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## Tenure: A Communal Privilege for Service, Not an Individual Privilege for Research

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## Volume 3, Issue 1 (2015)

**Tenure: A Communal Privilege For Service, Not an Individual Privilege For Research**

Steven Kessler



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### Tenure: A Communal Privilege For Service, Not an Individual Privilege For Research

by *Steven Kessler*

#### Abstract

Tenure is commonly understood as a privilege earned by individuals in higher education guaranteeing a lifetime appointment barring gross negligence. To individuals outside of higher education, the tenure process is less clear. Contemporary tenure is earned today largely for research and teaching with the heaviest emphasis on research. The third leg of tenure, service, is often neglected or discouraged in the rewards structure. While this information is widely known in higher education, the irony of this system is not. This paper aims to explore higher education's historical roots as a medieval corporation in explaining the origins of tenure. Tenure originally came to higher education as a corporate entity because of the service it performed to its community, whether philological and religious, or vocational. The rights and privileges that came with tenure were endowed to higher education as corporate communities first which then gave the individual rights. This paper explores contemporary tenure in higher education, the socio-political factors that lead to the dissolution of the corporate community, including the French Revolution, the period in American higher education where research became the norm, and the implications for today.



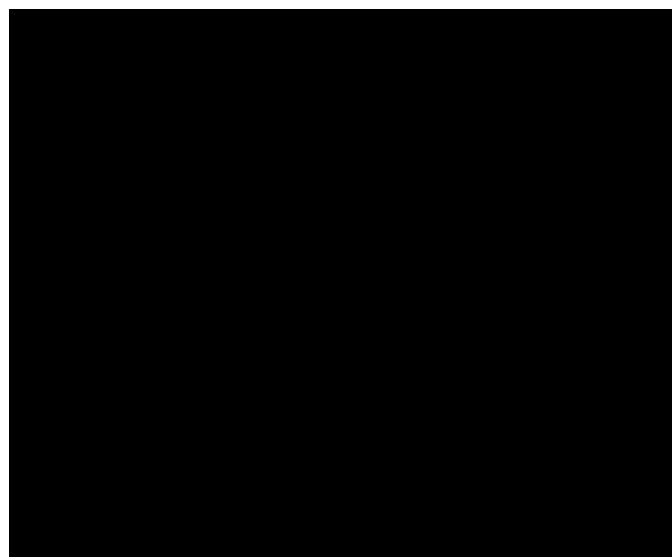
#### Introduction

Tenure in American higher education is a guaranteed lifetime appointment for faculty members barring gross misconduct or moral turpitude (Huer, 1991, p. 6). Whicker, Kronenfeld, and Stricker (1993) referred to tenure as a three-legged milk-stool, consisting of research, teaching and service, however, "When they are evaluated . . . as candidates for promotion, the evaluation is made principally in terms of their research contributions to their disciplines" (Caplow & McGee, 1958, p. 82). While teaching and research are almost universally held as the foundations for the merit of tenure, Bok (2013) referred to service in the role of the academic profession as, "service" (p. 30). Bok's use of quotation marks around the word service indicated that he feels it is a subordinate duty of the university and that not all institutions share in this mission. Service is ill-defined, not encouraged in the reward process, and possibly burdensome to faculty members.

But what is service? A clear definition of service is not necessarily available. O'Meara (2002) defined it as, "work by faculty members based on their scholarly expertise and contribution to the mission of the institution" (p. 8). Ward (2005), in *Higher Education for the Public Good: Emerging Voices From a National Movement*, said, "the notion of service on many campuses today has come to mean committee work that supports the functioning of the campus, a definition that has been to the detriment of campus efforts to connect more external audiences" (p. 218). Ward also said:

Service viewed narrowly as committee work tends to go unrewarded. It's become a taken-for-granted aspect of faculty work. Historically, the service role of faculty was (and is) much more expansive. Service, depending on time and place, can mean service to the profession, service to the community, service to the institution, service to the public sector, service to the private sector, or service to the society in general. (pp. 218-19)

Ward's understanding of the role of service is closer akin to the pith of this paper: faculty service is unrewarded in general and is



subordinate to research and teaching in the evaluation for tenure and promotion.

Ward (2005) articulated well that despite the fact that one can make the argument that both teaching and research are possible elements of contributing to the institutional mission (O'Meara, 2002) or "supports the functioning of the campus" (Keazar, Chambers, Burkhardt, & Associates, 2005, p. 218), teaching accomplishes this only, "passively" (Ward, 2005, p. 219) and, "A majority of research generated by faculty in academe, however, is conducted with the interests of furthering a particular discipline and is focused on meeting internal needs for knowledge production (and promotion and tenure)" (Ward, 2005, p. 221). The overlap of the three legs of tenure are not militating appositely with service. Teaching and research are primarily examined and rewarded, yet they do not serve institutional interests as directly as service.

Jaeger and Thornton (2006) agree with both Bok and Ward's assessment of service and its importance in the role of tenure. They found that faculty view service largely unimportant in the tenure and promotion process (35%) (p. 353), and that, "For most faculty, public service is not conveyed as important in the reappointment, promotion and tenure process" (p. 353). Additionally, "Socialization of faculty to devalue public service work, especially during the tenure process, is a consistent message across faculty" (p. 353).

The ambiguity of service's definition and its apparent lack of recognition in the tenure and promotion process create an environment where service is to be guarded against and not enthusiastically engaged in. This idea is ironic and interesting. Higher education in America originally admitted the children of ministers (and the wealthy) to educate them and prepare them to serve their communities (Lucas, 1994; Thelin, 2004). This paper details when these contemporary standards began to emerge and when higher education begin to place research and teaching above service analogously to a negative externality. The next section details the emergence of teaching and research at the expense of the service leg of the milk stool in American higher education.

### Higher Education Standardizes Research Norms

Boyer (1990) contends that the research movement in American Higher Education first came at the urging of George Ticknor and Edward Everett, two people who studied in Germany and desired to bring the German research model back to America (p. 8). This shift in emphasis took root, albeit slowly, and eventually, "By the late 19th century, the advancement of knowledge through *research* had taken firm root in American higher education" (p. 9). From here, the grip of research as the norm for higher education took place. Teaching as a foundational component of faculty workload has consistently been an important component of tenure and promotion, but the rise of research can clearly be traced to the emergence of national funding for science post World War II. With significant public investment in science through the Department of Defense, the formation of the National Science Foundation and the rise of medical research funding via the National Institute of Health, research activity has become the key measured component of an academic career in the last 65 years (Lucas, 1994; Thelin, 2004).

Caplow and McGee (1958) established through faculty survey that faculty production is synonymous with research and publication even though faculty was hired as teachers. The idea of scholarship was established as meaning research and publication at the expense of other faculty priorities, particularly teaching and service (Boyer, 1990). Boyer (1990) referenced Caplow and McGee's (1958) assertion that WWII drastically changed the academic profession more than anything before it. Nisbet (1971) concurred with this notion, saying:

I firmly believe that in direct grants from government and foundation to individual members of university faculties, or to small company-like groups of faculty members. . . and other essentially capitalistic enterprises with the academic community to be the single most powerful agent of change that we can find in the university's long history. (pp. 72-73)

He used both "higher capitalism" and "academic capitalism" in his description of this concept (Nisbet, 1971, p. 71, 73). Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) defined academic capitalism as, "the involvement of colleges and faculty in market-like behaviors and [sic] has become a key feature of higher education in the United States" (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p. 37). The academic capitalism model changed the landscape of higher education. Formerly, professors were appointed, a similar tradition to feudal knighthood, but academic capitalism's appearance changed the nature of the appointments to hirings (Nisbet, 1971, p. 102). Professors used to consider their profession with the university; they were simply a part of the university and nothing else (Nisbet, 1971, p. 106). Once the forces that gave rise to academic capitalism changed the notion of the university, the individual field the professor worked in was now his or her profession: "Very different was the situation once one's profession as a chemist, political scientist and mathematician took priority" (Nisbet, 1971, p. 106).

This transformation also individualized higher education. Schneider (2005), in *Higher Education for the Public Good*, said, "The thrust of the twentieth-century approach to liberal education was highly individualistic, both in principle and in practice. . . . liberal education. . . sought to help each student maximize his or her individual potential" (p. 133). He corroborated Nisbet (1971) when he said, "As critics observed, the twentieth-century curriculum implicitly envisioned each learner as a separate and unencumbered self" (p. 134). As academic capitalism eroded community in the university and highly individualized it, academic capitalism also pushed the ideas of service to the background.

Several of the scholars previously mentioned now claim that service is not valued in tenure promotion. Ask any faculty member today and he or she will tell you the same, even without formal assessment and empirical data to back the claim up. Additionally, faculty socialization is a highly individualized process.

Individual socialization occurs when individuals are processed in singular fashion. By and large, tenure-track faculty participate in individual socialization. Institution-wide activities usually do not take place, and faculty are isolated within their departments. The department rather than the college or institution becomes the locus of identity. (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996, p. 38)

Faculty are brought into higher education as individuals and work towards tenure as individuals. The effects of this individual socialization upon entry remain with faculty as they progress through their contracts and then earn tenure. "Since a tenure system produces a faculty with great individual autonomy, it contributes to keeping the university a sort of 'cottage industry,' a loosely constructed agglomeration of individuals who do their work in substantial independence from one another" (McPherson & Schapiro, 1999, p. 96).

Faculty collaboration relative to tenure is also not as strongly institutionalized as the individual is highly favored.

The existence of tenure does not preclude reorganizing faculty work to make it more collaborative but it certainly makes it more complicated, since individual faculty have substantial power to veto any arrangement they do not perceive as making them immediately better off. (McPherson & Schapiro, 1999, p. 97)

Essentially, what this leaves us with is our contemporary university system: coming in as individuals, behaving as individuals, and ultimately, earning tenure as individuals. Nisbet (1971) lamented the change and the state of affairs. Prior to these changes, higher education was more communal and corporate (in the feudal sense of the word corporate, i.e. community focused, cooperative, fraternal). Tenure served not as an individual reward, but as a communal privilege to higher education institutions for their service. The next section delineates the historical origins of tenure and higher education's medieval roots as a corporation. It then details the effect of the French Revolution on the erosion of the corporate community and how that highly individualized the occidental world. To understand the present we need to clearly see the historic tenant upon which the idea of tenure was framed. The corporate and medieval notion of tenure existed differently in days of yore than today. Understanding the true rationale for tenure, as viewed through the medieval lens, can facilitate a greater desire for service in higher education today.

## Higher Education as a Corporation

From their initial inception, historically speaking, universities were corporations (Norton, 1909). "Beginning with the year 1158 a long series of immunities, liberties, and exemptions was bestowed by State and Church upon masters and students as a class, and upon universities as corporations" (Norton, 1909, p. 80). Some of these exceptions given to universities as corporations were, "Masters and scholars . . . often taken under the special protection of the sovereign" (Norton, 1909, p. 80), they were also, "exempted from taxation and military service; and most important of all, they were placed under the jurisdiction of special courts, in which alone they could be tried" (Norton, 1909, p. 80). These privileges enabled university members to live in "unusual liberty and security" (Norton, 1909, p. 81). These privileges were given either by kings and various sovereigns and papal authorities (Norton, 1909, p. 81). The idea of academic life has vestiges in the corporations of feudal universities that granted "unusual liberty and security" as the foundation for tenure and academic freedom as we know it today (Norton, 1909, p. 81).

