

## Susan Moore Johnson

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### Video 1

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Hi, my name is Audrey Amrein Beardsley, and I am an associate professor at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University.

We developed a show titled *Inside the Academy* during which we honor some of the best scholars in the profession of education.

Today I have the honor of interviewing Susan Moore Johnson, Professor at Harvard University.

It's a pleasure to honor you.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Thank you. It's an honor to be honored.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

We're going to start with you growing up. Tell us about your childhood.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Okay, I grew up in a town, a small suburb right outside Youngstown, Ohio and Youngstown was a Steel City, a magnificent, thriving Steel City until about 1960 and the mills started to close.

I always thought that the sky was kinda gray and pink, that that's the way sky was generally and they closed the mills and suddenly the sky was blue and the air was clear.

It was actually a tragedy for the community because it was a tremendous recession that hit right after that.

But the city's on the Mahoning River, and they always used to say that you could start a fire in the Mahoning River 'cause it had so much trash in it.

So it was a very, very kind of urban industrial area. We lived in a little suburb that was right outside Youngstown called Boardman. My dad was a high school English teacher in the city. The community that I grew up in was all-white and not particularly wealthy, but there was clearly a kind of racial segregation by communities and in general our schools were supposed to be better than the ones in the city so I had a real sense of the difference between the city school and the opportunities there and my own community. But my dad was a very great teacher and he was the adviser for the yearbook and the newspaper and so he would have his staff at our house for picnics and things.

I remember my brother and I both realized that we had never seen so many different kinds of people at the houses in our community except you know, except for that so that was a kinda early awareness of, you know, the informal segregation in the north.

I had a very unexciting childhood, you know the neighborhood school was nearby, we all walked, I was in Brownies and Girl Scouts and went to camp at the Y, the YMCA camp in the summer. There is a great camp on Lake Erie and, and, you know, I just kinda grew up that way.

My mom was, had been an accountant, but she, like every other mom I knew stayed home and raised children at the time. It was very much a fifties sort of community, not quite what you see celebrated on television, a little more boring than that, yeah, that's what it was.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

When did you first decide that you wanted to become an educator?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

I don't know. Was I three, was I four?

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

You grew into it.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Well, it was something my whole family on my father's side was involved in education, great-aunt, you know it was just sorta the family business essentially if there was one in our family and I just grew up being in his classroom, you know kind of being able to stack the papers. At one point, he had me grading the multiple choice exams in his class when I was in high school and, and I always just assumed that I would be a teacher, you know I did the usual play school with my dolls. I honestly never thought I would do anything else. I don't know whether I really had a clear sense that I wanted to have a career full time until I was, you know, a good deal older because I didn't know any women who did that, initially.

But I clearly expected to teach, to go to college and to teach, and you know this was, I graduated from high school in '63, and at that time pretty much any woman that was gonna have a career and a college degree was going to be a teacher or a nurse.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Sure.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

It really was and you know I thought it was a good thing.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Was there a certain teacher that inspired the person you became?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Well, yeah, I think I actually had several good teachers, but the person who was most influential was a guy named Bill Dickens, we called him Dike. He was my speech coach, so you have to understand this is a time before Title Nine. There were no competitive athletics for girls, you could be a cheerleader and I did that for a year and, and this is really not what I enjoy, so he, I joined the debate team. My brother was three years older than I was, and he was on the debate team and so when I was in ninth grade, they had me on the debate team. I did actually extemporaneous speaking, there was a very big competitive thing in our area and so Dike was my coach and then he was my senior English teacher. He was, you know, just a renowned teacher and he really was an amazing person, so I stayed close with him over time, yeah.

#### AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In 1967, you earned your bachelor's degree from Mount Holyoke College, magna cum laude in English literature, and you taught English at Brookline High School in Massachusetts from 1967 to 1976. You earned a master's degree in English and served as an administrator while at Brookline. Tell us about your experiences as Assistant Housemaster.

#### SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Okay, let me back up just a little bit because it was, I graduated from college and when I was a student in college my father insisted that I do the coursework for certification. You never know, he would always say, you never know, you might have to earn a living and so you have to be certified, but this was a very tiny program and it didn't take long to do, so I decided that I wanted actually to do a serious program in teacher education, so that was the Masters of Arts in Teaching program at Harvard and it was only many years later, many, that I realized that it was a kind of an alternative prep program.

It was long, but we had a summer program with student teaching and then I became the teacher of record in a high school, in Brookline High School and we, we had a great arrangement where there were faculty members from Harvard who are also part-time teachers in the schools where we were placed, so it was a kind of very close link between our placement and then our Harvard classes. The program allowed you to go to classes, it was a two year program and you could do it either by teaching the first year and going back full time for classes in the second or you could do it the reverse.

And I wanted to teach, I was very, I had been in classes for a long time, so I did it that way. I taught and then went back to Harvard and did a fair amount of sub teaching when I was at the school when I was taking courses and then went back full time. So I had a position after the first few years of teaching that allowed me to teach, have time and serve in this role, essentially as assistant housemaster where I had responsibility for 200 children, high school youth I should say and I would combine the work as a teacher and administrator. So I love that because I loved the teaching, but you know being an English teacher and taking seriously what it means to grade papers, having a full load is a lot, and so this allowed me to teach and then to get very involved in school wide issues and it was really then that I started to become really interested in the relationship of the teacher in the classroom and the school and the district. I think otherwise I would not have had a sense of that whole organizational side of education of which ended up being very important to me.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Is that what inspired you to go back and earn your doctorate?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Um, yeah, I think in part I was eager to go back to school to learn. Um, you know when you're teaching full-time it's just breathless and I was really tired and I just felt like I haven't really had a new thought in a long time, so why not go back to school and I wasn't really clear about what I wanted to do. What I thought I would be an administrator because that seemed to give you more control over things. And my brother at the time actually was a doctoral student at Harvard, and he said they wanna make sure that they have people becoming superintendents so say that you want to be a superintendent and that was actually as good an explanation as any I could find, I at least knew that that was a role. So when I started graduate school I really, doctoral program, I really expected that that's what I would do and then my course changed.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

How did it change?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Well, the program that I was in was called Administration Planning and Social Policy, and it included people who were planning to be in practice and people who are planning to do research and we all had to take the same courses so in many ways I was as prepared to be a researcher, probably more prepared actually than to be an administrator. I had a course with a professor named David Kuechle, who was teaching a labor relations course and, and I got fascinated by that and decided that I would write my qualifying paper about it, a topic in labor relations and it was about the use of performance for teacher layoffs which is actually very current topic today.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yes, yes.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

At the time, you know, it was something new, we were laying off teachers, and I was eager to see how they could be laid off by performance rather than seniority, so I did a study. And then just became very interested in the unions and collective bargaining as a policy that affected teachers and by then it was pretty clear to me that I was very interested in the role of the teachers, the school as a workplace on and less in administrative practice really. So then when I was, when I was deciding what to write my dissertation on and my advisor, Jerry Murphy, was working with David Cohen on a new policy center and they had gotten a grant from the Ford Foundation, which as I look back, I think a four-page letter where the money, it was a very simple informal process but they had proposed to have a study about unions in it and neither of them really knew anything about unions at that time, so I looked at it and I said I'll do that and just consequently got involved in a, a fairly large study about the day-to-day practices of teachers in schools in the context of collective bargaining. So I did 300 interviews and 25 schools and six districts all around the country

