



(L to R: Peter Gabriel, Jeff Skoll, Ellen Moir, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Sally Osberg)

[Interview with Ellen Moir, Founder and CEO of New Teacher Center and 2011 Skoll Foundation Awardee](#)

Recently, I interviewed Ellen Moir, Founder and CEO of [New Teacher Center](#) and a 2011 recipient of the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship. NTC focuses on improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of new teachers. NTC partners with states, school districts, and policymakers to implement programs that create sustainable, high-quality mentoring and professional development; build leadership capacity; work to enhance teaching conditions; improve retention; and transform schools into vibrant learning communities where all students succeed.

Rahim Kanani: Describe a little bit about the inspiration and motivation behind the founding of New Teacher Center.

Ellen Moir: All of us have been inspired by a great teacher. My high school Spanish teacher, Miss Hayward, lifted my life. She helped me see new possibilities for myself. New to teaching and committed to helping all students realize their full potential, Miss Hayward opened my eyes to a world of opportunities. Because of her belief and high expectations for me, I was the first in my family to go to college. With Miss Hayward as my model, I began my career as a teacher knowing first hand that excellent teachers can change students' lives.

I went on to teach pre-service teachers at the university level, and became chair of the education department at University of California Santa Cruz. There, I noticed a disturbing trend. Brilliant new teachers were leaving the classroom early in their careers, overwhelmed and discouraged. Students were losing the best and the brightest from the teaching profession—before they had even reached their full potential. I became convinced, through my own work and research, that new teachers everywhere lacked support they needed to survive in the classroom and, subsequently, were failing and leaving the profession.

Focused on finding ways to turn this around, I established the New Teacher Center in 1998.

Rahim Kanani: Fast-forwarding to the present day, how has New Teacher Center evolved since its founding in terms of resources, reach, and results?

Ellen Moir: Today, New Teacher Center works on the ground in over 34 states, and our online e-Mentoring has extended our work into all 50. We are even working internationally, with Singapore and Finland, among other countries, inviting us to work with them. This past year, we have developed and equipped over 6,300 accomplished educators to mentor new teachers, reaching over 26,800 new teachers and nearly two million students across the country. As a result, each of these students had a more effective teacher, capable of improving achievement and inspiring success. Each of these new teachers now has the distinct set of skills, knowledge and dispositions needed to be effective, and the habits to continually improve the way they teach. Each of these mentors has sharpened skills and knowledge, a new and unique perspective of the school community and emerges from the mentor role as an even stronger educator, more likely to transition into a leadership role.

New Teacher Center has also had results and impact on the policy front. We've influenced the national dialogue on what teachers need to survive and thrive. Today, 11 states have comprehensive legislation and standards for new teacher induction, the federal government spends \$3 billion on professional development for new teachers and its competitive Race to the Top program favors initiatives that support making new teachers better faster. New Teacher Center has had a hand in it all.

We also help districts and states create ensure that they create environments that help their teachers and students succeed. Through the New Teacher Center's Teaching and Learning Conditions Initiative, our staff has surveyed almost a million school based educators in 12 states, providing data that can be used for school improvement planning and to support sound educational policymaking.

All this takes a great team and a great staff. From a handful of staff we are now a 180-person organization. I'm so proud of the talent and leadership we've been able to attract to New Teacher Center. These are the people behind this success.

Now, we are looking to do even more. I want to double our impact over the next three years. I want to reach more new teachers and more students in more districts around the country. New Teacher Center has had tremendous support from funders who believe in our work, and we continue to work together with the funding community to ensure that all students have outstanding educational opportunities.

Rahim Kanani: As a 2011 recipient of the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship, how would you characterize New Teacher Center in the context of the social enterprise sector?

Ellen Moir: New Teacher Center is a social enterprise. We bring a sustainable solution to one of the education sector's biggest challenges, and we have proven that our model works.

We want to turn around the current situation where underprivileged kids are getting the lowest quality education. Typically, the newest teachers are placed in the most difficult classrooms in high need schools. It's not surprising, then, that a third of these new teachers will not survive this trial by fire and will leave the profession within the first three years. Students suffer when

teachers leave. We're working to break this cycle of inequity and provide children who are in most need of an excellent education with teachers who can make that happen.

Great teachers are made, not born. By helping teachers move from good to excellent, New Teacher Center raises the capacity and effectiveness of the district's entire human capital system. Many of New Teacher Center's mentors go on to become school and district leaders, and our new teachers become effective earlier in their careers. As a result, students learn more. Every child in America should have an excellent teacher, and New Teacher Center is committed to making this vision a reality.

Rahim Kanani: What has surprised you the most with respect to what makes a great teacher?

Ellen Moir: What never ceases to surprise and amaze me is the power of teachers to change lives. Everyone has a story about a teacher who positively affected their lives. Like my story about Miss Hayward. And, one day here in Santa Cruz, I was having lunch with a large group of visitors from around the country. At the restaurant, I noticed a young woman kept staring at me. I kept wondering why, and did I know her? Eventually, this young woman plucked up the courage to come over to my table and ask, "Are you Mrs. Moir?" She introduced herself and told me, "I had you as my first grade teacher. You told us all we were going to go to college." She also asked if I remembered I bought her family a Christmas tree that year, and explained how she had gone to college and then on to earn a master's degree.

What an experience! Great teachers impact student lives and many hear stories just like this from their former students. Teachers have to be smart, talented, care about the children in their classrooms and be able to connect with them. Above all else they need to know their students really well so they can differentiate instruction for each individual. Great teachers have many, many attributes and qualities. A great teacher is not just someone who can impart knowledge. Great teachers need to connect with their students, care about their students, be able to diagnose their students needs, be rigorous, challenging and have high expectations of their students.

