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Avoid a tape deck tomorrow

My 1995 Ford Taurus — nicknamed Turk 182 — is nothing short of Superbad! I picked up the Turk when my last car caught on fire a few years back. I had my flaming wreck towed to the nearest dealership, told a salesman to dig up the cheapest car on the lot, and bought a battleaxe!

You'll admire the utilitarian flavor of the Turk. The front seats are broken in perfectly — and as long as you don't mind unidentified food stains, you'll have the time of your life riding with me. My tape deck is also impressive, even if the only tape I own is by the Eurythmics. Push locks and crank windows complete my ride...and throw my younger cousins for a loop. "Where are the power windows?" they ask. "At the end of your arms," I reply. "They're called hands."

No matter how much friends make fun of my car, I resist trading it in. The Turk may not be whiz-bang compared to leather-seat sporting, DVD playing, keyless entering vehicles, but it's reliable times 10. It starts every morning and is of absolutely no interest to thieves. Sweet dreams are definitely made of this!

I got to thinking recently that experienced teachers are a lot like my Ford Taurus. We're ultra-reliable, taking students from point A to point B without much recognition — and just like the Taurus, we've been American workhorses forever. Pull us out of the fleet and millions will struggle.

But in a world racing towards a rapidly changing future, workhorses need some spit-and-polish to keep up! We're not preparing kids for a

tape deck tomorrow anymore. Instructional practices have to change — and they have to change fast — in order to ensure that students are ready to succeed in a world without boundaries.

And successful change depends on collaboration. Teachers must collectively engage in powerful conversations, reading professional literature, and incorporating new findings into our planning. We must study student data to deter-

mine if our efforts have been successful — and value contention, which challenges us to find a defensible consensus.

Yet we remain isolated and reluctant, relying on a collection of comfortable lessons that are rarely questioned. Without out-

side review, there is modest room for growth and no encouragement to refine our practice. This just isn't good enough — and I'm often left to wonder how to drive change while respecting the reliable.

Do teachers need additional time or professional development before investing effort into innovation? Are we poorly prepared for a collaborative workplace by stagnant undergraduate programs? Will centuries of isolation prevent the nontraditional thinking necessary for redefining education?

Don't get me wrong — I love my Ford Taurus as much as I love my favorite instructional practices. Like trusted friends, both are incredibly comfortable. But someday, my Taurus is going to quit on me. And when I step into Turk 2.0, I'll probably kick myself for not replacing the ol' girl sooner!

The same regret fills me each time I see teachers turn away from collaborative work with colleagues. ♦



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