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

All for your dissertation work?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Your friend, colleague, and the former dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Pat Graham recalls the time in your life, writing that you impressed her enormously with your discipline as you stolidly sat at your machine, an IBM electric typewriter, hacking away at your doctoral dissertation on teachers. After you graduated, tell us about your first academic position.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Well, I graduated and at that point I had young children and we were kinda, you know, set here. My husband had a clinical practice, he's a psychologist and I wasn't really ready to move and I didn't really see myself as an academic because I had just started to do research, I mean it was relatively new for me and, and so I had a position. I spent the first year, under a grant from this Policy Center to turn my dissertation into a book, that was a part of my work and then I also had a research job at the Principal Center at Harvard as I was a research associate doing some work for them, so that was kind of a transition year. And people started to find things for me to do at Harvard, and I was sort of thinking these are interesting, I'll, you know, I'll spend the next year then what happened was they, they wanted to hire someone to study schools as organizations and with a kinda policy focus on it, and I had very few publications at that point, but they asked me to apply and it wasn't because the job was meant for me, it was because there were so few applicants for the position because it wasn't something that people you know, sort of was geared toward qualitative research and so I applied and initially my position was just half time, they had two of us sharing the job and then just gradually I stayed on. But it still was several years before I thought, okay, this may be a long-term gig for me, not, you know, not just a transition kind of time. And I love the teaching, and I really enjoy thinking about administrative practice and ended up doing some research about that and, and it was a very, it just kind of happened that way. You know I realized, okay, if I have to, you know, if I'm, if I have a, a long-term plan here I have to think more about publications. I was very, very lucky. It was in a wonderful place.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And it ultimately turned into a tenure-track position? Anyway, an associate professorship, you had enough publications at that point?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Right, although Harvard does not award tenure at the associate level, you have to be a full professor, so at that time, it was necessary to publicize all open positions so I essentially, for the, the 10-year position, was competing with some other applicants, well-known, well published, so that was harrowing. But I don't know, it all worked out and yeah.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

We talked to a lot of your former graduate students, and one of the common themes across all of them was what a wonderful teacher and what a wonderful mentor you have been ever since your arrival at Harvard. Related to this, your former graduate student Will Marinell noted that one of your most profound accomplishments, on top of all your books and articles, has really been the

scores of students that you have impacted throughout your career. Your daughter Erika witnessed your impact on your students, she recalls the holiday parties that you threw for your students each year, feeding them desserts, hot cider and eggnog. She remembers noticing a pattern to these events though. Students would first come in to eat and talk to each other and within an hour she would find herself pulled into corners by earnest, teary-eyed students who would talk about how you had changed their lives, one after another the students spoke about how you take care of them and pushed them to become more rigorous thinkers, more accomplished writers and more thoughtful academics. They wondered if she knew how lucky she was to have you as a mom. Of course, she always replied that she did. So a major theme here was how you helped your students become writers. Why do you believe writing and the writing process is so important?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

I think it's hard to separate thinking and writing, and I found that as students learn to write more clearly, they also understand their thoughts more clearly and I think expression through writing is just very, very important. My students always laugh because I correct grammar and I tell them the derivations of words and because I love it, in part, and, you know, my own children I think I probably, you know, was over their shoulders more than they would have liked on writing issues, but it really is about I see it as a way of expressing really important thoughts and that thinking about writing as communication, I know it seems have obvious, but most people don't write with a reader in mind and I'm so helping people realize that there actually is not just one other person they're writing for, it's not just for a professor, it's for an audience. I often tell people, particularly when they're writing their dissertations, to not think about their committee because then everybody second guesses what you already know and why should I tell you that, but create a kind of audience of people who would be interested in the topic who don't know what you know and so I just think writings very exciting and I like to write.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Do you define yourself as a qualitative researcher?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

I am. I am. Done a little bit of quantitative work, but, and I, and I think it, you know, sometimes our students say I'm going to do a qualitative research project because I don't find that I'm very strong in statistics. I do qualitative research because the questions that interest me are about how and why and so I'm very interested in, you know, strong quantitative findings but I also find that the study I really wanna do and the one I think I have the most to contribute with is about understanding how things work and explaining that.

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Video 2

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

We touched on this briefly before, but tell us more about your early research on merit pay and teacher incentives.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Well, I was really surprised to discover that the merit pay which was surfacing in the eighties sort of, after *A Nation at Risk* was published, was actually not a new idea, and I found as I went into some history and found some of the early accounts of merit pay in the twenties, in the nineteen twenties, 1916. Major surveys of these large urban districts that were done at the time and really very humorous accounts of how you were going to class and there's Teacher A who knows nothing and Teacher B who seems to know everything and why should we be paying Teacher A more, you know, the same as Teacher B. So, actually, these written accounts could really just go right into the newspaper in the eighties and now again today. And so there was a very strong idea that teachers would be motivated by money to somehow work harder, and I just fundamentally knew that that was not the case that if you weren't teaching well it wasn't because you didn't make enough money or could be, you know, encouraged to work harder and therefore achieve more, which really is that teaching is incredibly complicated and difficult work, so that was kind of, like many of the things that I've studied, I would reach back to when I was teaching, you know, over those nine years really and try to see, you know, is this really grounded in the way schools work, and the way teachers think, so I really just started to look at the history and then try to look at some of the programs that people were using and what I found, what others have found, is that they become very current, lively ideas; for the most part not created by educators who have other ideas about what would enhance teaching and then they start to fall away, so there will be a bonus program for a while and then the information will get out about who got the bonuses and there's no validity for the people who see this, you know, and so it kind of faded again in the eighties and then now with value-add has come back as a way of motivating people and for the first time there is some kind of objective measure and I say that with all caution of what would, you know, differentiate one teacher from another but again the research is increasingly clear this is not an incentive that either increases retention or improves student performance so I actually think that the most recent research on this should close this down, but I promise you it won't because there're just people who believe that that is what makes a difference for teachers. People teach because they love kids and they love their subject matter. I've probably interviewed 500 teachers who say the same thing, very much what Dan Lortie found when he did his research for *Schoolteacher* and so when you hear it from that many people, what they say is again and again, I never expected to get rich teaching. I decided to teach recognizing what the overall pay would be. I have to make enough money to be able to live a decent middle-class life as a teacher, be able to educate my children, and be able to have a, you know, decent place to live, but that's a whole different set of decisions than how hard I work, how successful I am. So I think, you know, for me that's done, but I know for other people that will rise again as a strategy. We studied, there was a signing bonus program in Massachusetts that was called the Mass Signing Bonus. It achieved headlines nationwide because they were recruiting, at that point, mid-career entrance to teaching, trying to get the best and the brightest who'd been in, you know, technology or engineering to enter teaching and they were going to go through an alternative short fast track program and they offer them twenty thousand dollars and we tracked some of those and I, other people, have tracked them and they had to stay four years to get the signing bonus and very few of them stayed that long because they weren't well-prepared, their schools weren't ready to support them and it really just wasn't enough money and people thought at the time this is a fortune. This will solve it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So is there a way to merit pay right?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

I think it depends on what you mean by merit pay. I have a lot of hope about good career ladder programs where actually the professional responsibilities and the pay are aligned and so I think there is a real problem to not having any expectation that your job will get more interesting, more complicated, more influential if you stay in the same position and where you can look at a standardized salary scale and see what the maximum is that you can earn and we certainly heard that, especially from this new generation of teachers that that's a real issue, but the answer is not a competitive pay program. It really is creating steps of advancement based on achievements and qualifications that allow you to assume more responsibility for more pay. And there are, Baltimore has adopted in the past two years a comprehensive program like that that has totally replaced their standardized salary scale. Cleveland is in the process of negotiating one right now and so I see great hope for those. But the other, I think, is really just a, you know, a blind alley.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And which is the current policies in this area that design mainly by test scores.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Yes, test scores, growth, one-time bonuses. You know some sometimes school-wide bonuses for, you know, aggregate value-added scores might be a good thing for the school, but I just really don't think over any period of time there're effective for individuals.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Tell us about your research on teacher unions and collective bargaining.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

