



# Futrell & FACE

Battle of the teacher titans or meeting  
INSTRUCTOR invited Mary Hatwood Futrell  
at Washington's National Press Club.

*Mary and Al, we'd first like to thank you for making time for this discussion. It will be taped, transcribed, and published for INSTRUCTOR readers in our October issue.*

*Mary, you are president of the National Education Association, which has 1,700,000 members. Al, you are president of the American Federation of Teachers, which has 610,000 members. Those positions give you tremendous leverage with which to influence the direction and strength of the education reform movement now underway in this country. Let's start with a broad but important question: What issues will impact elementary educators in the next five years, and what are your organizations planning to do about them?*

**Mary Hatwood Futrell:** The current reform movement is not new. It's been going on since the Russians launched Sputnik. At that time we began to place more emphasis on math and science and focused on some social issues, primarily desegregation. One major mistake we made was to relax the discipline and academic standards in schools. The decision was political but it was a serious error and one that we have not yet corrected. In the mid-'70s a reform movement toward basic competency standards began, but it

didn't gain momentum until 1983 when "A Nation At Risk" was released. Since then we have had nearly 300 reports about education from state, local, and national governing bodies. The current reform movement, for the most part, is positive, and the NEA supports 95 percent of the recommendations contained within those reports.

But there are areas these reports ignore, and unless we correct our course of action we will emerge from this movement not having reformed anything.

One such area is elementary education. When I bring that up, people say, "If it isn't broken, don't fix it." But elementary education is broken. Too many children who graduate from high school can't read, write, or do math. These young people don't suddenly develop a severe case of educational amnesia when they enter high school, forgetting everything they learned in the elementary grades. We need to focus more attention on elementary schools. If we fail to, all of the changes we're making at other levels will be for naught. We need to look at curriculum; at class size, which should be no more than 15. We need to open up the elementary grades to 4-year-olds. I know a lot of people disagree with me, but I am very ex-

cited about programs that teach reading and writing at the kindergarten level.

Another troubling aspect about the reform movement is that it focuses more on "quantity" issues than on "quality" issues. The reports advocate more hours, more homework, a longer school year, rather than how we can help teachers, how we can help administrators do a better job of teaching. One program the NEA offers is called "Mastery in Learning" in which we try to help teachers do a better job of assessing student progress and structuring the school day so that we can get the most out of it. It's quality that counts and we shouldn't miss that point.

Another change we need to make is to open up the decision-making process in schools. Teachers have a vast reservoir of expertise and creativity, and we should use those to address the problems that schools face. Yet we find that more and more decisions are being taken away from the schools and are being made by legislators and state school boards—people not close to the schools. Yet teachers are the ones held responsible for what happens in those schools. Let's open up the process, break down the structure so that teachers are more involved in

# Shanker OFF

of the minds? It was some of both when  
and Albert Shanker to talk about teaching  
What they said will shape your future.



all aspects of school decision making. Teachers should help determine who will enter the teaching profession and who will stay on.

We need to do a much better job of teacher training. There should be at least two years of liberal arts training before entering any teacher training program. The candidates should pass a competency test to demonstrate that they have the mastery not only of the basic skills but of higher order skills as well. Students should pass a professional skills exam assessing pedagogical issues as well as subject matter. Prospective teachers should maintain a grade-point average of at least 2.5 and complete a successful intern program. Most states already have induction periods or internship programs, and we need to upgrade those.

We strongly advocate that current practitioners be evaluated on an annual basis. We're not pleased with the evaluation systems currently in place. Teachers often say "I've never been evaluated, yet I'm being told whether or not I'm doing a satisfactory job." Evaluation should be designed to help teachers improve classroom performance, and the procedure should include due process. But if teachers aren't measuring up to those standards

after being given time to improve, they should be removed. Salaries must be raised; beginning salaries should be at least \$24,000 a year.