In England, the occupation of the land under which the privilege of liberty and security was applied was called tenure: "The primary method in which such power was acquired was via the granting of landholdings from the sovereign lord. The mode of holding or occupying land from the sovereign lord became known as 'tenure'" (Hepburn, 2005, p. 55). The concept of tenure in higher education is derived from the tenure associated with holding or occupying land as part of a feudal corporation. Possession of this land signified great importance: "land was regarded as the source of all privilege and the basis of civil rank. . . . land became a valuable commodity, and a tenurial grant conferred social prestige and acceptance" (Hepburn, 2005, p. 56).

The driving force behind what made something worthy of tenurial land holding was ecclesiastical. "Yet behind all variety medieval thinkers generally pictured a social world rightly structured on categories reflecting a divine plan" (Kauper, 2009, p. 137). The university's place for warranting tenure landholding arose because, "They had long applied to certain vocations the term *ordo*, meaning a division of society that was sacred in that God desired its existence and that God had ordained its appropriate labor as essential for human society" (Kauper, 2009, p. 137). *Ordo*, "came to denote a privileged body, isolated from the remainder of society, invested with particular responsibilities, whose cohesiveness, superiority, and dignity were plainly visible in the rank accorded to it in religious, military, or civic processions" (Duby, 1980, p. 73). As institutions with devotion to religious service, universities deserved their special privileges allotted to a medieval corporation and order.

Therefore, here is the foundation for higher education and tenure: through their service to the world, their autonomy, privilege, and protection earned. However, it is important to understand the nature of these privileges. These privileges were bestowed on the community first, which then empowered the individual with rights secondly (Harding, 1980, p. 432). Service was the basis for communal privilege. Harding further detailed this idea when he said:

Yet liberties granted by charter remained by definition privileges, even when the recipients were communities; they were not the rights of individual citizens. Even Magna Carta, that "charter of liberties of the realm of England," was the culmination of an old story, not the beginning of a new one, the greatest charter of territorial immunity and communal privilege rather than a bill of rights for individuals. (Harding, 1980, p. 434)

The point to take from this is that the immunities and protections granted to corporations and tenurial landholders were in fact communal and not individual. The communal privileges however did pave the way for individual liberties: "the rights passed on to the communities of tenants in rural and . . . urban liberties gave content to the idea of individual liberty, which may be defined as the bundle of separate privileges appropriate to a man's sphere of life" (Harding, 1980, p. 434). The notion of the community and communal rights fueled the idea of individual liberty and rights. The rights of the community are important in establishing the rights of the individual. This fortifies the idea of tenure acting both as an individual and group privilege, but placing more emphasis on the group before the individual.

While this is English tenure, similar concepts of exceptions and privileges in France existed as well. "In the Middle Ages, the similarities between universities and trade corporations were clearly signaled in language: not only were both headed by 'masters,' but apprentices in the manual arts were frequently called *escolans* and journeyman, *bacheliers*" (Sewell, 1980, p. 25). Corporations were endowed with privileges of self regulations and autonomy too: "The nobility, the clergy, chivalric orders, and even orders of monks and friars were legally recognized, privileged, internally regulated, semiautonomous bodies organized in a fashion analogous to trade corporations" (Sewell, 1980, p. 25). The universities maintained their place amongst the upper-echelon of the hierarchical structure due to their practicing of theological arts, a practice that, "became increasingly honorable and increasingly spiritual the higher the rank" (Sewell, 1980, p. 25). The religious and spiritual nature of higher education enabled university recognition and privileges of corporations to be bestowed upon the institution of higher education.

Corporations contained an element of communalism. When entering a corporation, membership required a sworn oath of loyalty to the group called a, "métiers jurés," or a "sworn trade" (Sewell, 1980, p. 26). The language of the grant entitling corporations was for, "en perpétuité ledit état. . . en état juré pour y avoir corps, confrairie et communauté" (in perpetuity the said trade . . . as a sworn trade in order to have body, confraternity, and community) (Sewell, 1980, p. 26). The language here specifically emphasized community, meaning the group, and makes no mention of the individual. Sewell (1980) quoted 17th century jurist Domat: "Legitimately established communities stand in the place of persons. . . . They are considered a single whole. And as each person exercises his rights. . . it is the same with communities" (as cited by Sewell, 1980, p. 26-27). Corporations like the university enabled individual rights through their communal association, which not only enabled them, but strengthened them. When exercising these individual rights, it was done through the community as expressed as a single legal entity. The community precedes the individual.

While the corporations were popular amongst some people, particularly those who were privileged, they were highly unpopular amongst those for whom inequities existed. For the scope of this argument, this led to the French Revolution, which ultimately led to the abolition and dissolution of the corporate world. The next section details their fall and the role of the French Revolution's influence in the changing social attitude and philosophical underpinnings where the world changed from a group orientation and communal society toward an individualistic one. The French Revolution is the philosophical basis for this change in tenure as well.

## The End of Corporations and the French Revolution

The corporations prior to the French Revolution were communal, hierarchical, contained sacred elements, and were privileged [exemption from taxes and military conscription as well as their own court systems (Norton, 1909, p. 80)]. These privileges ultimately drove an insurmountable wedge between the privileged and the unprivileged. The French Revolution stemmed from the desire to abolish privilege and inequity of these corporations (amongst other inequities) and replace it with a world governed by, "the invariant laws of nature and the crystalline simplicity of reason, in which equality under the law and the liberty of the individual citizen would be at once the foundation and the goal of public life" (Sewell, 1980, p. 62). The proponents of this new philosophy were known as the philosophes: "the philosophes turned to nature as the source of all truth and to reason as the sole means of attaining knowledge" (Sewell, 1980, p. 64). Essentially, they believed that "all men- now understood as purely natural beings- were essentially equal and in which order derived from nature rather than from a divinely sanctioned hierarchy" (Sewell, 1980, p. 64). The violent revolution knelled the end of the corporation and the old order; the hierarchies, stronger value of the group over the individual, traditions, and sacred notions were abolished.

The French Revolution introduced a new lexicon. Nisbet (1966) said, "A different set of words and ideas encompassed moral and political aspiration: ideas like *individual, progress, contract, nature, reason*" (p. 8). These new ideologies are a sharp contrast to preserving or conserving the state of being, as they are liberating the individual from them. Thus, the new order is a liberal one: "The hallmark of liberalism is devotion to the individual" (Nisbet, 1966, p. 10). The individual is the focus of the new order, the liberal one, and the group/community is a constraint to his or her progress and emancipation. "What tradition is to the conservative. . . individual autonomy is to the liberal. . . . belief that progress lay in the emancipation of man's mind and spirit from the religious and traditional bonds of the old order" (Nisbet, 1966, p. 10). This clearly relates to higher education and tenure, according to Nisbet (1966), as he said, "the notion of the discrete, self-motivating, and self-stabilizing individual is primary. Institutions and traditions are secondary: at best his shadows; at worst, barriers to self-assertion" (p. 10). Higher education historian Haskins corroborated Nisbet's notion of the individual, but specifically regarding higher education as a corporation: "First, the very name university, as an association of masters and scholars leading the common life of learning. Characteristic of the Middle Ages as such a corporation is, the individualistic modern world has found nothing to take its place" (Haskins, 1923, p. 24).

The French Revolution and the philosophy of the Enlightenment advanced the individual and abolished the communal corporate life. American higher education was not immune to the sweeping changes brought about by one of the great ideas of the western world. A brief return to the historical progression of early American higher education is necessary up until the WWII/Cold War era to fully understand how this shift is articulated and fulfilled here in the United States. This next section begins with the early charters of the first universities.

## Higher Education In America

Some of the earliest American universities like Harvard and Brown were influenced by the medieval tradition of privileges. This medieval influence is clearly visible through their charters, as Norton (1909) said:

The charter of Harvard College and Brown University the familiar exemption of corporate property and from taxation, and the exemption of persons connected with these institutions not only from taxes, but also from other public duties. The charter from Brown refers explicitly to European university privileges. (p. 101)

Further, the earliest American colleges and universities also retained stronger elements of communalism, with particular emphasis on the local community:

The trustees were closely tied to the local community or congregations which not only provided funds for the support of these institutions but also depended on the institution to provide ministers and teachers for the local community as well as general and moral education for the young men of the community. (Brown, 1997, pp. 443-444)

The success of the institutions came due to investment of the local communities in a reciprocal hope of fortifying their communities with newly educated men to strengthen their moral and spiritual convictions. As the universities grew in size and scope, so waned the centrality and exclusivity of the success of the institution to the local community (Brown, 1997, p. 444). New donors created the same effect of disinterestedness in the local community (Brown, 1997, p. 444). A gradual move away from community deemphasizes the importance of service due to the expanding mission that drifted away from servicing the community.

Essentially, the university in America meandered down a path away from service and the community and in so doing changed fundamentally, as Nisbet (1971), said when academic capitalism altered the university. The individual began to shine and the group waned. Academic capitalism transforms the university by using a market model which makes everyone, "maximize his or her self-interest" (Roepnack & Lewis, 2007, p. 228). "Any altruistic motives about, 'serving the common good' are just smokescreens for . . . job security. Within the market place . . . efficiency is key. . . . the university must be run as efficiently as possible" (Roepnack & Lewis, 2007, p. 228). The emphasis on the individual and efficiency is the exact opposite of serving the community.

The ideas of efficiency and maximizing one's self interest in the name of capitalism are now manifested through publication and research as scholarship (Boyer, 1990; Caplow & McGee, 1958). Faculty pay and promotion today are directly linked to research and publication. As of the late 1980's and early 1990's, "research consistently showed scholarly productivity as the strongest correlate of faculty pay. Teaching was typically unrelated to or a negative factor in faculty compensation" (Fairweather, 2005, p. 401). Bok (2013) said, "The more books and articles professor produce, the higher their salaries. The more hours per week they spend in the classroom, the smaller their paycheck" (p. 329). The problem with this method of promotional evaluation (tenure) is that it is often strictly based on a quantitative threshold and not evaluated on the quality of the work: "publications used for promotion decisions are just counted, not qualitative evaluated" (Carnegie Foundation, 1992, as cited by Bok, 2013, p. 329). Bok further delineated the problem with the emphasis on research and publication for tenure as he said it leads to large amounts of research that is essentially worthless, un-cited in other publications in the field, and takes away from quality of teaching and student engagement (pp. 329-331). If faculty members lack the time for students and teaching due to excessive and fruitless research pressures, certainly service is sacrificed at its expense. Again, Bok only mentioned service in quotations as, "service" (p. 30), so he clearly questioned the strength of institutional commitment to service.

The devotion to research and the ignoring of service in the pursuit of tenure in an academic capitalist regime is truly an irony in the face of the feudal institution. Roepnack and Lewis (2007) described the contemporary milieu as a "market model." This is one where, "The university produces good students by sending them through the 'assembly line' of classes in which 'content providers' stand, spewing out information, making investment deposits in the students" (p. 227). While this is talking about the effect of academic capitalism on teaching, the analogy is quite comparable with regards to research: faculty is merely publishing content for the sake of publishing and an effort to gain tenure and promotion. They publish research in an "assembly line" fashion essentially "spewing out information" (Roepnack & Lewis, 2007, p. 227).