I started to tell you a little bit about that. When I did my dissertation and there was really very, very little research, so this was in the late seventies, very little research about contracts or unions for teachers beyond contract analysis so some people had done some good work comparing what was in contracts across states and under different state laws and some analysis of the salaries that were gained through collective bargaining, but really nobody had gone into schools or districts to say: what difference does this make? There was a great deal of opinion and rhetoric about the evil unions and the bad role of collective bargaining, so for my dissertation I did go to six districts and that was my question: what difference does it make day-to-day in schools? Because again I have this sense that most teachers are very unaware of their contracts, not very prominent. They look at the salary scale, they know what they'll earn, but they really don't know what's in contracts. And, so basically what I found was that even in a very large city that had a very aggressive union and a very detailed contract, what really mattered happened at the school and where the principal and the teachers were working together for some common good and understood what they were doing together, the contract played very, very little role in what happened and where there was a lot of animosity it could become very prominent, people could file grievances, but even there, most teachers did not see their contract as being the document that would regulate how they did their work. They were there to teach. So that was really the big picture that I got of it and I have kind of studied unions and then gone away from that and then gone back it several times, so in my dissertation I learned about the importance of the school in relation to the union and then after that I would find an interesting topic related to something that I was doing, go back and look at what was going on with the unions at that time. Recently, I was

particularly interested in, as I was thinking about that turnover in the teaching force that began about 2000, I started to think what happens when the membership of the union starts to shift toward younger teachers, how will that change things. And so we did a study, along with several students interviewing union presidents, recently elected union presidents, in, I think, six states, five districts in each, and we just did the series in the union, you know, kind of exploring the issues with these union presidents. And that was really interesting because what we found was they were basically, as union presidents leading to smaller unions. One, of veteran members who, many of whom, had been involved in organizing the union, who were much more aware of the history of the contract and were ready to work for the union and, you know, staff the committees and do all the work. And then there were younger members who saw it more as a service organization; they had to pay dues, they had real doubts about whether they needed a union 'cause they already had a contract, they didn't know how collective bargaining worked and yet, from the presidents' perspective if they didn't recruit them as active members, in some states they wouldn't have enough dues, but in all cases they needed them to work, do the work at the union and so it, the attitudes of current early career teachers toward unions are much more mixed than are veteran teachers, but then when you have something like the Chicago strike, you see many new teachers basically saying, I understand what this is about. I'm just interested in collective bargaining, collective bargaining in unions as a vehicle of teacher voice, and I feel very strongly that teachers' views and opinions can inform schooling in a way that will really improve it for children. Some unions are belligerent and antagonistic and make it really difficult, and some actually maintain very collaborative relationships, so I'm always interested in what happens when things work and we've studied peer resistance in review programs. These are programs where teachers take responsibility, specially selected expert teachers, take responsibility for mentoring and then evaluating all new teachers in the district, as well as veteran teachers who were referred because they're struggling. Now this program is cosponsored by the union and management. They have what they call a PAR Panel, and they get the reports from the consulting teachers about whether someone has improved and met standards. It's actually very, very rigorous. They make recommendations about dismissal or renewal to the superintendent and in all the districts that have adopted this program many more teachers are dismissed than they were before it was introduced. So I've done a lot of work very closely analyzing these programs. We created a website that's called A User's Guide to PAR and that includes a lot of information and stories from these districts so that others that are considering it can really understand what's involved so that's the side of the unions that interests me a lot.

#### AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

This, too, is a hot political topic for educational policy, or specifically a reform crisis issue. Teacher tenure policies, teacher unions, and other onerous, though once considered protective dismissal rules and regulations; they are now widely being blamed for the institutional inertia of our public schools. What are your thoughts on this whole way of thinking about the unions?

#### SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

I have to find a short answer for this when I teach a whole course in teacher unions, collective bargaining, school improvement. In fact, yesterday we were talking about the uses of value-added to make many of these decisions so it is a long, a long story. I think there's no simple answer to this, but I would point out that Massachusetts is a highly unionized state and our students do extremely well on the NAEP exam. I do not believe that it's collective bargaining in

unions in, you know, in themselves that make it hard for a district to be successful. I know collaborative labor-management relationships in Montgomery County, Maryland are known nationally for incredibly impressive results and they have amazingly collaborative labor relations. On the other hand, I can show you places where I think, and it takes two to tango in this and it takes two to create a really hostile relationship. So is possible for it to work well and I am not at all convinced that unions are the problem or that tenure is the problem. Tenure is actually not part of a collective bargaining agreement. It's in state laws. It began in the 1920s as a way of protecting teachers from discrimination. No tenure, so-called tenure law, gives a teacher a job for life. Any district has within its power the procedures for dismissal and some places just don't bother. So, you know, I think, I think it's a very complicated story.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And now Louisiana has taken tenure down to one year based on value-added scores.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Yeah, yeah, and we'll see if the schools in Louisiana get better.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

We'll see, yes, exactly, when we look at the NAEP scores. We can make our predictions and lay our bets. Your friend and former student Morgaen Donaldson notes that you're one of the premier scholars in the world on questions pertaining to teachers, careers, the teaching profession, and again teachers unions. She adds that one can point to a number of significant accomplishments in your career including your widely cited book *Teachers at Work*. Tell us about your book *Teachers at Work*.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

This was, um, this was the first time I really systematically studied the schools as a workplace and I realize that there was, beyond Dan Lortie's *Schoolteacher* which is the classic, there really was, and his was a sociological study of the teachers, but there wasn't enough focus on the context of teachers' work. There are bits and pieces of it in many people's work, but I had this idea that I could better understand the teaching profession and the work of teachers if I really understood the relationship of each individual teacher to a context and what they thought of it. So, I think there were a 115 teachers in that study, maybe 125, and they were all identified by principals as being very good teachers so that I wasn't looking for the absolute stars but just people, the way I described it, I think, was tell me a few teachers in your school who really do outstanding work and who will be missed if they were to leave. It was a focus on what would you lose and out of that I selected a group of teachers in a whole array of public and private schools. So religious schools, independent schools, regular public schools, this was before we had charter schools so, the public schools were more kind of traditional, although some of those were alternative within, in that setting, and it was a wide-ranging interview from why did you become a teacher to, you know, what keeps you in teaching, are you thinking about leaving. But a lot of information about how they did their work, how they thought about their work... I had been at Brookline High School when I learned to teach. It was an amazing group of people and we worked together, we talked together, we watched each other teach, it was just an extraordinary place to learn to teach. So when I got to graduate school, people start talking about the isolation of teachers, I didn't understand it. I then soon observed classes and talked with

people and heard about it, where you know you say hello in the morning and when you get coffee and sit in a faculty meeting, but you don't really work with someone. So I had this sense that it could be all kinds of things, you could actually work very closely with colleagues or not and I really did, among all those teachers, hear the full range of stories so I was interested in what is it that encourages people to work together and what is it that keeps them isolated and, you know, that was really what I was after. As in virtually every study of schools that's done, the principal is absolutely key, on the other hand the principal can't regulate everything and to promote collegial relations among teachers is probably the most important thing that a principal can do and so that book is accounts of the teachers experiences and what I did was create a kind of framework for thinking about the school's workplace. What are the psychological components? What are the economic components? So there's, you know, a chapter about compensation and different kind of rewards and another about relationships with colleagues and another about governance and, again, trying to contrast not only the public and private sector piece which is a part of this, but also the difference that a school makes and that focus on the school just keeps popping up for me

#### AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And the school level is really where it's at would be your argument. So in terms of all these reforms that are being tossed around, especially at the educational policy level, what was, if you could you make one wish and reform a school, what would be some in the ideas you have?

#### SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Well, one thing would be to ensure that the principal, or a system principal or whatever the leadership team is, actually understand teaching and that doesn't mean that the principal has to have taught seven or eight years, though I can tell you when they have it's a whole different level of understanding about instruction and curriculum in the school, but there has to be kind of respect for teaching and some understanding about how complicated it is. Usually, with that kind of respect comes a recognition that teachers actually know a great deal about what will make the school work better and so principals who are really thoughtful about that rather than instrumental, you know, they have an inclusive approach rather than a kind of instrumental approach toward their teachers just benefit greatly from the kind of rich exchange that can happen among people as they watch each other teach and as they learn from each other. Isolation is a tremendous problem in schools and it's driven, not just by attitudes 'cause you can, you actually can have people work on those, but a lot of it is about the scheduling and the demands on people's time. They simply don't have time to do much work together and so there are ways to get around that, there are ways of pairing teachers, there are ways of scheduling people's time rather than just thinking, you know, about the teacher as widget to fill in this space or another to make the schedule look good, but not to think about what the work is that that's going on there. So the selection of principals is really important and, you know, in high-poverty schools often they are dealing with turnover teachers because the work context is often not what it could be and the fact that principals are often placed in the schools who have very little experience, they're new, the more powerful principals tend to get the schools that are humming along. If someone wants to transfer them to another school, if the superintendent wants transfer them, then it means disrupting the parents and those are often very influential parents and so there's a kind of lack leadership in a lot of the most challenging schools and when that happens it's very hard for teachers to be influential. I believe in differentiated roles for teachers whether it's in a career

ladder or, you know, you can release a teacher from one class and have that person do tremendous benefit to the school by connecting people who are working with similar children or by developing curriculum and helping people use it. There's so much, but you know that the schools were created for efficiency. They, one-room schoolhouse and then when you had a little bit bigger, you had one extra room and the rooms were just kind of built up and this egg crate structure that Dan Lortie wrote about and many people talk about is therefore efficiency because if you're in Roman strop, you just close one of those classes, so it's not at all designed to promote the interaction of people and with, one of the things I've been studying schools as organizations is that I've become very interested in other kinds of organizations and it makes you realize how bizarre this structure is because no corporation that wanted to draw the best of all its employees would separate people into little cells, give them their work, and then not give them any time to exchange information. So really focusing on, you know, those kinds of people things. We did a, there's a study, a survey study that was done in Massachusetts a few years ago, it's just been re-administered and has been done in a number of other states, developed by Eric Hirsch and it's about working conditions in it asks teachers, it's anonymous, a whole array of working conditions and then the data from that study are put on the web by school so you can see for each question by school what the responses of the teachers were if they get a forty percent response rate. I was fascinated by that because what you see is this great school to school difference. So along with two of my doctoral students two years ago we did a, we, we were able to get the data and do a reanalysis of it with some of the concepts that we had in mind. What we were trying to look at was what part of these working conditions really matter and there were two outcome questions that we focused on. One is a kind of Likert scale to respond to the question: The school is a good place to teach and learn. So, a measure of satisfaction essentially and the other one was whether I intend to stay in the school. Sunny Ladd who is an economist at Duke has done research showing that when teachers say they plan to leave a school they actually do, so we could take that and, and look at, you know, what are the schools where there's going to be a lot of stability and where will there be a lot of movement and what are the reported working conditions there. And so what we found was that, we were particularly interested in high-poverty schools because some people think that the reason there's great turnover in high-poverty schools is that the teachers don't wanna work with the kids, that they'd rather work with whiter, wealthier children. And, you know, I had interviewed enough teachers to know that didn't, that didn't make sense. Surely there are some people like that, but this doesn't explain the level of turnover that we have been seeing in high-poverty schools and so what we did was an analysis of the data from the study and we found that once you controlled for the demographic factors in these schools you found that it was the working conditions that determine teacher satisfaction or dissatisfaction and, and the working conditions that mattered most so I think there were nine of them that came out. They were what we call the social working conditions because number one was the leadership, well, I don't remember the order. I think one was the leadership, the principal essentially. The other was colleagues and the third was school culture, so they were all about how the people work together. Now whether the roof leaks or not matters because it conveys certain things to people about how seriously you take their work, but it's that part of schools that interests me, how, how we draw upon the knowledge, the talents and support people who have needs to learn new things within the school. I, I have a very strong view about the current reforms that focus on individuals and, and how do we get the very best individuals and how do we reward the very best individuals and how do we dismiss the worst individuals and the, the problem with that is that in any school at any time you have some people who are stronger in

some things than others. There're people with more experience, there're people with more course work in a particular area. In an elementary school there're people who are better at teaching math and others that are better at social studies.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It's complicated.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

And so if, if you can figure out, you know, how to draw on everyone's strengths rather than trying to find the highest value-added score for each isolated classroom you have much greater chance of improving the school. What this survey revealed was how important that is to teachers in, in finding time to work with colleagues, trusting colleagues, and especially in high-poverty schools where you really need to draw people together, it's a challenge to be working often in settings that don't get much support from the district that actually sponsors them.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Do they say anything about the ways in which the school leadership or the school in itself approached accountability and how they negotiated through that?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

It wasn't really part, there may have been a question about it, but it wouldn't have been enough to, to explain that. But we subsequently have been doing case studies in a set of high poverty schools all under accountability and, and really what's so interesting is how, how much the teachers are concerned about their students' performance, partly to keep the school open because these are schools that potentially the state could close and it has closed schools and in part, large part, it's about the kids. I mean these are people who really will stay at their school for the kids as long as they can. When they encounter a principal who treats them like, you know, little machines, somehow that they're supposed to follow a plan then they often leave for another school, but it's not that children themselves that drive them out. It could be a chaotic environment within the school and it's, you know, the chaos is the kids are outta control, but that's a whole school that has no set of understandings about how we work together here, no clear expectations. So the accountability is something, you know, a large number of the teachers in high-poverty schools have begun teaching since, you know, the late 90's. Accountability has been the water they've been swimming in, and they don't really reject it. What they, what really aggravates them is the amount of test prep that goes on and the amount of time that's spent on testing. You know, twenty days in some schools and also the very high stakes that are attached to them sometimes. Often you know in, in those schools and the, you know, statistically we're doing things now with students' achievement on these tests and with teachers value-add that are fairly controversial and, you know, there's a, a large and vigorous debate among people who truly understand the statistics and again and again the study by the National Academy of Education, a study by the Economic Policy Institute, by just first-class scholars say don't attach high-stakes to these tests, so I think that part of it is, is painful for teachers 'cause they see what the threat of that does. Now, at the same time, accountability has ensured that kids who were not being taught are being taught. I had great complaints about NCLB, but the one part of it I thought was really important was that every group of students counted and you couldn't come out with an average student score, you really had to be effective with all these subgroups and you could see

the effect of that within schools, people worry about who would teach them. So, you know that it's certainly not that it's all bad, but I do think we could be more thoughtful and careful about thinking about how to do it. The idea of turnaround is to my mind a, a very kinda primitive idea because it essentially out of nowhere there was an idea that we should replace fifty percent of the teachers in a school and there's, there's no clear reason for that number and I, you know, I call it a swap-out strategy. We're going to move individuals and what you find is that, unless you think about the entire school as an organization, it's no better and, it, you have a lot of disruption. So we're gonna learn a lot from what's happening right now, but unfortunately it's doing a lot of damage in some places.

