observing my class during those first and second years, our discussions would usually involve my focusing on negative aspects of the lesson (i.e. breaches of trust, classroom management issues, lack of students’ respect for me) while Marcia would almost always focus on the students’ assets and unique interests (i.e. one of my students’ palpable attentiveness to detail, or another’s contagious enthusiasm for Ancient Egypt). I continually overlooked these positive attributes of my class, and it wore on me throughout the year. I was hoping, I think, for a classroom similar to those described in *Teach Like a Champion* -- a classroom in which all students spoke and acted like “scholars.” As I spoke with Marcia and my peers at Bank Street, I began to realize that this type of uniformity and hope for certain outcomes and behaviors would not lead to the utopian classroom environment I had envisioned and been trained to achieve.

II. How Did We Get Here?

How did we arrive at this kind of certainty through testing, accountability, standards-based instruction, and “best practices”? Diane Ravitch, in *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, asks the same question, and pinpoints the publication of a report entitled *A Nation At Risk (ANAR)* in 1983 as the moment when “education reform [went] wrong” (2010, p. 22). *ANAR*, published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (appointed by President Reagan), was a “response to the radical school reforms of the late 1960s and early 1970s,” and advocated for “a full-fledged program of curriculum and assessments” (2010, p. 22). The text of *ANAR* is sensational and alarmist. Its first paragraph describes “a

rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Throughout, the report uses the language of war (“educational disarmament”) to incite fear and consternation. As a result of *ANAR*, according to Ravitch’s narrative, widespread popular fear led to the creation of accountability-driven educational policies enacted through Clinton’s Goals 2000 program, No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top (Ravitch, 2010).

Acting upon fears induced by *ANAR*, America went wrong, Ravitch argues, in failing to implement a genuine curriculum with clearly defined curricular goals and rigorous assessments. As Ravitch explains, our educational leaders have a tendency to espouse structural and political solutions rather than content and curriculum-based reforms. Though *ANAR* “envisioned a public school system that offered rich, well-balanced, and coherent curriculum,” we have not made that vision a reality (Ravitch, 2010, p. 29). *ANAR* had actually urged these kind of curricular reforms, but political concerns blocked a genuine focus on curriculum development.⁸ Though the Core Curriculum is a meaningful step forward, most reform initiatives have focused on, as David Tyack and Larry Cuban observe, “business practices” that often overlook the aspects of teaching that teachers find so meaningful (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 127). Performance pay, rigid assessment guidelines and rubrics, along with a focus on testing are, fundamentally, peripheral to what teachers really care about: interacting with students through engaging content. As Tyack and Cuban summarize, “...effective teaching of educationally disadvantaged children [is] no simple matter to be solved by business expertise, extrinsic incentives, and programmed instruction” (1995, p. 120). These extrinsic reforms often do little to positively alter the realities

⁸ Ravitch attributes the nation’s lackluster curriculum and content development to Lynne Cheney’s “attack of...history standards for their political bias” in 1994 (p. 17). Lynne’s critique of provisional history standards raised concerns about their political and cultural bias. Fearing political retribution, all political parties shied away from genuine engagement in curriculum development.

of the classroom. Teachers “close their doors” and insulate themselves from the policies surrounding them.

Along with testing and accountability, some schools -- especially high-profile charter networks such as Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), Achievement First, and Uncommon Schools -- have realized the importance of detailed instructional and behavioral standards for teachers, and have codified and promoted specific actions that teachers should perform in order to realize student growth. Doug Lemov’s *Teach Like A Champion* lists forty-nine of these techniques, and includes a DVD with video segments for each. Doug Lemov, Managing Director at Uncommon Schools, a charter management organization that oversees twenty-four schools in New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, conducted detailed analyses of teachers and classrooms in high-poverty districts that are outperforming their affluent peers. The book exudes certainty; its foreword notes that “what [Lemov] has discovered is surprising for its simplicity and portends good news for the teaching profession” (Lemov, 2010, xi). Lemov’s simple findings have become a kind of gospel for some teachers -- the “good news” -- especially for those in high-profile charter networks like Uncommon. They are effective because they are not “alchemical,” but mundane: they reveal “highly skilled individuals, working with a common, discrete set of tools, building systems of classroom culture and instruction, brick by brick” (p. xii). Lemov elaborates on the literal construction metaphor as he describes, in his introduction, that while teaching is an art, “behind every artist is an artisan” (p. 1) Mastery of tools -- the ones presented in the book -- enable teachers to become artists. These techniques are specific and concrete. (The first, for example, is a technique dubbed “No Opt Out,” in which students correctly answering a question to which they had previously provided an incorrect answer).