This is highly ironic in the face of the medieval university where tenure was bestowed on the community for service. There, the idea of knowledge was sacred, as Nisbet (1971) said, "*Knowledge is important*. Just that. Not 'relevant' knowledge; not 'practical' knowledge; not the kind of knowledge that enables one to yield power, achieve success, or influence others. *Knowledge!*" (p. 24). Tenure was bestowed upon the medieval university because of the sacredness of its knowledge and the service it was providing to the world. Nisbet defined the concept of the sacred as, "The mores, the non-rational, the religious and ritualistic ways of behavior that are valued beyond whatever utility they may possess" (Nisbet, 1966, p. 6). The sacred, conceptually speaking, is best understood when contrasted with the profane. Emile Durkheim (1912/1955) articulated the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Allen (2007) explained Durkheim's ideas by saying:

One of the primary features of the sacred is that it stands diametrically opposed to the profane. In fact, one cannot exist in the presence of the other . . . . The sacred either destroys the profane or the sacred becomes contaminated by the presence of the profane. (p. 117)

In the medieval institution knowledge was sacred; in the contemporary university, knowledge is highly profane. The market model is the profane version of higher education while the community model of education is the sacred one. Roepnack and Lewis (2007) contrasted the market model of the university relative to tenure with the community model by explaining that the community model values education as a public good, the faculty work conjunctively with the administration, and that, "the whole community benefits" (p. 229). The community model, i.e. the one higher education as a corporation that deserves the privilege of tenure is predicated on, "does not follow the rational choice model of the market place. The pursuit of truth and the building up of knowledge is not a well understood process" (Roepnack & Lewis, 2007, p. 229). Not following the "rational choice model" (Roepnack & Lewis, 2007, p. 229) goes hand-in-hand with Nisbet's (1966) notion of "the Sacred" (p. 6).

When comparing and contrasting the community model with the market model of education, it is "easy to see that they are, diametrically opposed" (Allen, 2007, p. 117) as the sacred and the profane and that, "The sacred either destroys the profane or the sacred becomes contaminated by the presence of the profane" (Allen, 2007, p. 117). The two cannot coexist and ultimately undermine each other. Originally, the corporate community of higher education understood knowledge as sacred; today, the individual understands knowledge as a profane means to a financial and vocational promotion. This is not the original idea of tenure. Contemporary tenure is not a communal undertaking that values service as it often values research as a profane means to an end, forcing academics to shirk other responsibilities and to publish merely for the sake of publishing without a reverence to the sacredness of knowledge and service to the community in pursuit of a higher goal.

## Conclusion

Today's landscape of higher education is a far cry from the medieval corporate institution. While it is easy to see the arguments presented here as a romanticism of a time period with significant societal inequities and flaws, it is not. What the arguments presented in this paper are meant to accomplish are the advancement of the notion that tenure is a communal privilege that endowed the individual with rights on the basis of the services provided by higher education to the community. The advancing of the public good merited this privilege. Today, tenure is earned by the individual for research with an abjuring of service.

Gone is the corporate notion that, "implied unity, brotherhood, and a feeling of love and compassion between fellow members" (Sewell, 1980, p. 32); this corporate unity contained a "common will or spirit- an esprit de corps- and a deep indissoluble bond such that harm done to any one 'member' is felt by all. . . . The phrase meant to be united in all bonds of solidarity" (Sewell, 1980, p. 33). These communal bonds have been eroded over time in favor of the individual. Further absent are the loyalty-oaths that the corporate individual took upon

entry (Sewell, 1980) as they were legally abolished by California courts in 1967 and shortly after by the U.S. Supreme Court (O'Neil, 2005, p. 97). Additionally, the community in which the university is located became more and more a simple place of work and less and less a community: "Faculty began to live more distant from campus and to spend less time as active leaders in their campus communities. Increasingly, the university was becoming simply a place of work" (Zemsky, 2006, p. 28). These changes pushed the communal university further and further from importance as the individual's umbrage is cast.

It is important to remember our past and our true purpose as institutions of higher education. We are here as a group to serve the community, not as individuals here to publish. This is the purpose of tenure: a privilege bestowed upon the community which enables the individual to serve.

###

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### Engaging the Learning Community with an Integrated E-Learning, Gaming and Social Networking Platform

by *Tim Thomasma*

#### Abstract

Our view is that an e-learning platform based on user-created content, gamification, and with an integrated social network, will create a content-dense environment in which all of the stakeholders can maximize their outcomes and in which the best teachers, students, lessons, and organizations will rise to the top. The elements of such an integrated e-learning platform would include: Wizards to enable instructors to quickly create engaging multi-media lessons; Capability to automatically transform lesson content into additional activities, games, and quizzes; The ability for students to take lessons in the form they prefer, including lessons presented as games; Reports and monitoring to enable instructors to track student engagement and outcomes; A safe internal social network to allow teachers, students, administrators, parents, and the community to participate in the discussion; Capability to enable user translation of lessons, allowing for truly global sharing. In order to test this hypothesis we are engaging with educators to build a platform called Memarden. The Memarden platform is designed to be a safe, easily accessible on-line environment where teachers, students, and those who support and encourage them meet. Memarden enables teachers to create interactive lessons quickly that can be offered to anyone on the platform. Students have profiles and pages where they organize their lessons and interact with other students, teachers, parents, mentors, and even future employers. As students use the lessons, Memarden collects data which they can keep private to assess their own progress, or share with teachers or parents who are guiding them.



#### Purpose - Can Technology Improve Outcomes for Everyone Involved in Learning?

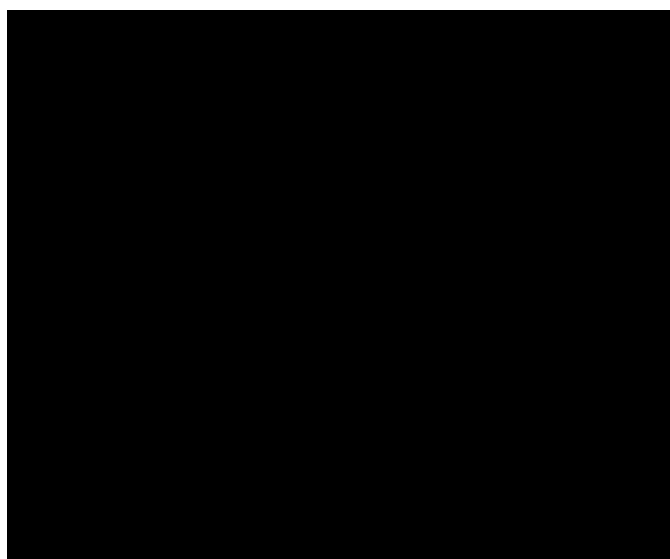
People learn all their lives, for school, for fun and to keep up at work; but many people find that learning can be inconvenient, boring and not relevant or customized for their learning style and interests. They may have a difficult time finding lessons and study groups to motivate them. Teachers find that canned content sometimes does not work for their classes, and they can't quickly create online lessons and games.

For adults and university students, personalized learning environments and social media have been helpful technological solutions for these problems, but there are drawbacks.

Students build personalized learning environments for themselves by drawing together resources that are suggested by professors, students and others in the university community. Building oneself an environment like this requires skills to organize things and pull resources together. It also requires an overall information fluency and ability to critically evaluate items that not all students have.

Facebook has been used as a way to organize and make available course materials (Irwin, Ball, Desbrow & Leverett, 2012). This can produce some positive outcomes for those who are involved with the class:

- Increased communication among students
- Greater access to course materials
- Improved logistical management of the course
- Earlier visibility to difficulties students were having



More generally, Facebook and other social media can be used for rewarding academic discussions, and to foster global academic relationships. They can enable mentoring across international boundaries. However, there are risks associated with Facebook. It has been used as a vector for cyber-bullying and there are concerns about privacy, integrity of the information provided on it, and content ownership. Since Facebook is primarily used for social interaction, it can be a distraction in educational settings.

### **Perspective – Enabling Differentiated Instruction Within a Global Educational Community**

Our view is that an e-learning platform based on user-created content, gamification, and with an integrated social network, will create a content-dense environment in which all of the stakeholders can maximize their outcomes and in which the best teachers, students, lessons, and organizations will rise to the top. The elements of such an integrated e-learning platform would include:

- Wizards to enable instructors to quickly create engaging multi-media lessons
- Capability to automatically transform lesson content into additional activities, games, and quizzes
- The ability for students to take lessons in the form they prefer, including lessons presented as games
- Reports and monitoring to enable instructors to track student engagement and outcomes
- A safe internal social network to allow teachers, students, administrators, parents and the community to all participate in the discussion
- Capability to enable user translation of lessons, allowing for truly global sharing

Technology like this enables students to work individually and privately to get practice opportunities, feedback, error correction and assessment. Research indicated that easy-to-use technology interventions that accomplish these elements can be used to achieve several benefits (Taylor, Skinner, McCallum, Poncy, & Orsega, 2013):

- Increased spelling performance
- Increased math-fact fluency
- Gains in reading accuracy and fluency

Software can provide reading comprehension lessons, vocabulary practice, assessment, and opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation. This has been found to produce both increased fluency in reading science textbooks, and interest and enjoyment of science (Wolff, Isecke, Rhoads & Madura, 2013).

Research has also shown that multimedia (sound, graphics, and video) produces better learning results and creates a more positive impression of the material that is taught than use of text only (Ioannou, Brown, Hannafin & Boyer, 2009). Gamification provides an additional dimension of engagement and interactivity to the rich communication that multimedia provides. Use of points, awards, leader boards and games with the teaching activities produces increased engagement, understanding, and interest in the subject matter being taught (Hickey & Filsecker, 2013). Furthermore, test scores have been improved using private on-line assessments that give immediate feedback about activity results and the difficulty levels of the learning challenges that are presented improve test scores (Economides, 2009).

Although small children primarily need human interaction and freedom to explore the physical world, technology can be helpful for children three to six-years-old. Rich, fun, interactive experiences can foster learning, cognitive development, skill building, social interaction, physical activity, and healthy behavior. Negative results from some kinds of on-line games can include fear, hostility, desensitization, aggressive behavior, and stereotyping. Another risk is that time would be spent with electronic media that would be better spent interacting with the real world. In order to ensure children are beneficially using technology, data collection is essential to ensure that positive results are achieved (Lieberman, Chesley Fisk, & Biely, 2009).

Computer use outside school can lead to increased computer literacy, linguistic and thinking skills, and academic achievement. It tends to produce positive social-emotional, academic and technical attitudes, creativity, expression, diversity, exposure to multiple perspectives, and fosters exploration of sense of self and future opportunities. In a leisure setting, adolescents may choose educational experiences when they are afforded free expression and virtually full autonomy (Cilesiz, 2009).

### **Method – Build an Internet Startup**

We want to learn how the elements of electronic learning can be most beneficially used by teachers and students. We think that an excellent way to do this is to create an Internet startup and a community of teachers and learners around our startup. Many recently formed Internet companies have rapidly created large global communities. Examples include Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Elance, and Etsy. We want to continue in the same fashion by building a global community that is focused on learning and teaching; therefore, we are engaging with educators to build a platform called Memarden. The Memarden platform is designed to be a safe, easily accessible on-line environment where teachers, students, and those who support and encourage them meet. Memarden enables teachers to create interactive lessons quickly that can be offered to anyone on the platform. Students have profiles and pages where they organize their lessons and interact with other students, teachers, parents, mentors, and even future employers. As students use the lessons, Memarden collects data which they can keep private to assess their own progress, or share with teachers or parents who are guiding them.

Like many entrepreneurs, we are building our product because we want to see something new and helpful exist in the world. Memarden is something we want to use ourselves and with our children, and something that we think other people will want to use. A startup is an experiment to test whether our concept is actually as helpful to people as we think it might be. This requires engagement with others in the educational community so that as the platform grows it offers capabilities that truly are of value in teaching and learning. Ries (2011) offered a best practice for startups as they develop their products: begin working with prospective users as early as possible and observe what is effective and what is not. If the product is valuable, people will use it on a continuing basis, and they will talk about it both electronically and in person. It is possible to objectively measure this activity, and Ries pointed out that this is what the most successful companies do.