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### Video 3

#### AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

In terms of your research on school leadership: Allen Grossman, your friend and colleague co-chairs with you the Public Education Leadership Project, a joint venture between the Harvard Business School and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Tell us about your work on this project.

#### SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

That has been so interesting. We, Harvard is a, a place that's notorious for something that's called "every tub on its own bottom", ETOB, where the schools historically have been very separate. You had to raise your own money, a school like the law school or the business school had very wealthy graduates and consequently had a very large endowment, a school like the education school, divinity school, or public health had much smaller. So historically it has meant that it's been very, very hard to create collaborative work across the university and so this was a program that nobody thought would really last and we're actually in our tenth year. And it really brought together the, Alan has worked in non-profit organizations, Outward Bound was his organization for a time, and so he's, he's on the, the nonprofit side of the business school but, you know, his, he has been taught all the business principles and they wanted to work with school districts and with school leaders and we know something about that at the Ed School and about the way schools are organized and I had studied superintendents. So, we basically created this collaborative project and, for, I think, we come up on our tenth year this summer, we have an intensive institute where we bring teams of eight from large urban districts to work with us for a week and it's a combination of teaching by the case method and out facilitating their teamwork and a variety of speakers and it's a kinda nonstop event. So Alan and I have co-chaired it and then we have faculty from each school who are part of it and in addition to that we, we work together to create a casebook of the cases that we taught and kinda tried to make it available in that context so that it could be used in classes for administrative preparation. And we're now working on a project where we're trying to understand and help explain to school district leaders, policymakers the relationship between the central office and schools. The question about how much control over school level practice should come from the central office is one that's very important to school leaders, and in the past there have been these competing answers. You centralize everything and control it and prescribe everything in standardized practice; no, that's a problem because the schools serve different communities, they need to be able to be responsive to the communities and they're varied in what they do so you have to be

able to have them have more autonomy and so then there would be proposals for complete autonomy within the district. You give the budget, curriculum authority to the schools and let them work. So, under accountability this has become very important, so we have been studying several districts, five districts, all of which won the Broad Prize [for Urban Education] so they have been recognized as exemplary districts and we've been trying to understand that question: how do they think about what the central office both offers and requires and what do they think about the schools and so we've interviewed people in the schools, in the central office and we're just analyzing data now. We're gonna be writing a book about that. So we work together in a lot of ways, but the thing is that we have been one of these collaborative group that has, has lived on and I think both schools and the deans and both schools realize that there's great benefit to this beyond just the, the work that we do directly with districts.

#### AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It's interesting also with your case study approach because that is more rare than common. You also did a lot of research on the experiences of novice or new teachers. Talk about that.

#### SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Well, this has been work that we started in 1998 and that's when I started The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers along with, at that time, a group of four doctoral students. I was, I had been academic dean for six years and I was going back to teaching and I thought I really wanna work in a different way with my doctoral students. I want, I wanna have a collaborative project rather than advising an array of dissertations about a whole range of topics and so I decided to, with them to start this project. They basically said we want to work with you, we want to work together, and we want to do something about teachers and so we spent actually about, I don't know, ten months in a just kind of informal seminar reading, I wanted them to read all the basics and looking at topics. And about that time my daughter had graduated, was graduating from college and she gone to liberal arts college and it was before the, you know, the technology bubble burst and everybody she knew was getting job offers for these phenomenal jobs in everything. And I was, I, she never intended to be a teacher at all, she, we have a video of her when she was about seven and we kinda interviewed the kids as they were growing up you know to watch that and I said what do you think you'll be, and she said, I think I'll be a poetess or a psychologist. Now, my husband, her dad is a psychologist. She didn't really know much about, she wasn't going to be a teacher, I think, that was the clear message for me. So she interviewed with different you know recruiters that came to campus. I bought her a nice little jacket to wear to interview, she told me recently she never wore it. But nothing really interested her, you know, these consulting management groups whatever and Teach For America came and so she signed up. And, at that point, I thought this is how children rebel. I am a professor in an education school and she doesn't need me. So, anyway at that time then I realized, okay, thirty years ago, I started teaching and this is so interesting because I never [thought] about another line of work nor did virtually anyone I went to college with, you know. It was some of my colleagues or friends in college, or college classmates went to law school and some went to medical school, but it was a fairly small number and we expected to be teachers for life, you know, that was the women's movement was very strong and so we were going to work and we were gonna be teachers and these other careers hadn't been opened up really at that point, so when I looked at that labor market and then the labor market of new teachers today I thought this is really fascinating. They can do whatever they want. Here was my daughter beginning to be a teacher

and I thought I really wanna know what her cohort thinks about teaching, why are they there, they could do anything, you know. Is it about teaching itself really and how do they think about this when their classmates are going to get jobs that are going to promote them very quickly, they're gonna earn a lot of money, they're going to have comfortable places to work, the photocopier machine will work, you know, all the things. So that was the beginning of it and we started this study, we started by interviewing first and second year teachers on from all our public schools, some were charter schools at that time, and, and really just asking all these questions: why are you teaching what do you expect, you know, what are your concerns, tell us your colleagues are, who'd you talk to, just all the same kinds of questions about their workplace and I was, we were hearing from people that they did not expect to stay in teaching and they if they expected to stay in education they thought they would do something else. Now this was, you know, 1998, 1999 - so many of them told us that they were going to become instructional coaches and that was before many schools had instructional coaches. They actually didn't know anyone who held that job but they thought that that would be the next step. They didn't see themselves being in the classroom for the long term and I just thought the public schools are not ready for this because they're expecting a generation like mine to come in and stay. You give me a job and I'll stay and suddenly we were starting to see they are not staying and they, even when they came in, they had one eye on the door, you know, so we were really trying to understand what makes a difference and what again just became very clear was that for new teachers if things didn't work for them in their school, they were gone. Many of them had no interest in looking for a better school if that first year or two didn't work out well. Some did but it had to happen at the school and it had a... like many of them had no curriculum and they, I, I was stunned because we had accountability in the state and these were all Massachusetts teachers at that that time. We have accountability, I thought surely they have an oppressive reading programs that they'll complain about or something, lots of them didn't and or they would say I have a math curriculum, I don't have anything in science, I don't know, someone showed me the book room, I have to go by the book. They got very little meaningful orientation, they had very little mentoring of any sort, formal or informal, although that did gradually change. Actually, within the state at that point they were required to have mentors and we would say so "do you have a mentor?" and first so many of them didn't and then the ones that did would say I have a mentor, yeah, I have a mentor. What do you and your mentor do? Well, most of the time I only see her when we're passing in the corridor and he'll say you're alright, so you're okay, right, so they were, when it worked it was magic, you know, people were very excited. But I've come to say that you know it's kinda expecting something to work in an intense kinda way that really depends on a match that schools cannot make and when you think about the divorce rate in this country you know and the effort that goes into making good matches there, we shouldn't be surprised when it falls apart in schools. So I really what, one of the things that we learned was that the important thing was not to have one person who is responsible for you because when that happens other teachers back off. If I'm Audrey's new teacher, then you know Jane down the hall might be able to help me but the way teachers work she wouldn't intervene. And I as a new teacher, I'm supposed to expect that you're the person who will guide me. What we found was that when teachers were involved in what we call an integrative professional culture, where the norm was that these are all our teachers, we have responsibility for our new teachers and for our students tended to be a kinda culture issue that went through the school, then teachers pretty quickly got engaged in how we do things here, who's good at what, you know, what are the questions to ask this person or that person.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