Their concreteness lends certainty to the idea that teachers can master them. I will discuss some of the problems within this kind of certainty below.

Michael Schmoker's *Results Now* epitomizes education reform's emphasis on structural and evaluative initiatives in the wake of *ANAR*, along with its contemporary sense of certainty. Rhetoric concerning "effective practices" that are known but not implemented supports the idea that success is certain if we would only put these "best practices" into action. Schmoker writes, "we would achieve...results by addressing the monumental gap between common and effective teaching practices" (2006, p. 3). Schmoker's sensationalist rhetoric echoes *ANAR*, and, similar to *ANAR*, Schmoker condemns contemporary teaching practices as mere "mediocrity." The way to surmount mediocrity, Schmoker argues, is to demand "results," and he cites Jim Collins' *Good to Great* as containing answers about ways that organizations can successfully "confront the brutal facts" and effect sweeping change. Schmoker's certainty that a "results orientation" will bring swift change recalls the espousal of business practices described above. "Results" are a kind of product; it is easy, in a business that manufactures objects, to "demand results." Certainty, in such a business, would be expected -- an object is static; once it has been created, its existence and condition are certain. Children, however, cannot be minimized to mere "results."

Schmoker proposes three key reforms, among other ancillary ones: greater transparency in schools, rigorous literacy curricula, and increased collaboration among educators. These are sound reform principles, though the language surrounding them indicates that they can, if implemented correctly, unfailingly change the face of education. Regarding collaboration, Schmoker writes that "professional learning communities have emerged as arguably the best, most agreed-upon means by which to continuously improve instruction and student

performance” (p. 106). Schmoker describes in detail the characteristics of effective professional learning communities: they must “meet at least twice a month, for a minimum of 45 minutes” and must talk in “concrete, precise terms” about instruction. Though Schmoker’s intentions are good, the idea that a singular protocol will effect dramatic change ignores the ways specific groups of people relate to each other and influence the process. Schmoker’s insistence that implementing these “best practices” with fidelity will yield “results” overlooks the uncertain nuances of people, with their diverse intentions, quirks, and concerns.

The driving force behind certainty that “best practices” and business-based reforms will deliver “results” is, of course, data. Data are a key piece of sought-after “results,” and educators rely on “data” to prove that reforms “work.” Often overlooked, however, is the conflation of correlation and causation in education’s use of data. Larry Cuban, in “Data-Driven Instruction and the Practice of Teaching,” critiques our contemporary valorization of data: a 2007 RAND study, Cuban writes, shows that “of 36 instances of data use in two districts....researchers admitted...that they could not connect student achievement to the 36 instances of basic to complex data-driven decisions in these two districts” (2011). Patterns in student data, Cuban points out, do not always mean that educators are the ones causing those changes. As Hirst claims above, teacher intentions do not always yield student learning. Cuban goes on to point out that “in 2009 the federal government published a report that examined 490 studies where data was used by school staffs to make instructional decisions. Of these studies....only six -- yes six -- met the Institute of Education Sciences standard for making causal claims” based on data. Teachers are not statisticians; our effort to make them into quantitative analysts is not proven to yield “results,” only the assumption of results. Cuban closes with a pithy summary: “Numbers may smell scientific. But we give meaning to those numbers.” The meanings we give to

numbers belie their seemingly scientific aura, and the certainty with which we imbue them is an assumption, rather than a fact.

The emphasis on certainty in our contemporary education reform movement is symptomatic of (and a possible reaction to) our broader frustration with ineffable progress and unmeasurable goals. The metaphysical process of teaching and learning -- i.e., change -- is difficult to understand, describe, and quantify. Our attempt to measure it in a positively certain way is analogous to an attempt to quantify the “success” of a piece of beautiful music or art. As I continue to work toward improving educational possibilities and outcomes, I continue to reflect on the dilemma of measurement in teaching and education more broadly. As we train teachers to enter classrooms, it is essential that they develop sound understandings of “data-driven instruction” and its limits. What follows is an attempt to grapple with teacher training and development today, and what it means for students and for education as both an institution and an ineffable and unquantifiable process.