If we are going to have meaningful reform we must have the resources to achieve it. I am extremely alarmed about school finance in this country. The states and local districts are currently paying 93 percent of the bill; the federal government has dropped its responsibility from 9.2 percent to about 6.4 percent. And at this very moment, Congress is considering a proposal to repeal the deductibility of state and local taxes. Sure, there is a need for tax reform, but there is also a need to more evenly distribute the responsibility for supporting public education in America. While it's true that 70 percent of the taxpayers do not have children of school age, it is also true that all of us benefit from an educated population. We simply must establish a better system for financing schools.

May I raise one final issue? I am very concerned that we face the inherent danger of homogenizing or standardizing our school system. Some aspects of the reform movement do not deal with the reality that we have a very diverse student population and that they do not all function at the same level, at the

same time, on the same day. We must not so structure our schools that we prescribe what teachers do, or make instruction "teacher proof." We must instead strengthen teachers' abilities to meet the needs of a wide range of different kinds of students.

**Albert Shanker:** This is a very critical time. Only a few years ago our schools and our teachers found themselves in a desperate position. Education was largely ignored. Parents with children in school comprised a smaller percentage of the public, and therefore fewer people had a direct interest in schools. The country had other priorities—reindustrialization, rebuilding the infrastructure, rebuilding our defense system. There was growing dissatisfaction with education as measured by various polls. Scores were declining, but the number of dropouts was rising. Public schools faced a major challenge from proposed tuition tax credit legislation. Almost everything was negative!

Fortunately a vocal reform movement emerged from "A Nation At Risk" and other reports. The movement itself is an indication that the political and business communities in this country realize that along with the nation's other priorities, there has to be an investment in



*Futrell: "To extend the school day and the year and not change what is happening in schools will amount to cutting off our nose to spite our face."*

education and human beings again.

The reports, in essence, are saying to educators "there is a certain period of time during which we will support your efforts to improve. But we won't support the same old thing; we're not satisfied with what we've had in the past." The interesting thing about the reports is that not a single one of them supports vouchers or tuition tax credits.

So this is a time of great opportunity and also a time of great danger. If we who have the ability to bring about these changes don't come up with some good ideas, a reaction will set in and it will be said, "The educators had their chance. We were willing to give them more money and look what they did. Instead of moving ahead, they were out there fighting us every step of the way...." We must seize this opportunity while the public considers school reform a national priority.

I agree we'll see an emphasis on elementary education in the next two or three years. It will be as great as that on secondary education now. Students who experience failure in the high schools are usually those who have experienced failure earlier. We educators have to get away from the automobile-manufacturing model. In America we build cars, sell them, and then recall 300,000 of them if they don't work. The Jap-

anese figure out what might go wrong at each point in a production process and then try to correct it at the outset. Now that's a much more important concept with human beings. After all, automobiles can be taken apart and rebuilt. Human beings can't be repaired that easily. Once an individual loses faith in himself and doubts his ability to learn, it's very difficult to undo that damage. So getting kids to experience success at the elementary level is tremendously important.

What other issues will impact elementary schools? It's very important to understand the power relationships that link the state, local districts, and teachers. The reform movement is essentially saying, "You people at the local levels haven't done a good job, and the only way we can get you to do the right thing is to hand you this one-inch-thick piece of legislation telling you what to do. Here are the books to use, the tests you are to give, the number of minutes in each day you must teach...." This could result in the most extensive, rigid centralization ever to take place in American education. State centralization could be very destructive. The question is: Can local school boards, teachers, administrators turn around and say, "Thanks for giving us a kick and forcing us to realize that we can

really do it (reforms) better. We're going to and we're going to succeed!"

That tension between centralization and decentralization is very closely related to whether teachers are going to be treated as hired hands not to be trusted or treated like other professionals who have been trained and selected in such a way that they have expertise and can perform relatively unsupervised. How we answer that question will determine the kind of teachers we get. If we treat people like ignoramuses who can't make decisions, that's the kind of people we're going to get. If we make demands, have high standards, and say to teachers, "When you come into this job you will have the decision-making power to prescribe instructional strategies for your students," we will attract a different type of person.

Another tension is between public and private schooling. I do not think that the public schools are broken. There are many successful things happening in them. But the expectations of an educated society are quite different from the expectations of the uneducated society that we had several years ago. Higher expectations are part of the progress we are making as a nation. We in public schools have to live up to them. If we fail, there will be a new move toward private schools.