A very holistic perspective.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Yeah, then you get engaged with the faculty as opposed to being a, you know, a novice who is very limited in where you can learn.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

We can learn a lot from that higher education, too. In terms of measuring junior faculty.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Yes, yes, that is so interesting to me 'cuz one of the things that we learned was these people never have the chance to watch anyone else teach and sometimes they did in student teaching but again, it was kinda one person and the best induction program I saw was one that released the new teachers from an administrative duty, you know, cafeteria duty, bathroom duty one day a week, so one hour a week, to go observe another teacher and they had some guidance this person is really good with people who speak out of turn in class, go watch her. And it, it was just eye-opening and once you see all those people, then you feel OK, I can, I can ask, so I think about that a lot in higher education 'cuz, you know, it's, it's a challenge to get people to watch each other teach and yet when we do it it's wonderful.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It's wonderful, yes, and it's a time challenge. So, this work that you did, this research, this is from *The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers*, right? And this ultimately inspired your book *Finders and Keepers*.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Right, *Finders and Keepers* was based on these 50 teachers. We started with it just being an exploratory case and, and my former doctoral students would laugh at that because exploratory, suddenly their ambitions outstripped mine, they wanted to go to AERA and deliver conference papers and so we did fifty interviews. We divided them up and we did 50 interviews by, I think, it was December, and we had, of course, written a proposal for something we hadn't finished yet which is convention and so we then divided it up and we wrote one paper about the role of curriculum, one about colleagues, one about hiring, I think, we had at that point... Anyway, we had four papers, we were all co-authors and we had, each of them took the lead on one of them and then we realized these people are really interesting and we're interested in retention, so let's keep in touch with them. And so we followed them over four years. We do follow-up phone interviews and really we tracked who stayed, who went, why and it was very interesting. Out of the 50, after four years about a third had left public school teaching, about a third had transferred to a new school and a third stayed in their original schools, and that was fairly close to the national, it was, you know, a qualitative study. We chose the people, we couldn't see in any way as being generalizable, but it really did reflect that pattern and one thing we learned was that the people who change schools, who transferred were lost to that original school as much as if they'd left to become a lawyer. In other words, when you lose a teacher from your school it doesn't really matter if they're crosstown. That may matter to the district that they've retained you, but at

the school if you leave after two or three years you're just beginning to really understand the school, you're about to take leadership in the school, and so there's some very interesting work that Ronfeldt and Loeb have done out of Stanford about the organizational consequences of these kinds of transfers and students pay a price. So that question of, people always wanna stay is talk about the levers and the, you know, who stays who leaves the profession, but the problem is not so much the profession as it is this kinda rapid turnover, especially in the highest needs schools.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Now, is this book, was your daughter Erika part of this?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

No, no, she was what my students called the FDP, our favorite data point, because we would talk about these things and then I would talk to her and I'd say what you think about this and then, so she was kinda, you know, an outside voice on this all. All of the doctoral students had been teachers, so they and they were, you know, not many years older than the people we were studying, but it was a bit of a different time for them.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Sure.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

And so no, she was just the beginner that we talked about.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And you said that she went to the TFA program.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

She did. She taught in a community in California, very high poverty, high immigrant student population. She was assigned to teach first grade bilingual. Now, she had been anthropology major. She had done a lot of English courses, she had had Spanish through high school, she had very good Spanish through high school, but she was not fluent in Spanish. She used to say "I'm fluent at a first grade level." She knew nothing about teaching reading and it really, you know, alarmed me. So we spent a lot of time, we spent a lot of time on the phone. I went to my colleagues who know a lot about literacy, I got materials. Her kids learned to read, but it didn't strike either of us as the best way for her to begin teaching, for her, for her students. So she stayed in that school for three years and then she went on and did a master's in literacy.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And she's a doctoral student at Stanford now.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

She is a doctoral student at Stanford, but I think she taught for, I think, seven years.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

She was retained for a while. What is she studying in her doctoral program?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

She is studying literacy.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So she came full circle, back to my mom.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Well, now, we've got to say literacy is different than what I studied, but, yeah, that's been fun.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So has her experiences changed your perspective in terms of alternate routes to teaching?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Well, it, I'm very interested in alternative routes and as I said to you, I realize that mine was an alternative program, different, long, still two years, but in many ways from some of the same issues. I think, you know, I think Teach for America has been very successful in recruiting into education people who would not be there otherwise. Many of my students have been through Teach for America and, you know, they're amazing in their interest in wonderful things. I have always had concerns about a program where the expectation is that people are there for a short time. And we actually have done more in, and Donaldson did research in the project about how long Teach for America teachers stay and it actually is longer than most people realize and so I have, you know, I think that that program, I know, has grown enormously in the support that it provides for teachers, but I also think that it could do more to encourage those teachers to work on changing the school outside the classroom. The commitment is very much to their students and to their academic progress which is great but I, I think this turnover piece still is serious.

I mean it's, it's, it's not two years, but it's not five years either, you know, people aren't staying a very long time. And often, although they stay in teaching, they often change schools after their two years in their high poverty schools. So, and so that part of things concerns me. Teach for America has become the model for many alternative programs and they are often being run on a shoestring whereas Teach for America actually has tremendous resources and so some of the copycat programs are, are pretty weak. We studied a number of them, not Teach for America quite deliberately, we're looking at other programs, district-based, some university special programs, all kinds of programs. What was interesting was how attractive that quick route to the classroom was particularly for people who are changing careers and that the idea that they could do this without going through a longer teacher ed program, the opportunity cost, the financial cost so that were seen as a barrier to them. But many of them, we interviewed the teachers while they were in the programs in the summer and then about seven or eight months later, and many of them felt that they just really weren't prepared, especially the ones that were placed in the most challenging settings. Because what it, you know, the idea of alternative prep is often that you expect the school to become the support that the preparation program, you know, didn't provide. But very often the schools that have the most difficulty hiring well-prepared teachers are taking the folks who are going on the fast track programs and those schools just don't have enough resources, personal, you know, professional financial, to actually provide the time for support. So there's tremendous variation in alternative programs and I think the effect of them has been that more traditional programs have had to think very hard about how they expect

students to spend time in their programs, that endless education courses that are mindless or, you know, repetitive or low-level just are unacceptable. Also, that the clinical part of student teaching and experience in schools is very, very important, so I think more so-called traditional programs are looking more like some the alternative programs and then there are the teacher residency programs which the Boston teacher residency was the first of those and I follow that pretty closely. That's alternative but actually the first year of the program they co-teach with, you know, a regular teacher in the classroom and then have additional coursework and a lot of support, so the, the idea of alternative and traditional, it's very hard to say what's what anymore.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

'Cuz you're blending, right

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Right, they become hybrids on both sides.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yes, the same in our university, as well. You said something earlier about the principals that you found most effective in your research are typically the ones that had backgrounds in teaching and understood the complexities of teaching, so this question to you. Having a background as a teacher, how has that informed you as a scholar, a better scholar, a scholar with more extreme credit?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