III. Endemic Uncertainties

As mentioned above, Dan Lortie provides an overview of teaching’s “endemic uncertainties” in his comprehensive analysis of the teaching profession. Lortie’s study, though published in 1975, remains relevant; his analysis of the “psychic rewards” teachers seek, along with his explanation of the uncertainties that make these psychic rewards so scarce, resonates with my own experience in the classroom. Given that the majority of teachers’ days are spent in a classroom without continual adult oversight, teachers lack the “authoritative reassurance” that often serves as a primary non-monetary reward in many professions (Lortie, 1975, p. 149). Without adult reassurance, teachers primarily rely on interactions with their students -- or with

themselves -- to provide satisfaction and reinforcement. Further, given that teaching is an “unstaged” career (i.e. lacking a significant career ladder with major salary increases), these interactional rewards gain increased importance.

In his chapter on “career and work rewards,” Lortie focuses on the primacy of these interactional or “psychic rewards” as a replacement for financial rewards and/or upward career mobility (pp. 106-108). Based on interviews with teachers in the Boston Metropolitan Area and Dade County, Florida, in 1963 and 1964, Lortie concludes that the most prized “psychic reward” is the satisfaction of “reaching students.” The majority of teachers are heavily concerned with maintaining sound relationships with students, rather than with meeting specified learning targets or associating with other teachers. Though it is the most rewarding, “reaching students,” as it turns out -- is incredibly ambitious and hard to assess.

Lortie begins with a comparison to other professions, focusing in particular on the way teachers assess their own progress: “compared with other crafts, the work processes in teaching, and the products sought by teachers, are difficult to measure by several assessment criteria” (p. 135). These primary criteria, Lortie continues, include:

1. “Intangibility” of learning outcomes: Our teaching goals are literally intangible, as compared to the goals of “craftsmen in tangible fields [who use] models, blueprints, plans, and detailed specifications” to create physical objects
2. Lack of clear boundaries surrounding teacher’s work: “Craftsmen in tangible fields...usually work within clear boundaries; they know what part of a particular product they are responsible for.” Teachers, however, “are normally assessed in terms of multiple criteria applied simultaneously....Few people seem to define schooling as purely intellectual in intent -- the general tendency is to include a variety of socialization goals.

Breadth of purpose means that teaching performances will be judged in terms of moral, aesthetic, and scientific values all at once: But what *is* good or beautiful or true?"

3. Unstable product: "People in many crafts can count on the stability of their efforts: the novelist or mason need not worry that his imprint will soon vanish. But teachers work with inherently changeable materials; the objects of their efforts -- maturing children -- are supposed to keep changing after they have been taught." (pp. 135-136)

Complementing Lortie's work, Seymour Sarason offers another important reason for teachers' uncertainties: isolation. Sarason, an educational philosopher whose "research into public education produced the 'bitter pill' of the system's intractability to significant reform and change," cites, primarily, an ignorance of an isolation-inducing "culture of the school" (Fried, 2003, pp. 8-14). Added to isolation, he writes, is intellectual stupor and an emphasis on "routinization of thought...as well as narrowness of role." First-year teachers, Sarason writes, are largely uninformed about the degree to which they are isolated in schools, made to solve problems on their own, without others to provide much-needed reassurance and to assuage Lortie's "endemic uncertainties." Responding to Sarason's chapter, "Teaching is a lonely profession," in his book *Psychology in Community Settings*, one teacher wrote that "Finally, someone recognizes that although we spend the day with students, as an adult we feel alone in the world" (Fried, 2003, p. 42). The sense of loneliness generates a situation in which "each teacher is, so to speak, a law unto him- or herself." This sense of being the origin of right and wrong paradoxically endows the teacher with consummate certainty and crippling self-doubt. Teachers establish their own rules even as they question them, alone without other adults to corroborate their judgments. As Sarason concludes, "it is, therefore, not surprising that the

neophyte teacher approaches the opening of school with a good deal of anxiety about being able to effectively act and be independent; to hide anxieties and ‘mistakes’ from other teachers.”