Something else that will impact schools is new management theory in the private sector. We are moving away from the factory model of supervision, away from the notion that workers are merely to be told what to do and evaluated. We're moving toward a form of participatory management. When this reaches schools, and it will, we'll call on teachers to participate in the management.

Also ahead is a renewed emphasis on curriculum—and I point specifically to the concept of cultural literacy, the notion that reading isn't just decoding. By the time kids get out of the primary grades they must have something real to read. For too long we've accepted a "curriculum of relevance," of rock and roll and sports....I think one of the big pushes ahead will be to return to a much more traditional curriculum—otherwise there will be no real literacy.

Further, we are about to engage in an extensive experiment with the structure of schools, including the whole question of the use of technology. Does it make a difference that some video cassettes now available can impart certain types of information to students in ways better than teachers can? Their use might free up teachers to be involved in coaching, teaching critical thinking, writing, expression—acts of

teaching that require one-on-one relationships.

We will also rethink the structure of schools in terms of time. Could teachers deliver instruction better if there were shorter semesters? Can children learn better, feel more success, if schooling is broken up into three-week periods which can be repeated rather than an entire year if promotion to another level doesn't seem advisable?

As a teacher, I got into the AFT because I wanted to see major changes in the lives of teachers. Collective bargaining brought us some of those. But I am convinced that what we want for teachers and schools today cannot be brought about by pursuing collective bargaining. With collective bargaining we hold onto what we have. In a good year we get a point more; in a bad year we lose one or two. We could do this for another 30 years, take a look and see that we've stood still. Sure we'd get salary increases, maybe even of 100 percent! We could get reductions in class size and maybe even more time for teachers to plan. Add up these gains—the price tag is over 100 billion dollars! We are not going to get that kind of money unless we radically restructure our schools, unless we develop a confidence on the part of the public which it does not now have.

We must professionalize teaching. We must have rigorous entry exams so that we can say to the public "only the best and the brightest are teaching." And teachers need to be involved with the whole question of quality and excellence, deciding who their colleagues are going to be. We need to see to it that the incompetents do not stay. Those will be demonstrations to the public that we are professionals truly concerned with the quality of education.

*At a time when the two of you seem to be so like-minded as you speak*

*about the need for more and better teachers, better teacher education, higher standards for teachers, why do you persist in being separate from each other as organizations, especially when the time, energy, and dollars you spend competing with each other could be better used to reach a common goal—better teachers and better schools? Why in today's world do we have two teacher unions instead of one?*

**Shanker:** We would like to merge. We've been in favor of it since 1972. We think that there ought to be a meeting of the leadership of the two organizations to put together a laundry list of whatever differences there are. We ought to agree to a period of time when we can negotiate those differences and see if we can find out what the name of the new organization should be, what size the executive board should be, who should be on the staff, whether they should have conventions every year or every two years, what should be the referendum procedure. At the end of that period, the negotiations ought to be submitted to a panel of arbitrators and then put to referendum by the memberships of the two organizations. Whatever differences exist on curriculum, on international affairs, discipline, bilingual education, or anything else can be decided on by the members of the new organization. I think it's very important that the teachers of this country have one organization and that they not fight each other.

**Futrell:** We believe in the concept of a unified teachers' organization and that there should be one organization representing the education community. The NEA did debate the issue quite extensively in the 1970s. We did experiment with a merger situation in New York State that did not work out for a number of reasons. We do have one merged local now in Los Angeles. We have positions stating that we must be an

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autonomous organization and that we believe in principles such as one person, one vote, secret ballot, that minorities should be guaranteed roles in the organization, and that the decisions are made by the 7,000 delegates attending the representative assembly. So my response to your question is we agree with the concept—we believe the organization should be the National Educa-

tion Association and that's basically our response.

**Shanker:** The issues Mary raises are issues that could be decided by a membership. I don't think that the teachers of this country want to have two separate organizations fighting each other, thereby weakening their own profession. If you ask most teachers whether the issue of just how the delegates vote at a national convention is worth fighting over, I think they would say no. The question of whether an organization should have racial quotas in terms of staff employment and in terms of electing people to office is another thing that the members of an organization would decide.