## Results – Learning From Early Adopters and Prospective Users

As of this writing, Memarden is in use by several schools and some additional individual instructors. One teacher built mathematics lessons in French around themes from the 2014 Winter Olympics. She presented them in class using a smart-board device. Students then practiced on their own using their tablets. Once she mastered the user interface, the instructor found it interesting to create the lesson, and the students liked it.

We also meet with school boards and other organizations to talk about Memarden. These have been instructive experiences as well. We knew we needed to provide a way to structure groups of lessons. Our discussions gave us direction: enable teachers to compose lesson plans that aggregate selections of lessons offered on Memarden into daily lesson plans for the teacher to use, weekly plans to hand out to students, and broader month/year curriculum plans.

We also found that there may be high value in helping teachers administer and assess progress on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). At first we thought of this as another type of curriculum aggregation, but we found that most schools already have a way of placing IEPs on line using the school's servers. What they do not have is a means of providing the right interventions, additional activities, and progress assessment that the IEPs call for, and the capability to keep track of the data about progress for each of the students who have IEPs.

We are planning to add more games and other types of activities, including some that address higher order learning. We thought of doing this using a narrative role-playing type of game that would include increasingly complex intellectual activities to unlock portions of the game world. While this may be useful, some teachers told us that they could address higher order cognition using combinations of the lesson types that Memarden already supports. Others are telling us they want a collaborative on-line work space for student teams who are working on projects. These spaces would provide a multifaceted approach where student work can be developed and reviewed: blogs, documents, videos, links, and games that the students create. This would work as a type of 'pinboard,' much like Pinterest. It could be used to bring students along step by step in a creative project, or students could add resources to something they want to present.

## Predictions

We expect that we will learn a great deal more as additional schools, teachers, students, and even businesses make use of Memarden. There are many possibilities. We think that types of educational experiences typically offered only on computers will be more broadly available at affordable cost. Memarden will be accessible by anyone anywhere who has a smartphone, tablet, or PC and has Internet or cellular access. The price of these technologies is decreasing throughout the world. So far we are finding that in low-income areas, schools have Internet access and PCs or tablets for at least part time student use, but there are no computers at home. However, the parents often have smartphones. Therefore, a platform that is available on both can make possible new connections between home and school. Furthermore, on-line philanthropy will increase. People will provide funding to students to enable them to take the lessons they want. It will be very easy for anyone anywhere to do this. There will also be closer collaboration between employers in the business community and the schools. The learning needs of both communities will be supported on a single platform that will enable new levels of collaboration. Besides working together, the data collection and reporting capability built into Memarden will make possible novel research projects. This will tie more closely the educational research community with the world's schools. Also, Memarden will help students who have learning disabilities, not only when they're in school, but throughout their lives. These at-risk students will not be lost once they leave the school. They can stay on Memarden and use it to review material from school, as well as explore new learning for recreation or for work. We are very hopeful and excited about the creative and valuable things the world's educational community will do.

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### Teacher Candidates Learn to Create Teacher Websites to Support Student Success Through Student, Parent and Community Engagement

by Jennifer Laffier, Meaghan Clarke and Alanna Houston

#### Abstract

'Theory to practice' based learning activities are important for teachers in training. Therefore, as part of a course in a Bachelor of Education program in Ontario, Canada teacher candidates learned how to create effective teacher websites to promote the healthy development of students as well as engage students, parents, and the community in the learning environment. Student, parent, and community engagement are considered key elements of student success. This learning activity and how teacher candidates developed effective websites based on theories of healthy development and student success were explored in this paper. First, the research related to teacher websites is reviewed. Next, two case studies are presented to illustrate how components of teacher websites can engage students, their parents and the community. The case illustrations also demonstrated how educational and child development theories can be transferred to 'practice' for teacher candidates in their program of studies. Finally, recommendations for including teacher websites into teacher training programs and ways to engage students and parents in websites are included.



#### Introduction

Unraveling the elements of student success is often a goal for researchers and educators. One known element of student success is *engagement*, that includes student, parental and community engagement. Students thrive when they feel supported and engaged in their learning process (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2004). Additionally, involving parents and families is one of the most important ways to improve schools and thus help students succeed; specifically when parents have the opportunity to be involved in their child's learning process (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). Although often overlooked, community involvement can support student success. Partnerships can be developed with local agencies or community members to increase resource support. Community members could also be involved in fundraising efforts, policy development, and school programming (Piper, 2012). Schools, parents, and community members should have a common goal pertaining to children: to contribute to their healthy and successful development. Thus, these groups should become allies within all communities (Ryan & Cooper, 2007).

One way to increase student, parent and community involvement is through teacher websites. The internet has been described by teacher educators as a tool that can have benefits for both teachers and students (Friedman, 2006). Teacher websites act as a virtual portal to the real classroom; supporting student learning by including course outlines, tutorial videos, or other supplementary materials (Holcomb, Castek, & Johnson, 2007). In addition, classroom websites can encourage parental involvement by increasing awareness of course expectations, school functions, and student homework. This allows the parent(s) or guardians to know how they can support their child's learning and school experience. Teacher websites can also engage students and parents within the larger community (Piper, 2012). Having community resources on the webpage can link parents, students, schools, and community agencies together.

Since such evidence exists to support the use of teacher websites, teacher candidates in a Bachelor of Education program in an Ontario

university learned to create teacher websites as part of their '*Adolescent Development and Learning*' course. Pedagogical practices in pre-service teacher education programs that allowed for the interplay of theory and practice contributed positively to teacher candidate learning. Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007) suggested that, "Teachers benefit from participating in the culture of teaching by working with the materials and tools of teaching practice and by examining teaching plans and student learning while immersed in theory about learning, development, and subject matter" (p. 122). Therefore, students were asked to create teacher websites in their course; the assignment sought to nudge students into a practical yet "informed by theory" learning exercise where they would apply theories of learning, motivation, and human development to building an effective teacher website. The ways in which they designed their websites and what information they included would reflect this theoretical knowledge, thus reflecting best practice ideas. One key area of student success studied by teacher candidates was the importance of a sense of community and engagement. This paper reviewed this learning activity and provided examples of teacher websites to illustrate how theory of practice was accomplished as well as provide examples of ways in which teacher websites can enhance student, parent and community engagement.

## Literature Review

In order to explore how teacher websites can enhance student, parent, and community involvement and how these websites can be created by teachers, a literature review was performed on the following topics: 1) elements of student success, 2) parental and community engagement, and 3) teacher websites. The journals searched were *Journal of Educational Research*, *New England Reading Association Journal*, *Journal of Technology & Teacher Education*, *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, *School Community Journal*, and *the Journal of Adolescence*. The relationship between academic success and student, parent, and community involvement is first presented. Following, is a review of the current use of school based websites; specifically the benefits, problems, and recommendations for the use of teacher websites.

## The Importance of Engagement

**Student engagement.** Student engagement in the learning process is essential for academic success. Students need to be actively engaged in what they are learning in order to understand the value in their education (Auger & Rich, 2006). Additionally, students need to feel a sense of community from their learning environment, a place where they will be supported and valued. In the document, *Early school leavers: Understanding the lived reality of student disengagement from secondary school* published by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (Ferguson et al., 2005), a disconnection from the school community was listed as one of the top reasons for students to drop out of high school. This disconnect could be caused by a negative school climate, passive instructional strategies, disregard for student learning styles, or lack of support for students with disabilities (Ferguson et al., 2005). Recommendations were provided to increase students' sense of community and engagement with school: meeting individual student needs, developing innovative, interactive and personalized instructional strategies, building links with the community, considering the fit between school structure and adolescent development, providing opportunities for decision making, involving parents, and providing students with information, services, and opportunities for participation (Ferguson et al., 2005). If students feel a sense of community in the classroom, they can learn more effectively. Students' learning process is enhanced when they feel safe, supported, and valued because they feel less stress; this is important for brain functioning and learning (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008). Reducing stress for students should be a primary goal of all classroom teachers; when students know what to expect, trust the people they are with, and feel that they have the proper supports for their learning, they will be better equipped to learn (Auger & Rich, 2006). In addition, when students feel a sense of community, they can develop social skills and a sense of identity, both of which are important for development. In a cohesive classroom, students can practice communication skills with others; they have opportunities to negotiate, mediate, and problem solve. Students would also have opportunities to develop their sense of identity; they could bounce ideas of others and try out different roles (Auger & Rich, 2006).

**Community engagement.** Community involvement is an important factor for school success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). A student's community can be part of his or her support network to enhance their chances for academic success. Individuals and organizations in the community can offer encouragement, resources, and support for students (Sanders, 2006). For example, community organizations can offer academic support such as tutoring or training sessions. There are also community organizations that can offer mental health and developmental support such as counselling or after school programs for physical fitness or social skills. Having these after school activities can increase the child's chances for academic success since research shows that mental health is important for learning (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008). Community members could also be involved in fundraising efforts, policy development, and school programming (Piper, 2012). Several case studies of elementary and high schools efforts to involve the community demonstrated successful methods: student tutoring and mentorship programs, advertising for the school, sponsorship of school teams, student and family incentives at school events, and internships and community service opportunities (Sanders, 2006). Moreover, the author (Sanders, 2006) suggested that students, who understand that the surrounding community provides valuable support, were more likely to return following graduation and add to the community.

**Parent engagement.** Parent engagement is also important for student success. By involving parents and families into the school community, a school's climate can be improved (Mapp, 2003). If parents have opportunities to be involved in their child's learning process throughout the school year, they will increase their interactions with their child at home, feel more positive about their abilities to help their children in the elementary grades, and rate the teachers as better teachers overall (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). The benefits of parental involvement for students included not only higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests but enrollment in more challenging academic programs, and more classes passed or credits earned (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parents can be supportive and engaged in their child's schooling when two-way communication with teachers is established (Unal & Unal, 2010). When parents communicate with teachers and participate in school activities, they gain a clearer understanding of what is expected of their child at school and will be better prepared to help their child at home (Holcomb et al., 2007). Moreover, good parent-teacher collaboration leads students to receive consistent messages from home and school about the importance of education, which positively influences their learning and social development (Li, Price, & Fu, 2011). Schools use a variety of strategies to communicate with families. Traditionally, schools have sent student report cards, school newsletters, or organize events for the entire family or parents. A more modern method to enhance parent and community engagement for student success was the creation and use of teacher websites (Friedman, 2006; Hill,

Tucker, & Hannon, 2010; Holcomb et al., 2007).

## Teacher websites

As the percentage of youth using the internet increased the pressure on teachers to create websites also increased (Janicki & Chandler-Olcott, 2012). Teacher websites can provide a portal into the real classroom for both students and parents. Students and parents can access course resources such as course outlines, videos, handouts, notes, assignments, school year calendars, and teacher contact information. Improving home-school communication was identified as a primary way to enhance trust for the parents or family and having a course website can do just that (Adams & Christenson, 2000).

**Benefits of teacher websites.** There are a number of noted benefits of course websites in the literature. Piper (2012) reported the following ways teacher websites can enhance parental or community involvement (1) increasing awareness through communication, (2) recruiting volunteers, (3) supporting student learning and progress, (4) including parents in decision making processes, and (5) collaborating with the community. Ultimately, parents can stay informed of their child's academic progress and school functions. Grunwald Associates (Mageau & DeBoor, 2000) found that more than 60% of families wanted to be able to communicate online with teachers (p. 82). Information about homework, grades, and upcoming events let parents feel connected. It is important that there is communication throughout the school year between parents and teachers. Researchers (Hill et al., 2010; Umit & Akbayin, 2012) proposed the inclusion of personal teacher information such as biographies, photo, hobbies and interests, and contact information. If this was included for parents they would have a better sense of who the teachers were, their qualifications, and how to contact them; and overall a better sense of security about their children's school experiences.