In this way, Sarason goes even further in naming teachers’ uncertainties “anxieties” and, more importantly, “fears.” Teacherly fears, Sarason writes, stem from concerns about control and power dynamics in the classroom. Sarason is acutely aware that “schools...are political organizations in which power is an organizing feature” (Fried, 2003, p. 48). One of the major reasons why many reform efforts have failed, Sarason writes, is because reformers have overlooked the importance of power dynamics in shaping teachers’ actions. Individual classrooms, moreover, are particularly fraught with power plays -- classrooms are themselves miniature “political organizations.” Sarason interviewed nine first-year teachers to investigate their responses to power dynamics in the classroom. In addition to fearing that they would be unable to establish command of their classrooms, these teachers “feared that their inadequacies would come to the attention of the principal and other teachers -- that is, those who were perceived as having power would devalue them” (Fried, 2003, p. 49). Looming above uncertainties regarding one’s ability to discipline a class are uncertainties about who is watching; the teacher’s status as a solo agent exacerbates his/her fears. Along the lines of Lortie’s point above, the absence of systems for regular adult input and oversight engender fears of unexpected punishment and control. Fear -- and, thus, uncertainty -- comes from the top and the bottom, and fear is exacerbated by isolation.

Given that the teacher is one who *has* institutional power in the realm of the classroom, it is striking that Sarason points out the ways that *having* power can itself be troubling. Teachers are urged to maintain unilateral control of their classrooms (even if, in many cases, the maintenance of that control looks effortless -- there are, as Sarason points out, many calm and

relaxed classrooms; for these classes, dynamics of power are still paramount, but they are just below the surface), yet the goal of a classroom should be, as most teachers are aware, for students “to comprehend the complexities of power in a complicated group setting” (Fried, 2003, p. 53). It is difficult to bring about this kind of complex comprehension when teachers feel they must act unilaterally. In Sarason’s conversations with teachers, he found that although they assumed the teacher’s role is to maintain unilateral control, “many of the teachers found themselves disagreeing with assumptions they themselves recognized as underlying their classroom behavior” (Fried, 2003, p. 61). Teachers experience self-doubt about seemingly universal beliefs about classroom control (or, at least, beliefs universal to Sarason). They realize that certain tenets of their lives with students, while perhaps pragmatic and long-held, or forced upon them by the system within which they work, may in fact not be best for students or for themselves. These moments of self-doubt, Sarason finds, plague teachers and classrooms generally.

Susan Moore Johnson corroborates some of Sarason’s work on isolation and power-laden relationships between teachers and students (2004). According to Johnson, “the students -- their behavior, their skills, and their needs -- can be the most surprising part of teaching for new teachers” (2004, p. 74). In addition to possible control issues, teachers must contend with the fact that they often do not know their students before the first day of school. Once they do get to know their students, teachers must balance the desire to maintain authority with “the importance of forming bonds with students in order to engage and motivate them” (2004, pp. 74-75). This delicate balance between authority and collegiality makes the relationship-building aspects of teaching all the more uncertain. Different students have their own ideas of how the teacher-student relationship should work, and ensuring that these relationships fit each student’s needs

can present a significant challenge. In this way, Johnson's work echoes Lortie's in its understanding that teachers face a difficult task in ensuring that a multitude of students' needs are met by one teacher.

Reflecting on these critically uncertain aspects of teaching, a few things surface. First, these three aspects of teaching -- intangible goals, lack of boundedness, and unstable product -- primarily concern the relationship between teacher and student. It is in that plethora of unique relationships that these uncertainties surface. Lortie devotes a section of this chapter to the uncertainties within this specific realm: “fragilities of relationship” (1975). In this section, Lortie writes that teacher-student relationships are always unstable due to: “(1) the lack of voluntarism [i.e. teachers and students do not choose their counterparts, and students are mandated to be in school], (2) the incomplete socialization of students as workers, and (3) the grouped context within which instruction takes place” (Lortie, p. 151). Because teachers are often tasked with producing certain work outcomes through students (i.e. grades on a state test, projects to hang on a wall or place into a portfolio), incomplete socialization is a major barrier. Of course, this is a necessary part of the teaching situation; teachers are present to socialize children, in addition to teaching them intellectual content. But, as mentioned above, because socialization is an extremely complex enterprise, influenced by the cultural backgrounds of teachers and students, it is difficult for teachers to know exactly how to socialize children.