That's funny because when I first went to Harvard as a doctoral student, I had it in my head that I would leave behind everything I knew. I mean, I hadn't not deliberately, but that, that was no longer relevant. And it took almost a year for me to realize that I was at a school of education, that many of the faculty in that school had not been in the public schools since, you know, either since they were students or many people teaching a year or two. And I started to realize that, not that it would give me particular credibility with them because I don't think they, at that time, thought it's particularly valuable, but that I had some understanding of what, of this place and these people that I wanted to study. So I, I started then to think back, you know, the schools I knew, the teachers I knew, it, it became, you know, like this golden resource for me of understanding. I, I do know that when I speak to professional groups it's very important to them that I've worked in the school for more than a little bit of time and I, and I try to make it very apparent as I talk that I know their world even though I, I know that I haven't, I haven't taught under accountability, you know. So, the other thing is just that teaching itself, I mean, there, there is this ridiculous belief based on value-added numbers that people get better for a few years as teachers and then plateau and you can see it happening. My explanation for that is, yes, you get better for a few years because you have your kids there and you kinda use your own resources to do the best you can to get better at it. If you're teaching in a school where you never see anyone teach, where the professional development is dry and distant, it's hard to get better if you don't, if you're not well supervised and very, very few teachers have good supervision so you kinda, I can understand how you plateau, but this notion that for some reason teachers, unlike any other professional group, don't get better over time is, is really absurd. Allen Grossman at the business school and I were talking about this once, and he said, he said that that's laughable, how could any business survive that believes that? So, I just know that in my own teaching, I'm much

better now, you know. Yesterday I was much better than I was thirty years ago. I'll, and so that part of it, I see a real continual kinda development just in the teaching part.

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#### Video 4

##### AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

So what's next? As a former high school teacher and administrator, you have continued your interest in the work of teachers and the reform of schools. You've written six books and numerous articles, chapters and editorials on the experiences of new teachers, working conditions, collective bargaining in the schools, the use of incentive pay plans for teachers, and leadership of superintendents. These were review here. So what is next for you?

##### SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Well, I'm not sure. We're still working on finishing up a current study, some papers that come out of that, that's more articles, and I have to decide whether, where that will go, whether we'll do a book on that. I tend to not plan ahead in a big way. Even when we started The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers which has lots and lots of research in it that doctoral students have done, and that we've done together, we had no idea where we were going. I think that I, one thing I, I want to do next year I'm, I'll be on leave next year, and one thing I want to do is do more synthesis of what's known about these issues. There has been a great deal of research since 2000 about teacher quality and the idea of teacher quality was just, you know, seldom mentioned before that in the, in research arm circles. So, I have been talking to a few people about thinking about how we might pull together what do we know, what do we not know because there are a lot of younger faculty members and doctoral students who want to, you know, contribute to this field but sometimes they choose a random topic that's not really connected or about which there's not much, I don't know, it's not something that seems even feasible and I think we can generate some promising lines of research for people. In our project we did this, so probably five or six years ago, we did a literature review that really just said these are all the topics and this is what we know and, and that has been, and here are some questions that are worth pursuing and I've had, it's been on our website and so a lot of doctoral students around the country have looked at it and subsequently told me, I, I took that question and I'm studying that. So, some kind of synthesis to, so that people don't really redo work that is not worth redoing, where time could be better spent really trying to figure out what's the next important question here. So, or something that we better, I'm not quite sure.

##### AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What impact has a research had of which you're most proud?

##### SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

I think that it's hard to nail down direct effects, I mean, I can, I know schools that have adopted programs that I've highlighted in, you know, I, think that probably the biggest impact has been the attention to teachers and the context of their work broadly. Working conditions for, for many years were, that was just seen as more what might be bargained, but not in the way of thinking about the context in which people work and how that can make for happier people, better work, better student learning and I think just broadly I have been able to, to highlight that. And, you

know, it's always hard to say what, you know, unless you have a great scientific discovery and can really trace it, it's very hard, hard to see that. I think I've probably contributed to a more open-minded view of unions among people who were ready to be open-minded about that and I have identified some programs like this peer assistance and review program that I mentioned before that I know work well and can be implemented successfully and I really concentrate on getting information in a way to people so that they could use it.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Okay, what impact would you like your research still to have?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Well, I think, and I don't think my research alone can have such an impact, but I hope it will contribute it, contribute to creating more differentiated career path for teachers where people, you know, I think it's unrealistic to expect teachers to remain in the classroom for thirty years, it's, we live in a different world. Our schools have to respond to that by having some people who become really the expert long-term teachers in the school who have responsibility for curriculum and instruction, in addition to a principal, that there's more academic leadership in the school. And, and I, I think that that has to happen, both school by school, by individuals doing it, but also through policy, through creating real job descriptions and, and requirements and assessments that give it credibility and give it some permanence and that I, I don't think we're ever going to revert in public schools to the old kinda one teacher for as many years as you stay. I think, I think we can't do it. Either the, the schools will just continue to just fail.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yes, old school.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Definitely old school.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Okay, here's a set of introspective questions that we have. First one, who do you believe has had the greatest impact on you and the person and scholar you have become today?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Wow, that's a, that's really hard 'cause there are a number...

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It can be lots of people.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

You know, I think as far as the research that I that Dan Lortie's work definitely did. And I never studied with him, I mean, I just, just revered what he did. I read *Schoolteacher* and I thought this is so amazing that someone understands what happens with teachers and I continue, I have probably have four or five copies of the book. When he retired there was a celebration at AERA and I was one of the people who spoke and then he sent us these mint editions of *Schoolteacher*. Which, you know, so I really find in that book any idea I think I've had for the first time, I'll find

it somewhere in the book and it'll be in one paragraph what I think... Certainly in that way, he did. Jerry Murphy who is my advisor and then was the Dean when I was academic dean, and I have his named chair actually, taught me to do qualitative research. He was a political scientist and I, I would have, it would have taken me a long time to understand what that was about and why, why it was for me and, and so that that was really important. I mean there were, it's very hard, there are a lot of people I have worked with, students of mine, colleagues, Pat Graham who is my dean when I was first hired. She was a remarkable inspiration and she was subsequently at the Spencer Foundation and was a great supporter there, so there are many, there are many.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What inspires you?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Working with other people. Kinda the energy of that and, and feeling like I can still participate in learning things that matter to people, you know, schools. I still am thrilled by being in schools, I love that and when they're terrible, I tear up, as you can imagine. That is very powerful.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What do you find uninspiring?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Simple-minded answers and kinda bureaucratic rules that I don't think are going anywhere, those are a few, yeah. There's a lot on that side of the ledger.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What is your favorite word?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Oh my. I'm not sure I have one. I mean, there are words that entertain me, but I don't know whether I have a, can't think of one.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Okay. What's your favorite curse word?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

I couldn't say.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Okay, what profession other than your own would you have liked to attempt?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

You know, I, I thought at some point after I was in teaching that I'd should have gone to law school. And that was when I saw that women were being recruited to law schools and that it really was an option and there is a kinda, I like logic, I like oral argument kind of thing, I like the side of collective bargaining that has to do with arbitration and, you know, that the statutes that control it. But I actually think I wouldn't have enjoyed it. I would have enjoyed studying it, but

maybe, you know, public interest law in some way would have interested me. My brother was an educator and he was an advocate and he was a very intense, confrontational, challenging person and he accomplished a whole lot doing it, but it became clear to me that, that my best mode of operating is not that. It actually is about engaging people in kinda the most promising things that are possible, I think I do better at that.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What occupation other than your own would have not liked to attempt?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Anything where I was very isolated and probably something that was very technical and in the sense of ... but I don't want to say anything I really would offend someone who has, you know, but anything it's very repetitive. I get bored very easily and that's been the wonderful thing about, about my, the opportunities I've had. I've kinda always been doing more than one thing. As a faculty member, you know, I get to teach and I get to do research, I was able to be in the administration for a while, I get to consult and that has travelling involved with it and I, I find that very exciting, I love that. So, you know, sitting doing something routine, probably be fired.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