A class website can increase a teacher's ability to rapidly and accurately communicate current and up-to-date information such as modifying a class schedule, announcing a trip, or posting important reminders. Teachers may need parent volunteers and websites can get information and updates about opportunities to volunteer out quickly. Websites are available 24 hours a day and can be accessed in the time and place most convenient to students and parents, including after school or late at night (Witt, 2003). This access to information may reduce the need for students to contact the teacher and be more prepared, as well as reduce time the teacher has to spend in class asking questions (Witt, 2003).

Students with learning disabilities (LD) and their parents may find extra benefits from classroom websites. Heiman and Shemesh (2003) investigated the patterns of course website use of 964 students with and without learning disabilities studying in higher education. They found that students with LD logged into the website more frequently, entered the forum more often, and left significantly more messages in the discussion than the students without learning disabilities. Including a section for missed homework and the use of video tutorials addresses student absenteeism, which is common when students with learning exceptionalities or those experiencing health or mental illness issues (Fulton, 2012).

Teacher websites can identify and integrate community resources and services to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. Community resources for learning supports, field trips, mental health, or afterschool programs can be described online. Piper (2012) suggested the inclusion of a counseling section on classroom websites to provide information about contacts for parent support as well as links to local support networks. Community organizations such as boys and girls clubs, arts programs, and team sports can coordinate with the school and advertise their services on the sites so students and parents are aware of these opportunities.

Witt (2003) reported that teacher websites may be perceived by students to be a contemporary methodology and an appealing instruction style, thus perceiving their teachers as more competent or credible. This may apply to parents' perceptions of teachers as well. Teachers who develop classroom websites demonstrated a commitment to preparing students for participation in a growing technologically-literate world (Unal & Unal, 2010).

**Problems with teacher websites.** There are several problems or obstacles to creating or using teacher websites noted in the literature including teachers' beliefs, accessibility, maintenance issues, time factors, and lack of information. Teachers' own beliefs and attitudes about the relevance of technology to students' learning were perceived as having the biggest impact on their success (Friedman, 2006). Teachers indicated that other internal factors (e.g., passion for technology, having a problem-solving mentality) and support from others (administrators and personal learning networks) played key roles in shaping their practices.

Several studies indicated that teachers were failing to maintain their websites for reasons including lack of technological knowledge (Hill et al., 2010), regular system breakdowns and internet failures (Li et al., 2011; Witt, 2003), cost of required software (Friedman, 2006), the perception that they are not being used by students or parents (Friedman, 2006; Hill et al., 2010), or the time commitment (Witt, 2003). Witt (2003) found that 77% of teachers had built the websites themselves spending an average of 13.6 hours building them (p. 432). In addition, 87% of teachers updated the websites themselves, spending an average of 10.6 hours per semester on maintenance (p. 432). The majority of middle school and high school class websites were organized with few interactive elements; leading to less use of the website by students (Holcomb et al., 2007). Unfortunately, teachers viewed this as a lack of interest in the website and failed to see why they should spend additional time to maintain their pages. In a study conducted by Friedman (2006), teachers reported a large disparity in the percentage of their students that had internet access at home and this had a profound effect on whether teachers used their websites. Many teachers believed that the majority of parents would not be able to access their site, thereby mitigating any potential communication benefit that it might hold.

There may also be a lack of information on teacher websites. Hill et al. (2010) examined over 50 classroom websites and found that only 60% listed teachers' email addresses and only 44% included a telephone number (p. 117). This disconnect could ultimately lead to decreased parent engagement and involvement in the class and school, which could negatively affect student performance.

Current literature supported the idea of teacher created websites for student, parent, and community involvement; however, adequate guidelines for determining formal content of a teacher website were missing or infrequent (Unal, 2008). Teachers may be more likely to

have a classroom website if they felt that it was not an obligation; it could be used as a tool to support student success. Research conducted by Janicki and Chandler-Olcott (2012) indicated that professional development that focused on website creation and maintenance and potential benefits to students, parents, and teachers did make a difference in teachers' commitment to creating classroom websites. Additionally the use of checklists could help teachers design and maintain their websites in an effective manner. A checklist of suggestions could be used to evaluate content and design features that should be included, with categories such as content, control, consistency, and corroboration (Hill et al., 2010; Holcomb et al., 2007).

It has been suggested in the literature that there is a need for teacher training on website creation and maintenance (Unal & Unal, 2010) and Bachelor of Education programs may be the ideal place for future teachers to learn these skills. The barriers preventing teachers from using classroom websites can be addressed in a teacher education program: a) confidence in technological skills, b) beliefs about the value of technology in student learning, c) time, and d) knowledge of design principles (Fulton, 2012; Janicki & Chandler-Olcott, 2012; Piper, 2012; Unal & Unal, 2010; Witt, 2003). Teacher candidates can learn the value of technology in the lives of children and adolescents as well as effective use of technology in the classroom. Courses focused on educational software, programming and coding, and interactive technology can give teacher candidates added skills. While enrolled in a B.Ed. program teacher candidates can also learn relevant theories and research related to what children need for healthy development, motivation, learning, and success. This knowledge can be transferred, in a research to practice model, to the development of an evidence-based and practical website. Teacher candidates can learn what components of a website are effective for student learning and development. Creating these websites in advance gives teacher candidates an opportunity to receive feedback from course instructors and colleagues and thus opportunities to restructure their sites if needed. Students are taught the importance of reflective practice which includes soliciting feedback on their websites from future students and parents to know what is working or not working.

## Methodology

In order to illustrate a *theory to practice* learning assignment regarding engagement that is of value to teacher candidates two case studies are presented. These are mock classroom websites created by teacher candidates (TC) in a one year Bachelor of Education program in an Ontario University (both co-authors of this paper). As a requirement of their course titled '*Adolescent Development and Learning*' each TC had to create a teacher website that enhanced the healthy development and academic achievement of students. TCs learned that effective teaching should involve educating the *whole child*; knowing who the student is from a personal, family, cultural, and community perspective. TCs had to consider theories about healthy development and learning in order to design their website. For example, theories related to learning styles, memory, learning processes, community building, engagement, active learning, developmental tasks of children, and adolescents could all be applied when considering what to put on a site or how to design a website. An overriding theme throughout the course was the importance of student engagement and community building; theories and practical tools of how to do this were explored in the course. This *theory to practice* model for the assignment provided an evidence based structure; thus making this a useful and practical tool for future use.

Each website was individually presented with screen shots of various features and followed by a) description of the feature, b) explanation of how it connects to developmental or learning theories from the course, c) explanations of how that feature could enhance student, parent, or community involvement, and d) recommendations for any additions or changes to the feature based on the literature review.

## Case Study 1

This website was created by a female teacher candidate in the Intermediate/Senior stream of the teacher education program. The website is specifically designed for students in high school and in a health and physical education program. (See Feature 1, Teacher Information)

The About Me page of the website provides personal information about the TC including such items as education, hobbies, teacher experiences, and teaching philosophies. The purpose of the page was to allow students and parents the opportunity to get to know the teacher on a personal level. This could allow a better relationship between teacher, parents, and students. Developing trusting relationships between teachers and students in schools everywhere is a challenging task that is essential to maintaining an effective learning environment (Ennis & McCauley, 2002). Teacher information was identified as an important component of a class based website (Janicki & Chandler-Olcott, 2012). There are many benefits of including teacher information such as biographies, hobbies, and interests to the websites (Umit & Akbayin, 2012). Research by Wakefield, Wakefield, Baker, and Wang (2011) suggested students are more likely to use and feel a personal connection to websites that contain helpfulness, friendliness, and familiarity. A sense of friendliness and familiarity can be achieved on teacher websites by the adding personal information about the teacher that a student may not otherwise know. This helps build trust and rapport between the students, parents and teachers. Trust between parents and teachers are a vital element in building and maintaining the family-school relationship (Adams & Christenson, 2000). (See Feature 2, Involvement)

The Get Involved page shows students and parents what is offered at the school and how they can be involved in the school and community. Research suggested that when parents are involved in their child's learning there are higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests, enrollment in more challenging academic programs, and more classes passed or credits earned by students (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parents can learn what is going on in the school and can volunteer for various activities, events, and fundraisers happening at the school. They can also become aware of volunteer positions their child can sign up for at school or what clubs are available for them to join. Parents may have ideas for clubs, volunteer positions, and include their child in the decision making process. Community connections through clubs and activities can be formed. For example, art centers or YMCA programs may be offered at the school. In the parent link, parents can find ideas and suggestions for helping their child study and prepare for school; this supports student learning and progress. Most importantly children need to feel connected to society and have opportunities for social interaction, to develop a sense of initiative and responsibility (Auger & Rich, 2006). Adolescence is a complex stage, a time when young people take on new responsibilities and experiment with independence. They search for identify, learn to apply values acquired in early childhood, and develop skills that will help them become caring and responsible adults. When adolescents are supported and encouraged by caring adults, they thrive in unimaginable ways, becoming resourceful and contributing members of families and communities (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2002). Thus, by being involved in school clubs and events, students are able to grow

as individuals and shape their characteristics. (See Feature 3, Study Habits)

Improved study habits lead to increased academic effectiveness (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). This page offers tips for studying to both students and parents. Parents and students can work together to develop study habits that will benefit the student learner in the classroom and at home. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012) when parents and families have the opportunity to be involved in their own child's learning process this increases student success in schools. The study tips posted directly reflect theories of learning, specifically memory and information processing (Auger & Rich, 2006). Knowledge of these topics allows the TC to post effective information to help students. Although not listed on this website, the TC creator identified a note should be provided on the webpage that these study tips do not apply to all students. This consideration comes from awareness of theories of learning styles and practices of special education in schools (Auger & Rich, 2006). Not all students learn the same and therefore different teaching strategies should be used with students. (See Feature 4, Questions/Comments/Contact Me)

The questions/comments section of the website allows students or parents to send feedback or ask questions about the class. Hill et al. (2010) recommended that the school name, address, phone number, and teacher contact information should be included for parents to contact the teacher. All of this information was provided in this link, except for the teacher's phone number. It was decided by the TC creator that since students could access this link it would not be professional to provide a home or personal phone number. Although not identified this may be the reason, in a study by Hill et al. (2010), why only 44% of 50 classroom websites listed a phone number (p. 117). In this website any submissions were designed to go directly to the teacher, not the school as a whole; this would provide more direct communication. As identified by Grunwald Associates (Mageau & DeBoor, 2000), 64% of all parents want to be able to communicate online with teachers (p. 82). Parents are supportive and engaged in their child's schooling when two-way communication with teachers is established (Unal & Unal, 2010). Witt (2003) identified that parents were more likely to call the school, or wait until parent teacher interviews than visit the teacher website for questions and information. This disconnect could ultimately lead to decreased parent engagement and involvement in the class and school, which could negatively affect student performance.