Mary, if you think that the members of your organization will overwhelmingly support the notion of racial quotas, then we ought to merge the organizations and your members would be able to outvote ours. Some of our members don't agree with my position, and I'm sure

that some of your members don't agree with your position.

*You're really demonstrating the difficulties with merging these two existing organizations. But you both said very clearly that you are in favor of one organization representing the profession of teaching.*

**Shanker:** But we said it differently. She's in favor of one orga-

with each other. I do not believe that the things that separate us cannot be worked out in some compromise, and I think that we ought to reconsider our position." If that were presented to the delegates, we might have a very different vote. The function of a leader is to do more than mechanically reflect the positions an organization took a year ago or 10 years ago. The function of a leader is to see the dangers on the horizon and to try to lead that organization through the stormy waters we're in right now.

**Futrell:** This leader does perceive the dangers on the horizon and has been working with her members to inform them, to encourage them, and to motivate them to address those issues. I do not see this as one of the answers to the problems that we are facing in education. I believe that the NEA is the organization and that if you want to come on over, we'll welcome you.

*Teachers' salaries are low. Even though we are well aware of the data that teachers work anywhere from 45 to 55 hours a week, there's a public perception that education is part-time, part-year work. Talk about professionalizing teaching naturally raises the question of full-day, full-year work, fully compensated. How do you feel about this?*

**Shanker:** Teachers' salaries aren't low because of work time, which is really quite long and intense. The problem is that standards are elastic. You can't go out and hire emergency doctors, substitute lawyers, emergency dentists. But with all this talk of excellence, you know very well what will happen this fall. Any district that can't find a math teacher or social studies teacher to take a position will go out and find a body to fill it. As long as school districts are permitted to hire like that, salaries will continue to be



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nization if we will raise the white flag and come over to her side and join them on their terms. We're in favor of sitting down and having both sides respect each other and respect their differences and try to work out some sort of compromise.

*Is the NEA open to the possibility of folding and creating a third entity?*

**Futrell:** No! And if I put that to the delegates at our convention, I can assure you that the vote would be an overwhelming NO!

**Shanker:** I certainly wouldn't ask Mary to take a position that's different from that which her organization takes. But certainly if you have a convention, there's an opportunity to go before it and say, "Because of the great dangers facing public education in America, because of what's about to happen with tax reform, because of vouchers and tuition tax credits, it's destructive to have two organizations spending millions of dollars fighting

low. We must have standards that mean something and stick with them.

**Futrell:** We no longer have the control over certain groups in this country that we used to have. The only thing minorities—especially blacks—could do if they wanted to be professionals was to become teachers or preachers. Women, if they wanted to be professionals, would go into teaching. With the civil rights movement and the women's movement, that's no longer true.

We're facing a shortage of about a million teachers. Let's not repeat what we did in the '50s, which was to bring people in who were not qualified. Let's restructure the profession so that beginning teachers are better trained and better paid.

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*Shanker: "This is a very critical time. . . . We must seize this opportunity while the public considers school reform a national priority."*

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*But isn't it true that many persons go into teaching because it affords them a schedule in which they can better meet household obligations and child rearing? If professionalizing teaching carries with it heavier responsibilities for activities that occur after 3 P.M. and during the summer, especially if we extend the length of the day and the length of the school year, won't we be cutting ourselves off from access to a traditional supply of teachers?*

**Futrell:** To simply extend the school day and the year and not change what is happening in schools

will amount to cutting off our nose to spite our face. We have to look at the role teachers play. Can we change schooling to make it more attractive so that more people will want to be teachers? As I talk with teachers, they say they aren't opposed to a longer school year, if they get paid.

