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Hilal Nakiboglu Isler

Teachers Wanted: Attracting and Retaining Good Teachers offers a direct, concise look at the challenges America's public school system faces. Author David A. Heller—a veteran administrator and teacher—provides potential solutions toward the appropriate recruitment and successful retention of K-12 instructors. “Regardless of the political or economic situation,” writes Heller, “we have to take a long, critical look at the conditions under which we train teachers, ask them to work and remain in the field, and expect them to see themselves as true professionals” (p. 11). Pulling readily from academic and popular literature, as well as his own field experience, Heller’s work serves as a clear-cut, quick, and ultimately useful read.

Promoting four “models” of response--preservice, induction, inservice, and retention-- *Teachers Wanted* pushes for a critical approach to the idea of public education. The educator-shortage issue is a challenging reality, says Heller, but it also presents a unique opportunity for an inspired kind of revival. Although he argues that the solutions are necessarily “complex, difficult, and nontraditional,” his presentation of them is patent and considerably simple—perhaps a bit too simple. At times, the models suffer from being somewhat surface—and subsequently reductionist--in their approach. At other times, one questions how much impact their implementation can really have. “I do not see the value in revolution,” Heller tells us at one point. “Revolutions leave too much damage in their wakes” (p. 99). Given this viewpoint, suggestions for change can seem timid or even uninspired. They lack a certain bold or creative ingenuity.

At the core of Heller’s argument lies the necessity for a shift in how teachers themselves—both in the college classroom, and onsite—are taught. It is the frontloading of responsibilities placed upon rookie instructors that oftentimes leads to frustration, exhaustion, and eventual burnout. From serving as curricula writers to counselors and club advisors, “there seems to be no end to the duties required of teachers,” argues Heller (p. 4). Part of his solution then, involves providing education students an accurate, sincere sense for what it is like to be a teacher today. For Heller, this means giving college students full exposure to the public school system -- including its teachers and classrooms -- from their freshman year through graduation. The scholarly emphasis on pedagogy and theory on schools of education is important, but must be adequately supplemented with practical, hands-on experience.

According to Heller, attrition can also be more fully managed through mentoring programs between senior and junior teachers; by implementing rigorous, ongoing inservice training initiatives, and through the successful cultivation of a rich, supportive learning environment. In a chapter dedicated to what he calls ‘Induction Programs,’ Heller asks for a re-examination of common teaching-assignment practice. “Assigning classes purely on the basis of seniority, with the best going to the most veteran teachers,” writes Heller, “is entirely inappropriate” (p. 38). Instead, he describes an alternate approach: one that discourages new teachers from receiving all freshmen, or remedial class-assignments.

Many of Heller’s suggestions place the onus of change on the shoulders of principals. *Teachers Wanted* asks them to be not just managers, or groundskeepers, but true leaders. “We must find ways to strip the principal’s role of as many managerial functions as possible,” argues Heller, “even if this means hiring a separate school manager, to create the time needed for the principal to provide educational leadership” (p. 96). The tendency for effective teachers to be put in administrative roles is one that Heller also expresses a healthy brand of skepticism toward. The assumption shouldn’t be made, he argues, that strong teachers necessarily make strong administrators.

It is also up to the principals to cultivate and maintain an environment supportive of professional development. In a chapter dedicated to inservice programming, Heller underscores the importance of creating a fertile learning community for teachers and administrators. He advocates for the use of, what he calls, “daily, embedded” inexpensive, in-house programs that work to support staff. It is through the creation of an “atmosphere of learning” that teachers will feel empowered, and be encouraged to grow professionally. “Success,” writes Heller, “will be at the result of courage, risk, and will, as it should be. After all, we are speaking of the preparation and care of our children” (p. 107). *Teachers Wanted* offers readers a relatively realistic roadmap. It provides practical, convincing insight toward addressing the shifting needs and responsibilities defining of many school communities today.

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