## Case study 2

This website was created by a female teacher candidate in the Intermediate/ Senior stream of the teacher education program. The website is specifically designed for students in high school and for students in a biology program. (See Feature 2a, Activist Learning Project)

Activist learning is a way of learning the curriculum plus life skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and empathy by engaging in a project that causes social change (The Freechild Project, 2010). According to Au, Bigelow, and Karp (2007), curriculum and classroom practice must be critical and culturally sensitive. This activist project developed such skills by introducing the topic of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and the associated health concerns to people. Students researched GMOs and the opposing views of the associated biological / health concerns. Then they presented the information in the form of a mini-summit to educate parents and members of the community on the issue of GMOs. Later they posted the information on the website for future reference for parents and the community as indicated on this webpage. There was a short video of GMOs and a description of the project that students and family members could view. This connected what the students were learning back to the community and parents. Parents could get involved in the project themselves or make suggestions for new activist projects. Engaging parents in the project may have helped develop healthy relationships between youth and parents; it could be a common interest and passion for them. In addition, the millennial generation (current students) are very strongly influenced by family and peers. Thus, if parents are involved in political and civic activity the students' motivation may increase as well (Au et al., 2007). (See Feature 2b, Mental Health Awareness & Prevention)

This page on the teacher website listed mental health resources in the community that students or parents could go to or contact for help. Information on mental health for both students and parents is a helpful tool on teacher websites (Piper, 2012). Students experiencing mental health issues are a reality for teachers today; the Mental Health Commission of Canada (2013) state, "up to 70% of young adults living with mental health problems report that the symptoms started in childhood" (p. 26). This page outlined supports for students experiencing bullying, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Contact information for community mental health resources, helpful videos, and other information was provided on this page. For example, this TC posted a video to help students with stress that was developed by a student advocating for mental health awareness. A student created video was chosen to be more relatable to students and increased their motivation to follow the tips (Lavoie, 2008). Having community mental health resources can link families and students to the community. This will also build a relationship between community partners and schools.

## Discussion

These two case studies of teacher websites provided examples of how a *theory to practice* model can be implemented in a classroom assignment for teacher candidates. Theories learned in class can be transferred to personal reflection questions such as 'so what does this mean for my teaching practice?' Validating the reasons why content is included on a site or why a site is designed a particular way is beneficial not only for the teacher but the school, parents, and students. This approach demonstrated reflective and evidence based practice; a skill that should be present in all teachers. Furthermore, this approach provided evidence that what is being taught or how something is being communicated to a student is based upon best practice; thus supporting the student's learning journey.

Several recommendations can be made from the literature review and these sample teacher websites regarding teacher websites and teacher training. Although the current literature supported the idea of teacher created websites there are limited adequate guidelines for determining formal content of a teacher website (Unal, 2008). Each website should be tailored towards the specific course, grade level, or cultural or community demographics. Teachers should obtain feedback on the website from parents and student to know (a) how they are using the website, (b) what components they think are useful, and (c) what recommendations they have for the website. In particular, teacher candidates should receive feedback from students and parents once they begin teaching to see if revisions are necessary for their website. Feedback on individual components of the site is important to understand which ones are more useful than others; website design should be based on this feedback and current research. Unfortunately, there was limited research on the effectiveness of individual components of teacher websites. For example, there was little research on the impact of teachers' personal information on websites (Umit



& Akbayin, 2012). Researchers should review if parents and students find this information helpful for relationship building.

The creation of teacher websites in teacher education programs can be an effective and useful assignment. Teacher candidates were leaning and practicing the skills necessary to develop effective classroom websites such as technology design (website design, video creations), theories of learning, healthy development, and aspects for student success. Research and theory to practice was a cornerstone of many teacher education programs. The websites will be based on the current research and theories they are learning in class. For example, teacher candidates learned principles of learning, healthy human development, social development that involved community and parent relationships, theories of motivation, and student success; this knowledge could be integrated into designing an effective website. Janicki and Chandler-Olcott (2012) indicated that professional development that focused on website creation and benefits to students, parents, and teachers made a difference in teachers' commitment to creating classroom websites. This professional development could be part of initial teacher education programs.

Future research studies should investigate the feedback from parents, teachers, and students on the design, use, and effectiveness of teacher websites. Research with teacher candidates could investigate if their websites are actually used once they start teaching.

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#### Related Items:

- [Article References](#)
- [Feature 1 Teacher Information](#)
- [Feature 2 Involvement](#)
- [Feature 2a Activist Learning Project](#)
- [Feature 2b Mental Health Awareness](#)
- [Feature 3 Study Habits](#)
- [Feature 4 Questions Comments](#)





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### Developing and Implementing Principal and Teacher-Evaluation

by *Kristen Dechert, Lois Kappler and Alexis Nordin*

#### Abstract

In 2013-2014, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) implemented statewide the Mississippi Principal Evaluation System (MPES) and select components of the Mississippi Teacher Evaluation System (MTES). Now overseen by the Office of Educator Quality, these instruments and the professional development that accompanied them were originally developed collaboratively by the MDE's Office of Federal Programs, Teacher Center, and Office of Career and Technical Education in order to help identify best practices for their principals and teachers, as well as to illuminate areas for improvement. Elements of both the MPES and MTES were piloted in 2012-2013.

While offering an opportunity to reinvigorate the state's educational system, the MPES and MTES implementations have presented unique sets of challenges for the MDE and the agencies with which it contracted from 2012 to present. Beginning in 2012-2013, the MDE launched large, concurrent regional professional-development initiatives throughout the state to prepare district superintendents, school administrators, practicing teachers, and teachers in training for the new evaluation systems, both of which are aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Experiential evidence demonstrated the significance of a clear and comprehensive communication strategy when implementing training initiatives of this scale, as well as the importance of strong professional relationships between superintendents and principals and between principals and teachers when engaging in the goal-setting and evaluation processes. As revealed by survey, focus group, and interview data harvested from superintendents, principals, and teachers in independent studies by the Research and Curriculum Unit at Mississippi State University and the Southeast Comprehensive Center at SEDL, "buy-in" among educators has improved since 2012, though many initially struggled with and/or still lack confidence in navigating the new evaluation systems.

This paper explored the major influences that shaped Mississippi's principal- and teacher-evaluation systems and provides preliminary results of the efficacy of the new systems, the training that accompanied them, and the lessons learned during the first two years of implementation.



#### Introduction

In preparation for applying for a No Child Left Behind-requirements flexibility waiver and in response to national trends toward more uniform educator-evaluation practices, Mississippi began developing its most recent iterations of statewide principal- and teacher-evaluation systems in 2010, piloting the main component of the teacher-evaluation system, the Mississippi Statewide Teacher Appraisal Rubric (M-STAR), in the 2011-2012 school year and components of the principal-evaluation system in the 2012-2013 school year in select districts.

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) Office of Federal Programs spearheaded the Mississippi Principal Evaluation System (MPES), and the MDE Teacher Center oversaw the Mississippi Teacher Evaluation System (MTES). Because these two offices targeted separated objectives at the MDE, the two systems are discussed separately for ease of understanding, except when combined discussion will best benefit the reader. Both the MPES and MTES are now managed by the Office of Educator Quality, created by the MDE in 2014. Funding for this study was provided in part by these offices as well as the MDE Office of Career and Technical Education and Workforce Development.

The MDE contracted with several agencies in the initial development of the MPES and MTES, including the Research and Curriculum Unit (RCU) at Mississippi State University, the Southeastern Comprehensive Center (SECC) at SEDL, Joseph Murphy of Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education, the American Institutes for Research (AIR), Cambridge Education, and IMPACT of Mississippi. Although the RCU participated in the development and revision of the two systems, we have been particularly involved in the areas of implementation, training, and evaluation.

#### Principal Evaluation

Mississippi undertook comprehensive reform of the state's principal training methods in 1994, when the MDE formed the Task Force on Administrator Preparation focusing on improved administrator preparation methods (MDE, 2012). While the state implemented many

reforms in principal training at that time (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007), comprehensive reform of the state's principal-evaluation system would not follow until 2003, when an early iteration, the Mississippi Principal Appraisal System, was first introduced by the MDE. The system required districts to evaluate principals based on structured interviews, observations, questionnaires, and an artifact portfolio. As Goldring et al. (2009) noted in their review of 65 principal-evaluation methods in use in the U.S. as of 2008, most evaluation tools, including Mississippi's, offered "very limited coverage on leadership behaviors ensuring rigorous curriculum and quality instructions...[and] in most cases, the practices of leadership assessment lack[ed] justification and documentation in terms of the utility, psychometric properties, and accuracy of the instruments" (p. 1).

As best practices emerged regarding principal evaluation, Mississippi has adapted its system accordingly; however, as evaluation-systems researchers recently noted (Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, 2014), much more research on principal evaluation is needed to inform practices nationwide as states struggle to implement valid, reliable measures to tie to high-stakes personnel decisions.

Prior to the 2013-2014 school year, the state allowed districts and local education agencies (LEAs) the discretion to evaluate principals using locally determined criteria, and principal-evaluation data were not reported to the state department of education. Consequently, districts and LEAs lacked consistency in their evaluation methods in terms of rigor and alignment, if they chose to adopt an evaluation method at all.

The MDE's Office of Federal Programs prepared the policies pertaining to the state's formal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)-flexibility-waiver request regarding principal evaluation and assumed oversight of principal evaluation in 2012. The MDE recruited Joseph Murphy to assist in redesigning the state's principal-evaluation system. Mississippi Teacher Center (2012) laid the foundation for the MPES in its current iteration and was informed by work he did for states such as North Carolina and Kentucky in his Education Leadership Program Redesign. The MDE first piloted the MPES with 34 districts and 219 principals in 2012-2013, with principals evaluated using a multirater survey (30%) and student outcomes (70%), the latter consisting of organizational goals (20%) and student-learning goals (50%). The MDE required all piloting districts to use the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) to fulfill the multirater-survey component.

The MPES system was fully implemented statewide in 2013-2014, with 151 districts and approximately 1,300 principals and career and technical education (CTE) directors participating. MPES participation was required in the 2013-2014 school year for all head principals and CTE directors in Mississippi's public schools serving preK-12 populations; districts were given the discretion to include assistant principals and alternative-school principals in the evaluation process in 2013-2014, and many elected not to do so. MDE-formed advisory groups assisted in adapting the MPES for these populations and four special schools: Mississippi School for the Deaf, Mississippi School for the Blind, Mississippi School for the Arts, and Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science. Details of the implementation phases are provided in Appendix A.

**MPES components.** A principal's MPES summative assessment score is currently based on his or her achievement related to two schoolwide language arts and mathematics goals (50%), a multirater survey regarding the principal's leadership (30%), and two organizational goals based on priorities selected by the principal and his or her supervisor (20%). CTE directors' summative assessment scores are calculated similarly; however, instead of using language arts and mathematics assessments, CTE directors base their schoolwide goals on objectives for Year 1 and Year 2 students in their CTE programs, all of which have mandatory statewide assessments. Based on the weighted calculation of the three components, principals will be rated as Distinguished, Effective, Emerging, or Unsatisfactory by 2016-2017.

## Teacher Evaluation

In 2010-2011, the MDE began developing the MTES when Mississippi qualified for and accepted the federally funded Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant. A well-defined evaluation method was needed to promote teacher effectiveness and to ensure that Mississippi students have both highly qualified and highly effective teachers. Research supports the influence of teachers on student performance (Reeves, 2004), so obtaining valid and reliable data on educator effectiveness is critical to ensuring that every student has access to the best education. To begin the process, the MDE contracted with American Institutes for Research (AIR) to develop a statewide evaluation tool. Following development, the MDE contracted with the RCU for training, implementation, and evaluation.

The M-STAR rubric was piloted in the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years in 10 TIF and 14 School Improvement Grant (SIG) schools. Statewide field testing of M-STAR began in 2013-2014 with plans for partial implementation of MTES in 2014-2015 and full implementation in 2015-2016. The 2013-2014 statewide field test of M-STAR required all 151 districts to participate and evaluate approximately 32,000 certified preK-12 public-school teachers. Details of the implementation phases from 2011-2012 to 2015-2016 are provided in Appendix B.