**Shanker:** I don't agree with Mary. I think the issue is a splitter. Some teachers feel they're absolutely spent and exhausted and they need time to rejuvenate over the summer. If they had to work that time, they would seriously consider leaving the profession and wouldn't work an extra week if you paid them. Then there are other teachers who would welcome the opportunity to spend that time on their profession. I think you make it available to those who want it and don't require it of those who don't. If you take away this option in the midst of so much else that's wrong with the teaching profession, we may not only lose people who have a family life, but we may also cut off people who say "part of freshness during the year as a teacher comes from what I'm able to do during the summer months—don't take that away from me."

*You both use phrases like "professionalizing teaching," "restructuring teaching," "new calibre of teacher." Are you looking to see a new breed of teacher and if so, could you describe what kind of person that is? What kind of mind does he or she have?*

**Shanker:** A professional is someone who by virtue of his or her expertise has a high degree of decision-making power, and five things go with this.

One, all professionals are tested before entering the profession with a national exam devised by a national board. Teaching will never be a profession unless we have the equivalent of the bar or medical

exam. We have to say to the public, "We don't know if all who passed the exam are good teachers yet, but we can tell that they're damn good in their subject matter and they know a lot about education; we'll have to see if they make it as teachers."

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*Futrell: "Salaries must be raised; beginning salaries should be at least \$24,000 a year."*

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Two, professionals have a concern for their clients. Collective bargaining has done a lot for teachers, but it's raised the question that teachers are only concerned with self-interest. If teachers have decisions to make, will we make decisions so that life is easier for teachers or will we make decisions that are good for children? So we as professionals, individually and collectively, must demonstrate to ourselves and to the public that we will make decisions that are good for our clients—in this case, the children.

Three, teachers will increase in professionalism when we stop thinking we have to do everything, and start making decisions based on what we know how to do. For example, textbooks shouldn't be selected by teachers just because they're teachers; they should be selected by those teachers who have studied what a good textbook is and what it isn't. Not every doctor does surgery. Only those who've been trained. Professions have areas of specialization. We need to acknowledge them in teaching.

Four, professionals have a concern for quality. That means not only bringing in good people but removing those who are incompetent,

with due process. We must set up procedures that show it's not just the principal or superintendent who controls this process.

Five, professionals have peer relationships. There's no profession without them. Teachers need time to develop those.

**Futrell:** Again, I stress teachers must be given more voice in running the school, selecting textbooks, setting standards....

*Getting back to the type of person we're looking for, isn't there a difference between a person who "is given a voice" and someone who assumes that voice? Isn't it one aspect of professionalism to assume that, once trained, you have the right and the duty to make some of these decisions we're speaking of?*

**Shanker:** I expect to see teachers standing up in their communities and saying, "This is why we should choose these textbooks" or "This is why we shouldn't choose them."

There's no reason teacher organizations can't set up a peer evaluation committee of outstanding teachers so that when a colleague is brought up on disciplinary charges that group can take a look at the charges. We don't have to wait for somebody to give us something, or wait to be told to do something. We didn't wait for collective bargaining; we took it.

We need to get people into the profession who have enough respect for themselves and enough confidence in their own abilities so that they will stand up and say, "We are the experts!"

**Futrell:** We're talking about a shift of power. We must train administrators to accept the fact that they can't make all the decisions anymore and have teachers follow along like innocent lambs. You asked about "a new breed of teachers." They'll come into the profession when they see they can be

bright, aggressive, creative, and can act independently. I come back to my point: we're really talking about redefining power in the school system. Teachers *can* stand up. How did professional standards and practices get adopted in 20 states if we haven't been?

*You've both talked about evaluating preservice teachers. What about evaluating teachers within the system?*

**Futrell:** We at the NEA are calling for a comprehensive evaluation system to be developed by parents, administrators, and teachers as to what the standards in the school district should be once you enter it.

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*Shanker: "We must have rigorous entry exams so we can say to the public 'only the best and brightest are teaching.'"*

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*Are any districts doing this?*

**Futrell:** Yes. The Rand Corporation did a study where they cited systems in Toledo, Ohio; Lake Washington, Washington; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Greenwich, Connecticut, as having outstanding teacher evaluation systems. In my district, in Alexandria, Virginia, we have a system that is not called peer review but which functions as one where one department chairperson helps evaluate other teachers in the department. In Alexandria we evaluate teachers on an annual basis. We have a staff development program to improve weak teachers, and if they don't improve, they go through another evaluation and are removed, if necessary, using due process. That's standard.