What's your favorite book?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Man, this is what happens when you're in the Miss America pageant or when you're running for president! Let me think.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It's not about world peace.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

No, no, it's probably not about education in that that always feels a bit like work. I don't know, I've read a lot of fiction and I enjoy it immensely, I like poetry. I, I don't want to give you one title 'cuz then I'll think that's not the right one.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If you could tell President Obama one thing, what would it be?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Well, in education I think it would be: don't put too much stock in value-added and this idea of finding the perfect teacher and relying really more on these sort of, the ideal teacher kinda piece as opposed to building a school and I think, you know, I think that we are getting a lot of that right now. The Department for Education is promoting it and that has to be with President Obama's support. I mean, in general, I, you know, an ardent supporter of President Obama, but I, I think the problems with schooling are, are really complex and that when we look for a simple solution that can be applied everywhere its probably, you know, probably not right. I was very happy to hear him speak out about gun violence and about preschool education and so I totally

support those, those kinds of initiatives, but I, but I do think we are ought not to imagine that we can find a simple technical solution to what are essentially big social problems in our country.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Which contradicts everything that you've done your research, is how educational, federal educational policy and then the state policies trickling down from there, contradictory.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

One of the nice things about Massachusetts is that we've had some very enlightened leadership on education and although we have had a state test that is a challenging one, the MCAS, it has been used very thoughtfully and I think most teachers in the state would say it's a pretty good exam. So I, I think, you know, I'm, we have kinda pushed back on our new teacher evaluation law which, you know, it's year and a half old now, does not include using student achievement as a particular percentage of a teacher's evaluation and, you know, I was involved in that process and know what thought went into that and other legislatures have really been convinced somehow that you can use those data to, you know, decide fifty percent, forty percent of the teachers' evaluations. That's crazy.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

And in some cases trump the other measures, so it's a hundred percent.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Yeah, and especially if the other measures are, are, you know, haphazardly done which they often are.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

If you could have dinner with anybody dead or alive, who would it be and why?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Oh, probably my mom. You don't wanna get me started. A lot of questions for her.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Yeah, what advice might you offer to graduate students and beginning researchers who hope to make a contribution like you to education and educational research?

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

You know, I was, I was very lucky because I could pretty much decide what I wanted to work on and you know it, there wasn't, had to publish but there weren't these kinda, you know, very rigid expectations about what journals and what kind of article and what kind of methods and, and I have really been able to do the work that I wanted to do and I think... My daughter's graduating, you know, in a couple years and she would like to be an academic and I, I do look at the way the job is organized now, the pressure, the number of people who actually become adjunct faculty members because they love it, but they have no time to do research. And so, I, I actually talk with students a lot about this who are trying to figure out what they want to do and tell them to think very carefully about what makes them happy day to day. Because sometimes it's people who suffered writing their dissertations, you know, really they found it interesting, but they were

miserable during the time. Well, that's at least a third of your work is about that kind of work so you want, you wanna think about it. But I guess, you know, if you can't, if you can't follow the questions that interest you, with the approaches that you believe you've the most to contribute on, I don't think it's worth doing. I would rather be, you know, continuing to teach kids than doing that. I think, I think it's a hard time, to be starting out. On the other hand, it, just as we've had this massive turnover in the teaching force with, you know, my generation retiring, that's happening now at higher education, so we've also had this kinda bimodal distribution of faculty members and many of us, you know, are in the pre-retirement or semi-retirement mode, so there are a lot of opportunities coming up and I know we have hired just some tremendous junior faculty members who, you know, I'm sure have great careers ahead of them. So, you know, I, it's, it's not a period of no jobs and it was for a while and so there are a lot of opportunities but I, I, I do think that, you know, everything is becoming in, in public school, in higher education, being reduced to a lot accounting, to looking at how many articles, in what journals, what kind of ranking do those journals have, how many hits does something get and I, and I think that if you, if you're living with that and that's, you know, it's not where you wanna be, it could be very hard thing.

#### AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

Finally, when asked to capture the essence and nature of Susan Moore Johnson, Pat Graham your friend, colleague, and again the former dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, wrote that you are a supremely integrated individual with remarkable accomplishments in several domains. You exemplify at very high levels what we wish to achieve with our students wit and character. You are, of course, an accomplished scholar, that while you take your scholarship seriously you wear it lightly just as you do the extraordinary mentoring of your students. The principles you hold dear of integrity, concern of others, and commitment to improvement of society suffice your work. Your friend and colleague Allen Grossman writes that you are serious about your work, totally reliable, and delivering what you commit to doing. You are deeply caring for your peers and students and firm in your beliefs, but flexible enough to change after consideration of alternative ideas and approaches. You work hard and will not accept anything less than excellence. Your friend and former student Will Marinell describes you as having a terrific sense of humor, you're quick to laugh, and have a sharp wit, natural comedic timing and you can both give and take a joke well. He also describes you as a master of your trade, teaching, fundamentally it comes back to that. Edward Liu echoes that sentiment describing you as brilliant, wise, amazingly generous, loyal to those whom have helped along the way as well as able to engender intense loyalty among those you have mentored. Your friend and colleague Monica Higgins also highlights the personal and professional impact that you've had on colleagues and students alike, noting that some of your students affectionately call you SmoJo. Did you know that?

#### SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Of course. They think that I've never heard it before or that when they talk about me as SMJ that's another one. I, I, yes, I use it myself.

#### AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

She said we never say that to her face. She adds that SmoJo is more than just a simple nickname name, it embodies your presence at Harvard, demanding and respected yet nurturing and joyful, this rare combination of characteristics naturally leads to quite the following among students.

This is the common theme you have, these, the student following that are very loyal to you given everything you have done to impact their lives. Your friend and former doctoral student Morgaen Donaldson explains that in your teaching, research, training, and mentoring you commit yourself fully to the tasks. She adds that when she thinks of you, the end of E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* comes to mind: "She was in a class by herself, it is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer, Charlotte was both." You are indeed a class by yourself. Your friend and colleague Susan Kardos described two other, albeit, conflicting images of you. The first is Susan the giant, whose professional accomplishments and intellect are gigantic, adding that your abilities to build relationships, to design processes, and build communities, and to set goals and achieve them are immense. The other image is of Susan the fairy princess. It was graceful yet powerful, you're wise and magical, your spirit is luminescent. She's also pretty sure that you can fly. Onto your family, your daughter Erika notes along with Susan Kardos that in high school your debating coach called you a tiger. That nickname is still apt, you're tireless and fearless in working towards your goals. You believe in excellence, but you also believe in doing good in the world, in treating others well. You're quite a special kind of tiger and your son Krister writes that he is not sure if your most significant accomplishment lies with one single act or event, but he describes you as a wonderful and devoted mother and now grandmother, noting that you and his father have been married for over 45 years and that alone is your most significant accomplishment. Not to mention your commitments as a runner, he notes that five to six days a week for over 25 years before anyone in the house had ever woken up, you were out running. You have always had tireless energy in your personal and professional life. Well, there's no doubt, again in the words of your son Krister: to many people in the world you are an esteemed academic, a tenured Harvard professor, and an author. The fact that you have so many fans and admirers in both your professional and personal life is your greatest compliment. Krister adds that he doesn't know how you did it, but you never compromised on either your family or your profession. On behalf of all of us, educators, scholars, future educationists, educational researchers and the like, we'd, thank you Dr. Susan Moore Johnson for everything you do and mostly for being and working on all of our behalves.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Thank you.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

It's been a pleasure interviewing you and that's it.

SUSAN MOORE JOHNSON

Thank you.

AUDREY AMREIN-BEARDSLEY

That's all, folks.