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Since then, the AJC has cleared out its archives, so it is now only available in the form in which I originally submitted it to Maureen Downey's Get Schooled education blog.

Great Georgia Teacher: Angela Dean, a Multiple-Tool Teacher
By Peter Smagorinsky

In sports, a well-rounded athlete is often described by having multiple “tools” with which to play the game. The more tools, the more contributions the player is likely to make. In baseball or softball, for instance, a five-tool player excels in hitting for a high batting average, hitting for power, running the bases skillfully and with speed, throwing the ball with authority, and fielding his or her position with range and efficiency. Five-tool players can often be found in All Star Games and eventually in the Hall of Fame.

Although teachers these days are evaluated according to how high their students' test scores are, the teachers who sustain schools over time are those who approach their work as multiple tool faculty members. These teachers are the heart and soul of every school, the ones that students come back to visit when they return home after graduation and thank them for their contributions to the quality of their education and the impact on their lives. They come back to visit and give thanks to teachers like Angela Dean.

Young Angela Battaglia attended East Coweta High School in Sharpsburg from 1993-1997, where she played soccer. As a soccer player she lettered for three years, and as both a junior and senior was named by her coaches as team captain. The respect accorded by her coaches, and undoubtedly her teammates, is characteristic of how the people around her have always responded to her.

The breadth of Angela's contributions to her schools—for over a decade, Collins Hill HS and now Mountain View HS, both in Gwinnett County—is breathtaking, especially to those familiar with the time it takes to do any of her work well, much less all of it. Read about the degree of her commitment to her schools and communities, and let me know if the first thing you'd look at when evaluating her performance is her students' test scores.

Angela is a former athlete who has coached—in her case, soccer. She was the assistant women's coach at CHHS from 2002-2006 and then head JV coach from 2006-2012, after which she accepted a transfer to Mountain View HS. Now, every coach will tell you that without good players, you won't have a great record, and I know from my own coaching days that there's more to high school sports than winning. Still, winning tends to follow from outstanding coaching during practices and games. Did Angela win? Her career record as head JV coach was 58-12-7, with a Region 7 and 8 championship in 2009 and a second place finish in 2010. Surely she had talent; but just as surely, she coached 'em up real good, as coaches say.

Another tool that Angela brings to her teaching career is her involvement in the community. Angela has been the primary organizer of several events that have benefitted the Suwanee area beyond what goes on in her classes. She organized events in which genocide survivors from Sudan and Nazi Germany came and spoke to students after school and in CHHS classrooms as a way to help them get a more concrete understanding of these atrocities. She also developed, planned, and oversaw annual school-wide “open mic” poetry slams for students that helped raise funds for Haitian earthquake survivors, [Duchenne muscular dystrophy](#) research, the [Darius Goes West](#) organization, and an after school program for children of refugee families. Normally, after-school events are attended primarily by students who have a strong affiliation with school, but Angela sought to include students from across the school’s whole demographic spectrum, from gifted to special education, to help them share their unique views of the world through their poetry. The goal of this activity was both to raise funds and to provide a forum through which students from outside the school’s social and academic core could find agency through their voices.

Events of this sort promote student involvement in school, link the school curriculum to poetic forms that are youth oriented, help students develop a sense of community and school affiliation, and ultimately provide much-needed money for worthy causes. Her community involvement extends beyond these events and the organizational skills they require. She’s also worked, quite literally, at the grass-roots level, picking weeds and preparing soil for a community garden and cleaning trash from a cemetery in Athens, where she lives. She’s willing to do the dirty work when there’s dirty work to do.

Another sign of great teaching is respect from other teachers. Although still in her early 30s, Angela has established herself as an instructional leader in her schools. For the last few years she’s taken on a number of leadership positions on the CHHS faculty, from organizing a group of English teachers for collaborative planning, to participating in the Instructional Leaders Academy of Collins Hill High School, a group that works through reading and group discussions and peer observations to improve teaching throughout the school and county through cross-curricular collaboration.

The professional reading in the Instructional Leaders Academy is just one part of the ongoing learning that Angela seeks about how to be a more effective teacher. In 2011 she was accepted as a Holocaust Educator Fellow as one of 24 participants from across the country to explore and discuss Holocaust education in the secondary and post-secondary classroom in New York City. In addition, Angela has been a Fellow and Teacher Consultant for the Red Clay Writing Project at UGA since 2007, an activity she built into her master’s degree coursework after she earned her bachelor’s degree at the same institution. She has reciprocated by mentoring UGA’s teacher candidates during their student teaching, a key assignment that suggests a high degree of confidence and trust from her university colleagues.

This ongoing learning has involved Angela as a producer as well as consumer. She has made presentations at the annual conferences of the National Council of Teachers of English and National Writing Project, as well as at local conferences and at the Red

Mountain Writing Project in Birmingham, Alabama. More recently she has written instructional material that has been published in educational books by Heinemann, the field's leading publisher of instructional resources.

Many people who complain about teachers point to the short working hours and vacation time, without realizing how much time teachers—especially English teachers and others who assign and grade writing thoughtfully—work with students and evaluate their work outside class. As Angela shows, most great teachers also use their summers for professional learning. As a teacher of a good 165 students a day, Angela spends a lot of time grading student writing, when she's not doing all of the other things that make her such an asset to her school. At CHHS she also worked overtime as a mentor to students for both academic and behavioral performance, helping to keep at-risk students on track to graduate and taking time to discuss their concerns, study skills, interpersonal skills, and other areas that help them navigate school successfully.

In case you're wondering, Angela's also one heck of a classroom teacher. At CHHS she was Teacher of the Month in May 2006 and in 2010 was a top three finalist for the school's Teacher of the Year, out of a faculty of nearly 200 teachers. One reason that Angela continues to grow as a teacher is that she conducts research on the impact of her own teaching, focusing on adolescent literacy practices and family-school relationships. The recognition from her peers and administrators suggests that Angela makes a lot of contributions to her school, all of which are appreciated by students, colleagues, and administrators, none of which would count toward her performance evaluation if Arne Duncan and friends have their way.

One thing I've always found about great teachers is that they get frustrated when teaching decisions are taken out of their hands, and the curricular sequence and details are outsourced to a centralized teaching script of the sort that textbook publishers and other edupreneurs are rushing to develop in conjunction with the new accountability movement.

Great teachers want to use their knowledge to design effective instruction and teach in relation to their good judgment. In other words, contrary to the image of the lazy, overprivileged, overpaid, dim-witted teacher, great teachers want to work more, not less. Angela's approach to instruction requires careful attention to what her students need to know, and how best to provide them with what they need. This sort of attention requires her to consider each student as an individual with unique needs, not another assembly line product in the effort to make all students look the same.

To achieve this sort of relationship with her students, she spends a lot of time outside class planning instruction and evaluating student work. She also spends time outside class reviewing her teaching log to see what she could be doing better. On top of that, she's coached a demanding sport, helped to mentor students at risk for not graduation, created dynamic after-school programs, served as a faculty instructional leader, conducted research to improve her own teaching, and made invaluable contributions to the mentoring of student teachers.

Five tools? I count at least 7 for Angela. Take that, A-Rod. And Angela does it all without steroids. How do you measure that? Ask her students and their parents, and her colleagues and administrators, whose admiration for her many, many contributions to her school community have resulted in such appreciation and respect.