Grouped context plays a large role in teachers' feelings of “endemic uncertainty” as well. The fact that teachers perform for a group of children at once, and must maintain relationships with each of them, leads to teachers' feelings that they must become a different person in the classroom. Peter McLaren's *Life in Schools* mentions this tendency for teachers to try on different identities (2007, p. 77). Peter describes his attempts to “act ‘the heavy’” and to

impersonate a “hard-boiled drill instructor.” In order to effectively relate to groups of students, teachers must inhabit a persona that is equitable and constant. Ironically, this kind of certain and unchanging persona actually engenders more instability than a teacher’s natural self. As Lortie writes in a subsection of his chapter on “endemic uncertainties” (titled “The Erratic Self: Despoiling Relationships”), teachers often place enormous pressures on themselves to reside within this constant and artificially stable persona. Breaking from this persona can, occasionally, cause incredible distress, especially when tempers flare. According to Lortie, “impulsive anger [is] the most emotionally disturbing of the shameful events” that teachers experience (1975, p. 156). Relationship-building between teachers and students, then, is an incredibly complex endeavor, due to the number of students and their relationship to a single teacher who must maintain a constant, predictable and certain relationship with a variety of students simultaneously.

Lisa Delpit’s *Other People’s Children* underscores the uncertainty felt by these teachers, and focuses specifically on the uncertainties that prevail in teaching situations where the teacher does not share the cultural and/or racial background of his/her students. In her introduction, she presents a series of vignettes that detail different perspectives on students. In one, a “little boy named Anthony, a five-year-old black child from ‘the projects’” talks to an external observer about his cousin. The observer notes to the teacher that Anthony “really does have things to talk about.” The Irish-American teacher, however, replies that “It’s unfortunate, but I don’t think he even knows what family means. Some of these kids don’t know who their cousins are...” (1995, p. xxii). The race and class divides that often undergird the teaching situation -- especially for Teach For America and many charter school teachers -- cannot be overlooked. Given differences in background and bias, teachers, students, and families often see the world radically

differently: as Delpit writes, “it is as if we are in the middle of a great computer-generated reality game, but the ‘realities’ displayed in various participants’ minds are entirely different terrains. When one player moves right and up a hill, the other player perceives him as moving left and into a river” (1995, p. xxiv). These differing realities add to the layers of uncertainty that run through teachers’ experiences in the classroom.

As a part of my research for this project, I invited groups of five to ten teachers to discuss their experiences teaching in low-income schools along with discussing some timely books and news articles on education reform. Many of the participants in these sessions were Teach For America alumni, or teachers at high-profile charter networks that espoused similar principles as TFA. I utilized personal and professional networks to publicize the sessions, advertising in the Teach For America weekly newsletter (which was sent to all current corps members) and mentioning the sessions to colleagues within my school. I pitched the sessions as “an opportunity to read texts on contemporary developments/issues in education reform, and to reflect on what the aims/theories/fundamental ideas of education really are, beyond our classrooms.” I titled the discussions “education seminars” to endow a reflective, formal tone. Anna Lassiter, a colleague from Teach For America and a peer at Bank Street, co-led these seminars.

After one month of recruitment, our first meeting comprised seven teachers (including Anna and me) along with three employees of organizations related to education (New Leaders for New Schools, Teach For America, and KIPP). The discussions each focused on a specific text. Two discussions, for example, centered on Diane Ravitch’s *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*. One discussion focused on a *New York Times* article about racial diversity in charter schools entitled “Why Don’t We Have Any White Kids?” Prior to

each discussion, Anna and I sent a few guiding questions and/or areas in the readings to focus on. For example, prior to a discussion of Ravitch's chapter on NCLB, we asked participants, "What are the ideas/philosophies behind NCLB's approach to teacher evaluation?" and "What does teacher evaluation say about theories of teaching and learning?" The discussions began with these kinds of text-focused responses, and inevitably broadened to participants' thoughts and reflections about their work in education. In this way, the discussions were meant to use specific texts as a way to unlock teachers' thoughts about their work, and to push them to challenge their thinking about teaching and learning, in addition to giving them a forum in which to learn about the world of education reform beyond their classrooms or organizations. We met biweekly from March through May of 2012.⁹

Anna and I recorded responses during the initial conversations (one of us would take handwritten notes or type minutes). Looking back on these notes, we discovered that the uncertainties mentioned above are still prevalent -- even after Lortie's mid-century research and Delpit's work in the 1980s and 1990s. Teachers still share a sense that a "teacher persona" can be inherently uncomfortable, or that relationships with students are tenuous and changeable. In these meetings, teachers expressed doubts about Teach For America's "data-based" theories, and one stated that she "felt she had to wear a mask every time [she] walk[s] into the classroom." Further, stories of relationships gone awry abound. In one instance, a teacher stated that she "had to lobby [her] assistant principal to transfer a child out of [her] class" after they suddenly started to "rebel," even though the child had been one of her "most well-behaved" in the past.