In Salt Lake City teachers screen new teachers and have direct input into the evaluation process. I know of districts in Oregon and California where teachers were part of the selection team to interview candidates for school principal.

**Shanker:** I'd like to take issue with Mary. I don't think that parents ought to be involved in developing evaluation instruments for teachers. That's the height of unprofessionalism. No other profession involves nonprofessionals in evaluation.

I'm all in favor of cooperating with parents, but there are places where cooperation is inappropriate, and this is one. I also think there is an overemphasis on evaluation. Ninety percent of what's wrong with schools does not have to do with not having good evaluation instruments. Doctors, lawyers, and dentists don't get evaluated every year. The problem is that we do not have good structures for delivering educational services. Until we rethink how to deliver education, evaluating teachers more and more isn't going to produce very much.

*How would you restructure the delivery of our educational system?*

**Shanker:** First, I'd push for a national teacher exam. Not a federal government exam, but one that models other professional exams, one that screens out undesirables, one that will make the profession a difficult one to get into and will appeal to those persons who might want to be teachers now but who feel that schools are places anybody can get a job in.

Next, I'd poll teachers and ask what major problems they face, take those problems and ask some of our outstanding researchers if anything in the current body of education research can lead to practical solutions within a classroom. It's very important that we act on solid

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knowledge—not just opinion.

Third, let's try to create a system in which teachers can constantly change things. We don't have an attitude about flexibility within our schools. We need to experiment. If something doesn't work, we need to try something else and it has to be acceptable to do that. Let's especially encourage widespread experimentation for those students who do not experience academic success by the fourth or fifth grade in order to provide a second chance for them.

*Futrell: "I have a real problem focusing on the classics. To me that ignores contributions women and minorities have made. . . ."*

Fourth, let's put a heavy emphasis on early childhood education because we know that is the best payoff for kids later on.

Fifth, let's not have an annual organization of school. Let's break it down into smaller periods of three to four weeks in which students can get a great deal of achievement over a short period of time. If a student fails to learn something in a short period, there's time to make it up. There's no sense of having lost a whole year.

Let's involve practicing teachers in internship programs for new teachers. I'd like to see teachers have adjunct professor status in the same way doctors teach in medical schools and hospitals. There's no reason professors of education have to be separated from practitioners of education.

Let's emphasize a classic, traditional curriculum because without it

you're lost in terms of further education.

**Futrell:** Al, I agree we need to teach the classics, but I have a real problem with focusing only on the classics. To me that ignores contributions that women and minorities have made in the last couple hundred of years. When most people talk about the classics, they talk about lists that contain works by very few women and minorities.

*You have two of the most important leadership roles in the nation. Using your own personal experience as an example, what one thing would you tell a teacher about how to make a difference?*

**Futrell:** Believe in the children—more than they believe in themselves! So many children feel they can't achieve for whatever reasons. They feel not much is expected of them. They feel there are predetermined ideas of who they are and what they can be. When a child says, "I can't do that," say, "You don't know until you try"; often they're surprised at what they can do.

Believe in who you are as a teacher and believe in your students, believe in education—and believe that those three things coming together can have outstandingly positive results. That's the way you make a difference.

**Shanker:** The best way to make a difference? Become president of the AFT! (*Laughter.*) The way to make a difference is to be active, lead, have ideas! Project what people's hopes are and fight for change. □

**Editor's Note:** Mary Hatwood Futrell and Albert Shanker were interviewed at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, on June 18 by Emily Feistritz, director, National Center for Education Information; Mary Harbaugh, associate editor, INSTRUCTOR; Leanna Landsmann, editor-in-chief, INSTRUCTOR; and Arthur Wise, director, Center for the Study of the Teaching Profession.

We welcome your comments and questions that may arise from reading this transcript. Address them to Futrell/Shanker Debate, INSTRUCTOR, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10017. If you wish, we will see that your letters are shared with Ms. Futrell and Mr. Shanker.