**MTES components.** When the MTES is fully implemented in 2015-2016, a teacher's summative performance rating in a state-tested area will be based on his or her M-STAR evaluation score (50%), individual student growth (30%), and schoolwide growth (20%). For teachers in nonstate-tested areas, student growth will constitute student-growth percentiles (referred to as student-learning objectives by the MDE and throughout this paper, SLOs) on state or national assessments. Their evaluation will be based on the weighted calculation of the three components: M-STAR evaluation (50%), student-learning objectives (30%), and schoolwide growth (20%). All teachers will be rated with the same designations as those used for the MPES: Distinguished, Effective, Emerging, or Unsatisfactory. As results are considered from the field-test year, modifications may affect the above percentages.

## Objectives

### Principal Evaluation

When developing the MPES, the MDE Office of Federal Programs was tasked by the United States Department of Education (USDE) with the main objective of enforcing a uniform system for supervisors (primarily district superintendents) to use when evaluating principals. The

Office of Federal Programs developed three portions of the evaluation to help districts and LEAs gain a comprehensive understanding of each principal's effectiveness and to apply a fair personnel rating to that individual. The implementation timeline is provided in Appendix A.

- **Mathematics and Language Arts Goals (50%).** With the shift to the Common Core State Standards coming in 2014-2015 and historically weak performance as a state in math and language arts (Mader, 2013; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013), the MDE and Mississippi Board of Education chose to place the most emphasis for principals on improving and/or maintaining student achievement in these areas. Each principal is required to set one language arts and one math goal for the school population.
- **Multirater Survey (30%).** The MDE required a survey to be completed by both the principal's supervisor of record and the principal's certified staff, as well as the principal himself or herself. The results of these surveys are equally weighted. The MDE elected to develop its own 30-question survey, the MPES Circle Survey, for districts to use without a fee. The survey was designed by the RCU over a two-year period with input from various stakeholders via focus groups and was influenced by work and research findings related to past iterations of performance-appraisal questionnaires used by the MDE for administrators, faculty, and staff; the Tennessee Teaching, Leading and Learning Survey (TELLTennessee.org, 2013), the Cambridge Public Schools Teacher Performance Evaluation framework (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013), and, perhaps most notably, James Stronge's principal-evaluation framework (Stronge, 2013; Stronge, Xu, Leeper, & Tonneson, 2013) also informed the survey creation. In the 2013-2014 administration of MPES, districts could use alternative multirater surveys, but the state-developed Circle Survey became mandatory in 2014-2015. Prior to 2014-2015, the MDE required that all multirater tools meet the following minimum guidelines, established by a report by Condon and Clifford (2012) regarding principal-evaluation rater tools:
  - Must be based on Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards
  - Must be designed for educational-administrator performance assessment
  - Must have published information regarding reliability (achieving a recommended reliability rating of 0.75 or greater) and validity (undergoing content and/or construct validity screening)

A noncomprehensive list of survey tools that meet the above requirements is available from AIR at [http://www.air.org/files/Measuring\\_Principal\\_Performance.pdf](http://www.air.org/files/Measuring_Principal_Performance.pdf).

- **Organizational Goals (20%).** Because individual schools have unique needs, a portion of the MPES rating was allocated for targeted school goals, which may be set schoolwide or based on subgroups. Initially, the MDE encouraged two organizational goals, one of which would be set based on leading/lagging indicators and the other based on student-growth percentile targets; however, in 2014-2015 the MDE allowed both organizational goals to be set based on local priorities determined by the principal and his or her supervisor. The flexibility for organizational goals is quite broad, allowing principals some autonomy in the MPES process.

**Implementation objectives.** The primary objectives of the MPES implementation to date have been to (1) familiarize MPES participants statewide with the MPES requirements, particularly setting appropriate and quantifiable goals; (2) build a database of MPES participants throughout the state so that the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 datasets could be centrally captured and so that online implementation and reporting capabilities of the MPES could be further refined in the future; (3) train the MPES population in implementation procedures; (4) conduct qualitative and quantitative analyses of the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 data to identify training deficiencies; and (5) ensure that the MPES is appropriately adapted to assistant principals, alternative-school principals, and directors of special schools.

## Teacher Evaluation

Like principal evaluation, teacher evaluation was lacking uniformity across the state and was even nonexistent in some districts. Therefore, an objective of the MTES was to standardize evaluations statewide to ensure best practices and fairness in appraising Mississippi's 32,000 teachers in preK-12 public schools. AIR was asked to streamline and redesign the state's teacher-evaluation instrument, and based on MDE-specified criteria, four components of the MTES were developed to measure performance in several areas vital to effective teaching (Minnici & Loignon, 2012). A phase-in schedule was determined to give teachers time to understand the MTES components described below. The implementation timeline is provided in Appendix B.

- **M-STAR (50%).** The first-developed and most-understood component of the MTES is the 20-standard teacher-evaluation rubric, which was designed to evaluate multiple aspects of classroom teaching. This rubric guides a minimum of three classroom visits: one announced, formal, full-length classroom observation and two unannounced, 10- to 15-minute walkthroughs. With this tool, evaluators rate teacher performance in five domains: Planning, Assessment, Instruction, Learning Environment, and Professional Responsibilities.
- **Individual Student Growth (30%).** To include the impact teachers have on their students, individual student growth will be calculated and applied to evaluation ratings. For tested-area teachers, this measure is student-growth percentiles on state and national assessments. For all other preK-12 teachers in nontested areas, SLOs and comparable assessments will be developed and applied for teachers' individual student-growth scores.
- **Schoolwide Growth (20%).** To account for the cumulative impact teachers have on students and to encourage collaboration among teachers and grade levels, a measure of schoolwide growth based on the statewide accountability model is included in the MTES.

**Implementation objectives.** The MDE's main objectives with the MTES are to enhance teacher performance and improve student achievement. The primary objectives of the 2013-2014 M-STAR field test were to (1) familiarize principals statewide with the rubric and allow them to practice using it to evaluate their teachers; (2) familiarize teachers statewide with the rubric and encourage them to shape their teaching practices around the 20 standards; and (3) determine areas of the rubric and process that can be improved upon to serve teachers' and administrators' needs and to influence student outcomes. The objectives of subsequent implementations were to (1) phase in the additional components of the MTES and (2) analyze pilot and field-test data prior to full implementation to shape the model to best capture teachers' effectiveness levels, while making needed modifications throughout the process.

## Theoretical Framework

### Principal Evaluation

The MPES was designed to fulfill both federal and state requirements, the latter of which were governed by the *Mississippi Standards for School Leaders* (MDE, 2013a).

As this paper has previously established regarding federal requirements, the MDE submitted an ESEA-flexibility waiver in 2012 in response to the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, with an accountability addendum submitted in 2013. Under federal guidance, the MDE agreed to develop and require all principals in the state to conform to one statewide principal-evaluation model. The addendum, approved by the USDE in December 2013, allows school districts and LEAs to postpone using educator-evaluation and student-growth data to inform personnel decisions until the 2016-2017 academic year.

Federal requirements stated that a school's performance in language arts and mathematics—as calculated by state-determined annual measurable objectives—must factor *significantly* into a principal-evaluation model, although the USDE has permitted states to define *significance*. Mississippi chose to allocate 50% of the MPES summative assessment score to goal achievement related to language arts and mathematics.

In response to federal requirements, the MPES required principals to establish schoolwide language arts and mathematics goals based on statewide assessments, such as universal screeners in Grades K-2, the *Mississippi Curriculum Test, 3rd Edition* in Grades 3-8, and subject-area tests in Grades 9-12. For principals of Grades 9-12 students, language arts and mathematics goals may also be established based on ACT performance. In 2014-2015, the MDE began offering a free attempt at the ACT for every high school junior.

The second basis of the MPES was the *Mississippi Standards for School Leaders*. Detailed components of the Mississippi Standards for School Leaders are available through the MDE (2013a). These standards were originally prepared by the MDE's Office of Leadership Development and Enhancement and adopted by the Mississippi Board of Education in 1995. The *Mississippi Standards for School Leaders* were then updated and approved by the Mississippi Board of Education in 2012. They are closely adapted from the ISLLC 2008 Standards. As the *Mississippi Standards for School Leaders* change, the MPES will mirror those changes accordingly.

The guiding principles upon which the MPES framework was based are clustered into three categories: Foundational Principles, Process Principles, and Outcome Principles. Specific principles in these categories are available through the MPES Process Manual (MDE, 2013b).

### Teacher Evaluation

The MTES was founded on the federal and state theory of action that an improved evaluation system would lead to improved educator quality, which would lead to improved student outcomes (Partee, 2012). Additionally, the state needed to develop a system that complied with its ESEA-flexibility-waiver requirements; specifically, the MTES was required to use multiple measures and to ensure that a significant portion of the evaluation was based on student growth.

The MDE-contracted agencies worked closely with the newly established State Teacher Evaluation Council (STEC) and reviewed research, innovative practices, and the existing appraisal instrument to ensure that the MTES was a rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation system aligned with national standards and reflective of Mississippi's priorities and practices. Following this review, the revised instrument included a rubric with descriptors of expectations for each standard at each level, increasing the objectivity of the instrument (Minnici & Loignon, 2012).

The approach to the M-STAR and other MTES components focused on the demonstration of student learning rather than teacher behavior in an effort to prevent evaluation from being considered a tool to measure a teacher's one-time performance. Rather, the MDE wanted teachers and principals to view the system as a cumulative evaluation of yearly performance. Specific measures taken in this effort are as follows:

- **The M-STAR defines instructional improvement on a continuum rather than a simple checklist.** Each standard comprises indicators that denote specific teaching requirements for each effectiveness level. Evidence that a practice exists is no longer enough; teachers must demonstrate that they regularly use certain techniques and strategies, which are much easier for administrators to identify when they are more regularly in the classrooms, as M-STAR requires.
- **The MTES focuses on professional conversations and setting two professional-growth goals** by requiring at least one face-to-face conference per year and written feedback for all M-STAR visits. At the post-conference with the teacher and evaluator, two goals are set for the teacher to enhance his/her effectiveness. These goals become the teachers' focus until the next formal observation. Most district-developed evaluation tools used across the state in the past have lacked these components, leaving many teachers to wonder about the rationale behind their performance ratings and how to improve their teaching.
- **The MTES overall score links student achievement to teacher-performance ratings**, information that was not correlated in previous evaluation systems. In the past, most teacher evaluations were only focused on what the teacher did, often in a single classroom visit. The MTES contains not only elements in the M-STAR that point to student performance in the classroom, but also components of the overall system that consider student growth and achievement in the teacher's evaluation rating.

Multiple methods were designed to evaluate teachers on all standards and to obtain a comprehensive understanding of each teacher's areas of strengths and challenges. The full M-STAR process is shown in Table 1.

## Methods

### Principal Evaluation

The MDE collaborated with the RCU and the SECC (Southeast Comprehensive Center) at SEDL to revise and implement the MPES process as needed. Primarily, the RCU has assisted the MDE with implementation, reporting, and evaluation, and the SECC has partnered with the MDE for development and training; however, all parties involved have provided feedback and insight throughout the MPES process to ensure cohesion and consistency in communication and reporting of all MPES-related content.

**MPES development and training.** The SECC was involved in the initial development of the MPES evaluation forms based on criteria established by the MDE upon recommendations by Joseph Murphy. The SECC spearheaded efforts to create MPES training materials and seminars offered statewide in summer 2013, and the SECC has continued to be heavily involved in the MPES development and training initiatives at the state level. Starting in fall 2013, the Southern-Regional Educational Service Agency also partnered with the MDE to develop and lead additional MPES training for administrators throughout the state. In spring 2014, the Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast (REL-SE) also began contributing to the MDE's efforts to tailor the MPES for alternative-school directors.