⁹ NOTE: This group does still meet, though we have transitioned into discussions of classical educational philosophy (Plato and Aristotle) as a way to reflect on larger questions behind our practice. In this way, the seminars function now as a kind of ad hoc "Foundations" course.

These uncertainties, which stem from the criteria Lortie lays out above, are still the source of major confusion and identity-questioning for teachers.

As described below, Teach For America and some high-profile charter networks -- particularly Achievement First -- are working to mitigate some of these uncertainties. They have developed codes and established protocols for teachers to follow, which, one hopes, should increase teachers' confidence and certainty about their identities, actions and outcomes. What follows is an attempt to grapple with a few of these methodologies and to examine their effects on teachers' practice and their perception of "certainty" on the job.

IV. Mechanisms of Certainty

Doug Lemov's oft-referenced taxonomy, *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College*, begins with a rationale for these "specific, concrete, actionable techniques."¹⁰ Lemov writes:

I call these tools "techniques," not "strategies," even though the teaching profession tends to use the latter term. To me a strategy is a generalized approach to problems, a way to inform decisions. A technique is a thing you say or do in a particular way. If you are a sprinter, your strategy might be to get out of the blocks fast and run from the front; your technique would be to incline your body forward at about five degrees...If you want to be a great sprinter, practicing and refining that technique would help you achieve more than refining your strategy. (2010, pp. 4-5)

¹⁰ Lemov is a managing director of Uncommon Schools, a high-profile charter network that shares resources with Achievement First.

Lemov's privileging "technique" over "strategy" emphasizes the mechanical aspects of teaching: standing still rather than pacing while giving directions, using certain hand gestures (i.e. clear, crisp ones that give students a sense of how they should move) but not others, and saying certain stock phrases (i.e. "I'll give you some think time" or "I'll start taking answers in ten seconds") (2010, p. 136). The approach promotes uniformity among teachers -- a shared community, which, as mentioned above, can be extremely positive in an existing environment that promotes a cellular kind of isolation for teachers. However, as Lortie notes, teachers prize the ability to "reach students," and they thus privilege unique relationships with students -- relationships in which they can see evidence of student growth and development. These relationships, as described above, make teaching simultaneously rewarding and difficult. Lemov's emphasis on uniform technique for all "champion" teachers tramples, in some ways, the need for relationship-building in classrooms. When all teachers have the same technique, unique one-to-one relationships between teachers and students -- in which teachers see all sides of the student and can appreciate his or her unique qualities -- are often discarded in favor of uniformity.

There is a widely shared video in Lemov's library that exemplifies this kind of unanimous body of students. The video is labeled "Systems and Routines," and it focuses on Ms. Mead, a fifth-grade literature teacher at Uncommon Schools, the high-profile charter network that Lemov manages. Ms. Mead begins by praising her students for waiting in a quiet single-file line in the hallway and "self-correcting" to ensure that their hands are at their sides. Ms. Mead paces from the front to the back of the line, repeatedly reminding students, "you should be tracking me." In fact, she interrupts herself twice to re-emphasize that "everyone should be tracking me right now." Content is sacrificed for "management" and uniformity. In

her frenetic pacing, Ms. Mead seems afraid. She watches her students for the slightest glimpse of disorder or chaos. Ms. Mead instructs students to file into the classroom and to “look me in the eye, shake my hand, and form a line across the back of the classroom. Your toes are going to be pointing towards the whiteboard at the front of the classroom.” It is evident that this is the first day of school, and Ms. Mead’s emphasis on rules and procedures is appropriate, though perhaps a bit excessive (particularly in her insistence that “toes [must] be pointing towards the whiteboard.” However, in Ms. Mead’s constant reminders and frenetic disposition, one wonders how truly certain she is of her management practices and the focus of her first day with this class. Occasionally, due to their frequency and hushed tone, Ms. Mead’s reminders seem directed toward herself more than her students.