Teachers are masters of so many things. And, despite all the challenges they face, they remain resilient and continue to believe that all kids can learn. And they believe it is their responsibility, if a lesson doesn't go as planned, to reflect on how they can do better, how they can share their knowledge in a different way, so their students get it and are able to achieve. It takes a lot of different skills and attributes to make a great teacher and be able to lift the lives of young people. That's what's amazing, and that's something many people don't realize.

Rahim Kanani: And what are the implications of this learned insight if applied to the broader issues of teacher training?

Ellen Moir: Teacher training needs to be situated in the context of the classroom. New teachers need someone beside them who can model how to do things, like differentiate their teaching for different learning styles and student abilities. You can't just tell teachers this in a university classroom setting or expect them to get it from reading textbooks. Teachers need to be shown effective teaching practice in action, and be given opportunities to learn and grow. They need

rich, ongoing feedback on their teaching practice so they can reflect and improve. Even the best university degree in education alone does not make a teacher excellent. On the job mentoring and professional development is essential to turning good teachers into talented expert teaching professionals who can address the inequity in our school systems, and turn around student performance. This is especially true in already disadvantaged rural and urban settings.

Rahim Kanani: From a leadership perspective, what have been some of the critical challenges you have overcome or key opportunities you have seized, which significantly contributed to the success of New Teacher Center?

Ellen Moir: The first critical challenge was scaling. How do we package our mentoring and professional development services and materials in such a way that they don't need to be modified every year, but at the same time are flexible enough to adjust to a district, school and classroom context? Doing so allowed us to grow while maintaining our effectiveness. The second challenge was in communicating our work to a broad audience. It is in learning how to advocate for what we know works—the right way to make new teachers better, faster and improve student learning— while remaining humble and open to learning. Ultimately, I learned you can't be timid. You have to be willing to speak out while remaining open to discussion and collaboration with partners. Focusing on the end result helps: we are all here to improve student learning and help disadvantaged students to get the great teachers they deserve.

We've seized many key opportunities along the way, partnership opportunities and funding opportunities. In the last few years, we have entered the portfolios of NewSchools Venture Fund, SeaChange Capital Partners, New Profit, Inc., and now the Skoll Foundation, all after extensive due diligence processes. New Teacher Center is the only organization in America to have done so. New Teacher Center is also a bridge builder. We've partnered with other organizations across the education sector—labor and management, principal and teacher—to build teacher leadership across the spectrum. There was a huge gap between pre-service university teacher training and the skills, support and professional development teachers need to be successful in the realities of the classroom. Once we'd identified that need, honed our model, and started to communicate our solution, we could seize the opportunities to partner with school districts interested in developing their teachers to improve their students' results. Partnership opportunities have been key to our success. Seizing these opportunities underpinned our ability to generate a stream of contract revenue from fee for service that, along with funding from foundations and grant-giving institutions, has allowed us to grow, consolidate and integrate our business practices and to move from small to large.

Rahim Kanani: Separate from more capital and manpower, or other tangible assets, what are some intangible assets you need in order to be successful?

Ellen Moir: You need a great culture and a great team. More than manpower, you need talented, dedicated and committed professionals who can come together to live the mission and values of the organization. And that's what I'm proud of at New Teacher Center. As we've grown, we've retained a culture of respect for each other's expertise and talents, and we've retained a connectedness. New Teacher Center staff care. They care about each other, about our clients, and ultimately about those we serve: principals, teachers and the students whose lives we touch. In

addition, we hold high expectations for ourselves, for one another, and for our stakeholders. We know great teachers care about these things. As we continue to scale our work, we, too, must maintain these intangible, but critical, assets.

Rahim Kanani: As New Teacher Center continues to expand, paint for a moment a portrait of the organization's position—as you wish it would be—five years down the road.

Ellen Moir: I want to make sure every underprivileged kid in America has a great teacher and that there is intensive induction for new teachers everywhere in America, and especially in underserved areas. I want New Teacher Center to become a one-stop shop for new teachers for support and resources like instant mentoring and referrals to appropriate resources. I want our organization to play a part in recruiting and retaining more Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) teachers, and making sure these teachers have access to the high-quality induction they need. I want to make sure beginning teachers are situated in schools with outstanding principals who are turning their schools into excellent learning communities. So, I want to expand our focus on building teacher leaders, principals, and expert talented teachers alike. I want New Teacher Center to be known for helping new teachers become extraordinary teacher leaders and professionals. I want to continue to contribute to the national dialogue to build a better, highly respected teaching profession so this generation, our children and our children's children will want to be teachers. Mostly, I want to eliminate the educational inequities in our country by providing every child with an excellent teacher, regardless of the child's background.

Ultimately, I want to deliver on our mission to improve student learning by accelerating new teacher effectiveness.

Rahim Kanani: And lastly, how has your own inspiration and motivation evolved since the founding of New Teacher Center?

Ellen Moir: I've never felt more inspired and motivated. I've always fundamentally believed in the value of teachers and how they have the ability to change people's lives. But now, for the first time in my career, everyone realizes that teachers and teaching matter. People now understand that teachers have the greatest impact on student learning and know that we need to develop them. New Teacher Center knows how to do that, and it excites me every day to think about how many children we can impact with our work. Add to this the recognition we are receiving in terms of new partnerships, awards and funding—like the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship—and you can imagine how I'm more motivated and inspired to push forward, extend our reach and make sure every student in America has the best teacher possible.

Written by Rahim Kanani

May 25th, 2011 at 11:51 pm