**MPES implementation.** In 2013-2014, the primary roles of the RCU during the first year of MPES implementation were to coordinate the MPES process using Canvas by Instructure, a learning-management system licensed by the MDE, and to report regularly to the MDE regarding compliance with each step of the MPES process. The RCU also assisted the MDE by attending statewide MPES training sessions and offering MPES help desk services for the MDE.

**MPES evaluation.** To date, four major evaluation efforts have taken place, two by the RCU, one by the SECC, and one by the REL-SE.

1. **Rigor of Principal Goals (Fall 2013).** Once most principal goals were uploaded to Canvas, RCU staff pulled a random sample of approximately 300 principals, or approximately 30% of submitted goals, from the system and qualitatively evaluated their math, language, and organizational goals for completeness, relation to student population, and rigor. This evaluation was used to inform the MDE of general trends in the goals to inform future training and policy regarding MPES and the goal-setting process.
2. **Focus Groups (Spring 2014 and Fall 2014).** In spring 2014, the RCU, with assistance from the SECC, conducted regional focus groups for principals and superintendents to gain feedback on the first year of implementation, including the goal-setting process, multirater survey, and future training needs. These focus groups were held in four regions of the state. In each region, the RCU hosted one principal and one supervisor focus group, for a total of eight groups statewide. The results from these focus groups informed the MDE of summer 2014 and future training needs. In fall 2014, the RCU, with assistance from the SECC, also convened two regional focus groups to assist in revising the Circle Survey criteria for 2014-2015. Suggested revisions were proposed from both groups, and based on their feedback and revisions proposed by the MPES Advisory Board, the RCU and the MDE revised the 2014-2015 Circle Survey indicators to reflect better alignment with the *Mississippi Standards for School Leaders*.
3. **Training Survey (Fall 2013 and Fall 2014).** Following MPES training initiatives in summer-fall 2013 and summer-fall 2014, both of which included several virtual and face-to-face sessions, the SECC conducted statewide surveys to gain principal and superintendent feedback on the training and initial steps of the MPES process (particularly goal setting and quantification, as well as the use of technological platforms to manage the MPES process). Each survey was administered for approximately two weeks in late fall (October-November), and customized versions of each survey were sent to approximately 1,600 principals and supervisors. This information is being used to evaluate the first two years of MPES implementation as well as to inform future training for new and incumbent principals and superintendents.
4. The RCU, with assistance from the REL-SE and the SECC, conducted focus groups to assist the MDE in tailoring the MPES to alternative-school administrators. This data was submitted to the REL-SE for analysis and used in the agency's report to the MDE on adapting the MPES for alternative-school leaders.

## Teacher Evaluation

The MDE collaborated with the RCU to revise and implement the MTES process as needed. Primarily, the RCU has assisted the MDE with training, implementation, reporting, and evaluation.

**MTES development.** As previously stated, the MTES was initially developed over the 2010-2011 school year. In May 2011, a decision was made to group standards into five domains, revise existing teacher-performance standards based on the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium recommendations, and Common Core State Standards. In addition, the MDE conducted 20 focus group meetings across the state, elicited e-mail feedback, and posted the MTES for public comment through the Administrative Procedures Act. The information collected from focus and feedback groups was used to make modifications after the 2013-2014 school year.

**MTES training and implementation.** The first group of evaluators trained were the principals from the 10 TIF and 14 SIG schools. Training was divided into two components: (1) January 2012 training on classroom observation using the M-STAR rubric and (2) March 2012 training on artifact review. During the January training, participants heard an overview of the evaluation rubric and performance levels, watched and rated videos of classroom teachers, and discussed these ratings. The initial training was followed by small-group and individualized sessions provided by Cambridge Education. The March training component consisted of a two-day training, which included a review of the previous training and practice sorting and scoring sample artifacts. An additional day of training took place in April 2012 to review the evaluation process, examine the evaluators' experiences, and address questions and concerns.

To prepare administrators for the field-test year of 2013-2014, two-day trainings were held across the state during the fall and spring of 2012-2013. The sessions were led by a cadre of 25 experienced educators, all trained by the MDE and/or its approved contractors, including the RCU and IMPACT of Mississippi. Training has continued across the state as requested by districts. Additionally, two-day training sessions are held for all new administrators, the MDE has updated its website to include detailed information and videos for all educators, monthly webinars are held on evaluation topics, and the RCU has

developed calibration videos for evaluator practice and reliability purposes.

**MTES evaluation.** Two validation sessions for the M-STAR instrument were held by AIR with groups of subject-matter experts in Chicago, Illinois, and Jackson, Mississippi. Feedback was gathered to evaluate (1) the importance of each performance standard and (2) the relevance of each standard to a teacher's job. Evaluation of the process was obtained from the aforementioned focus groups. In addition, the RCU has conducted preliminary analysis of M-STAR data from the TIF schools and six districts piloting performance-based pay in the state. From this data set, the RCU has calculated basic descriptive statistics on M-STAR domains and standards, performed an ANOVA to understand measurement error in M-STAR ratings, and performed a generalizability study to determine reliability of the M-STAR tool and process. Additionally, the RCU was in the process of performing several regression analyses to understand the relationship between teacher and student performance, especially the relationship between teachers' M-STAR domain averages with school accountability scores to learn the correlation between (a) teachers' M-STAR domain averages and schoolwide student performance and (b) teachers' summative M-STAR ratings and schoolwide student performance. Finally, the RCU also performed regression analyses to understand better the relationship between school demographics, teaching practices, and school accountability scores, specifically using demographic data from the National Center for Education Statistics to understand the relationship of socioeconomic status and parent income to school performance.

## Results

### Principal Evaluation

In 2013-2014, the major steps that MPES participants completed were to create 2013-2014 goals with their supervisors; conduct formative, midyear conferences with their supervisors to assess goal attainment; upload the results of the aforementioned meetings into the learning-management system Canvas; and complete the multirater survey. In fall 2014, the districts were then asked to report MPES summative assessment scores for all 2013-2014 MPES participants via the MDE's document-management system, SharePoint.

Overall, the goal submission step was a success, with 98% of approximately 1,300 MPES participants uploading goals by November 2013. Despite the participation success, the MDE and RCU encountered two major obstacles:

1. Despite extensive training opportunities offered throughout the state in summer 2013, many MPES participants still struggled to understand how to set appropriate, quantifiable, statistically significant schoolwide goals.
2. MPES participants have been frustrated by technological platforms put into place to monitor the MPES process. Early in the process, participants were frustrated by the initial technology platform, Canvas, which was utilized during the 2013-2014 year. Canvas was new to almost all participants, and the system experienced some early downtime spanning approximately one week, which undermined administrators' confidence in Canvas and led to a large number of help desk tickets and complaints. The issue has since been largely resolved by transitioning the MPES process to the MDE's online data portal, the Educator Licensure Management System (ELMS), with which the state's educators are more familiar. Nevertheless, training administrators to use ELMS for MPES purposes has been logistically challenging.

MPES participants completed the multirater Circle Survey in March 2014, and upwards of 36,000 unique survey responses were received. The RCU generated and disseminated reports for each principal in spring 2014 so that MPES participants could conduct survey conferences with their supervisors. Districts and LEAs opting for an alternative multirater survey than the state-developed option were required to upload their survey results to Canvas by April 30, 2014.

### Teacher Evaluation

Focus group data, training feedback, and evaluation activities indicated that there has been overall positive feedback on the M-STAR rubric from teachers and administrators and that educators began to view the rubric as a guide for effective 21st-century teaching. Additionally, administrators reported seeing more student engagement and higher order thinking activities as well as hearing higher quality conversations among colleagues and in professional learning communities. Using the aforementioned teacher- and student-performance data and data collected through focus groups, the RCU evaluated the MTES; however, it is too soon to draw conclusions upon this work.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Principal Evaluation

Preliminary data indicated that Mississippi's four biggest obstacles regarding the MPES include (1) implementing a new evaluation system that requires principals to set goals based on current statewide tests despite the fact that the state is transitioning its curriculum and assessments to the new 2014 Mississippi College- and Career-Readiness Standards, which are aligned to the Common Core State Standards; (2) training principals and their supervisors to set clear, quantifiable, and statistically significant goals; (3) transitioning districts to using an online platform for MPES data entry; and (4) identifying the best way to gear the MPES toward special populations, such as assistant principals, alternative-school principals, and special-school directors. Research about practical and cost-effective strategies other states are employing to address these challenges is urgently needed.

### Teacher Evaluation

Although the field-test year for the MTES presented challenges at times, those are expected to lessen as the state moves into the third year of implementation and as educators become more familiar with the process and tools. Many administrators have not used an appraisal rubric before and/or rarely visited classrooms, so the MTES has required that they rethink their approach to being an instructional leader and how they spend their time. This change has taken some aback, but with the process being modified based on their

feedback, the response has been positive and the process easier for this group. The MTES is a dramatic change in teacher-evaluation protocol and will take several years to become an accepted practice. In addition, for many teachers, frequent evaluation was a new experience and, as they learn more about the rubric and the standards for a 21st-century educator, their comfort zone likely will widen.

As the student- and schoolwide-growth components are implemented in the coming years, the resulting paradigm shift is expected to create some dissent among all involved, requiring additional training and communication to support educators across the state. The fewer the trainers, the more direct and consistent the message conveyed; hence, the development of archived webinars and training sessions is essential in reaching the states' teacher population.

### Significance of Work

As in many states, the principal- and teacher-evaluation work ongoing in Mississippi is being closely scrutinized by lawmakers and various advocacy groups. The impact that the new evaluation systems have on Mississippi administrators, teachers, and students likely will influence the next 10 to 20 years of education policy and educator-preparation programs. Already, the state legislature is looking to tie both evaluation systems to high-stakes decisions, such as forms of performance-based funding for schools and performance-based pay for teachers.

The MPES links the performance of the students in the building to the building-level administrator, a practice that directly speaks to the duty of principals to ensure student success. Too often, principal effectiveness is based on the ability to avert crises or handle difficult behavioral issues. The MPES brings the focus back to two key functions of any principal: (1) ensuring students' academic progress and (2) ensuring that teachers' classroom and professional progress result in student success. For perhaps the first time, Mississippi's principals and teachers recognize and value the explicit link between the success of both parties.

Statistically, the results of these large-scale implementations will yield abundant data to identify areas of improvement in the two systems as well as patterns that point to findings about Mississippi educators and processes. Already, preliminary analyses show the vulnerability of teacher ratings to the schoolwide-growth measure for the MTES. For policy makers and practitioners, the findings from quantitative and qualitative studies associated with the MPES and MTES will inform communication strategies, best practices regarding training and implementation, and improvement possibilities.

With the shift to the Common Core, new legislation changing teacher-compensation structures, and new evaluation systems all overlapping in implementation timelines, the MDE and other stakeholders are cognizant of the intersecting variables' impact on our future findings. To study the effects of the MTES and MPES carefully and fully, several years' worth of accurate, comprehensive data are needed for longitudinal analyses to minimize misleading statistical anomalies.

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### Related Items:

- [Article References](#)
- [Figure 1. Principal percentage contributing to overall MPES ratings starting in 2013-2014](#)
- [Figure 1a. CTE Director percentage contributing to overall MPES ratings starting in 2013-2014](#)
- [Figure 2. Tested teacher percentages contributing to overall MTES ratings starting in 2015-2016](#)
- [Figure 2a. Nontested teacher percentages contributing to overall MTES ratings starting in 2015-2016](#)