Along these lines, the claim that all teachers must utilize the same “technique” in order to create effective classroom culture and procedures creates classrooms that do not respond as well as they should to *students’* actions, and this has effects on teachers’ feelings toward their life in classrooms and in their schools. As a teacher using these techniques -- and, as described below, comments from sessions with teachers indicate that this is a shared feeling -- I felt that, in an effort to produce uniformity in the classroom, I was often overriding some students’ unique learning preferences. In the initial weeks of my second year as a teacher, I worked hard to establish uniform procedures for paper collection and distribution (as Lemov recommends), in addition to procedures for bathroom passes and clear expectations for homework completion. An initial emphasis on these procedures and the techniques that accompanied them, while initially effective, eventually resulted in a feeling of alienation. Lortie notes, in his chapter on “Endemic Uncertainties,” that this feeling can result from an overemphasis on common procedure rather than individualized learning and relationship-building. If used as Lemov

recommends -- that is, as a user's guide to the classroom, a way for teachers to hone their technique and ensure a strong classroom culture -- then these rote procedures can easily engender alienation.

The certainty that comes with knowing, as a teacher, that you have mastered one of Lemov's techniques is often taken as a replacement for the certainty that you have "reached" students. In fact, it seems this is true of most teacher "strategies," like running records or an adherence to the "workshop model." These strategies engender certainty because teachers can take pride in having mastered them and executing them well, but successful execution of strategies does not replace deep engagement with students and relationship-building with students themselves. Lemov writes, in his introduction, that "many of the techniques...in this book may at first seem mundane, unremarkable, even disappointing....They sometimes fail to march in step with educational theory. But remember the track record of the lowly chisel. In practiced hands, it creates faces that emerge out of stone and are far more striking than even the most clever...tool could make" (2010, pp. 5-6). Lemov, overall, privileges the certainty of the chisel to the genius and nuance of the artist. This is not to say that Lemov does not understand that teachers must be artists, too, but just that his approach promotes these kinds of practiceable, rote skills. It is much easier to be certain that you have done well as a craftsman or chiseler than as an artist. Given that Lemov's taxonomy is even more specific than most existing teacher strategies (it dictates exactly what teachers should say in certain instances, and includes abundant dialogues and a DVD with video examples), it more powerfully promotes a feeling of certainty in the classroom and thus overrides the primacy of relationship-building.

In this way, systems like Lemov's taxonomy overlook the importance of organic and social experience that Dewey promotes in *Experience & Education* (1938). Although Dewey

emphasizes the importance of rules (“Without rules there is no game”), he does not advocate for the kind of certain outcomes that teachers are made to expect from the practices and procedures outlined in *Teach Like a Champion* (1938, p. 52). Rather, Dewey espouses a classroom in which teacher and students together shape outcomes, and in which “...it is not the will or desire of any one person which establishes order but the moving spirit of the whole group” (1938, p. 54). Yes, Lemov hopes to create classrooms in which students are “bought-in” and in which the communal culture acts as one. Too often, though, teachers use Lemov’s taxonomy as a way to ensure certain results -- they want their classrooms to look like the ones in his models, and they ignore students’ input if it conflicts with their ideas of the ideally uniform classroom. They deal with student disruptions uniformly, rather than, as Dewey would recommend, “deal[ing] with them individually” (1938, p. 56).

Along the lines of Lemov’s taxonomy, Achievement First’s video library is divided into six categories, one of which draws heavily on Lemov. The categories focus on culture-building and behavior management, and they are, in order: School Culture, Essentials of Effective Instruction, Doug Lemov: Taxonomy, Mathematics, Literature, Guided Reading. Tellingly, the two most lengthy sections are “School Culture” (35 videos) and “Doug Lemov: Taxonomy” (39 videos). Within the taxonomy section, more than half (27 videos) depict “high behavioral expectations” and “student engagement.” Overall, these videos, like one on “Writing a Header” or “Systems and Routines,” are very similar to Lemov’s in content and emphasis. Teachers’ words are largely scripted, or have the feeling of being scripted as they address all students equally and in the manner of many of Lemov’s examples. In one video, “Strong Voice,” a fifth-grade teacher stands at the front of the classroom and says, in a staid voice similar to a flight attendant’s, “you should be done in the next ten seconds. In the next ten seconds.” The teacher

then claps three times to the left of her head, as students join her; then, she abruptly stops clapping, holding her hands in the air while she says, “your hands are up; eyes on me; no one is writing.” Putting her hands down, she continues, “Good, put your hands down. You have finished one strategy. Now, circle the word that we added; that *is* your strategy; that *is* your strategy.” The teacher, in this clip, does not engage with students or even seem to fully notice them; in fact, in the middle of the video, one student rises and others watch her. The teacher, in her use of “strong voice,” continues, certain in her attention to detail and adherence to predetermined practices.

So, how do teachers use Lemov’s taxonomy and Achievement First’s videos, and how do they drive instruction? In discussions with teachers mentioned above, the videos are described as a “jumping off point” but they are admittedly lacking in instruction-based support. High-profile charter networks like Uncommon Schools and Achievement First highly value these taxonomies, and ensure that all teachers follow them, sometimes to the exclusion of teachers’ focusing on instruction. In one conversation, a teacher said that “my coach comes in....[he] tracks us according to the taxonomy” and “you know, gives us feedback on how proficient we are” with creating classroom procedures and protocols. Further, one teacher mentioned that, in conversations with administrators, she was urged to continually employ Lemov’s “redirect” technique, which prescribes that teachers continue to repeat their message, up to three or four times, in the face of a student’s objection. The technique, according to this teacher, obligated her to deliberately “not listen” to students. It is evident, through the popularity of books like *Teach Like a Champion* and their widespread implementation in charter schools, that this mindset of the certain craftsman or chiseler rather than artist is a prevalent one.

Reflecting on this contemporary tendency to emphasize certain skills over uncertain relationships and a more nuanced approach to seeing the whole child, it seems that Lemov's book and Achievement First's video bank are in some ways reacting to the uncertainties that Lortie and others describe above. The reaction, though, as in one teacher's feeling that she was being instructed to deliberately "not listen" to her students, can sometimes exacerbate the original issues of teacher uncertainty. Dewey was aware of this problem in the early twentieth century -- as he writes, "education is essentially a social process. This quality is realized in the degree in which individuals form a community group. It is absurd to exclude the teacher from membership in the group" (1938, p. 58). Rather than relationship-building and interaction, contemporary educators trained in Teach For America and charter schools are excluding the teacher from the classroom community, and they are feeling isolated and unsure as a result. If we ignore the relationships within the classroom in favor of rote "chiseling," it is sometimes easy to create classrooms of alienation and missed connections, which are in fact more *uncertain* and difficult to decipher than classrooms in which relationships between teachers and students are open and transparent. The relationships teachers have with students, and an organic response to students' needs, can be much more "certain" than adherence to rote "techniques" leading to control and uniformity.

Further, if we recall Sarason's observations that teaching lends itself to isolation, routinization of thought, and intellectual stupor, we begin to see similarities to the reform-era emphasis on classroom routines and foolproof (i.e. sterilized or unintellectual) teaching methods. These reform practices, it seems, duplicate and perhaps exacerbate the problems that Sarason -- and Lortie, as well -- noted in the 1960s and 1970s. The isolation and routinization we see in the video of Ms. Mead, for example, mirrors the kind of endless isolation and routine that Sarason

cites as one of the key sources of teacher dissatisfaction. The two feelings are linked -- when we are alone, we can continue to repeat ourselves without the interrupting force of another's thoughts. We are like asteroids propelled by inertia. Examined from this angle, we begin to see contemporary reform practices outlined in books like *Teach Like a Champion* as unwitting replications of deeply entrenched problems with the teaching profession.

V. Conclusion

Contemporary discourse favoring results tends to overlook the plethora of uncertainties faced by teachers, favoring, instead, approaches that are meant to increase certainty. These approaches include: minimizing one-to-one relationships between teachers and individual students in favor of a teacher's treatment of a group of students as a unanimous body; emphasis on rules and procedures (i.e. process or "technique") rather than content; and reducing teaching practices to codified "techniques" that any teacher can use, irrespective of their unique disposition or approach. These mechanisms of certainty elide the uniqueness of teachers and classrooms. They recall mechanistic or "factory-style" learning and teaching, in which teachers and students erase some piece of their identity before entering into the teacher-learner relationship.

In discussions with teachers throughout my research, I have repeatedly heard that "teaching is too numbers-driven." The contemporary emphasis on data and measurement is a symptom of these aforementioned mechanisms of certainty. For individual teachers, and in the everyday life of a teacher, the act of imparting knowledge to others is very personal. It is about a unique relationship between teachers and students. As Lortie writes, these relationships are what make teaching so uncertain -- you can never fully know another human being. Teachers wonder,

“is anything happening?” and that wonderment breeds “diffuse anxiety” (1975, p. 143). It seems, then, that the anxiety and uncertainty is inherent in the condition of being with others. As teachers, we go beyond merely existing alongside others to giving knowledge and ultimately changing others. We can never be certain that we are creating the change we desire.

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