

Call and Response: The Impact of Knowles

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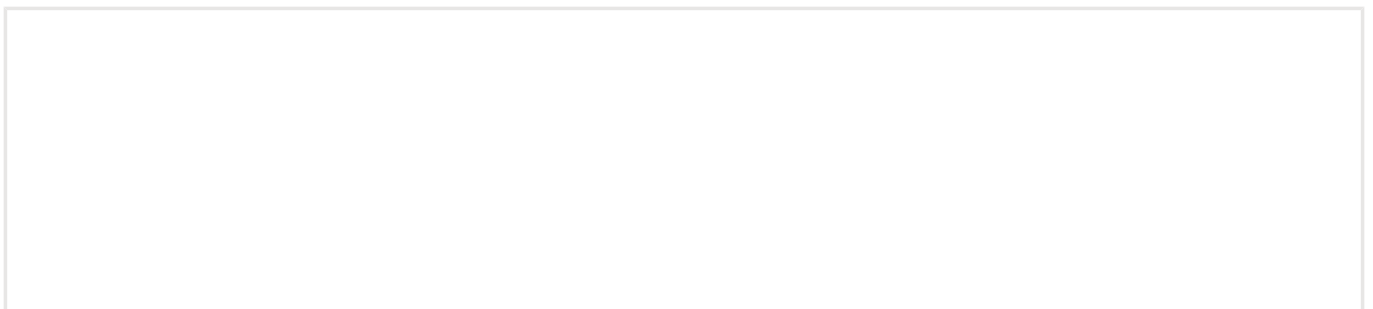
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We asked teachers in the Knowles community to reply to this prompt: “C. Harry Knowles, founder of the Knowles Teacher Initiative, passed away recently at 91. How has being a Knowles Fellow impacted your teaching or career?” Here are their responses.

I am incredibly grateful for the support, both professional and personal, that I’ve received as a Knowles Fellow. The opportunity to receive professional development and fellowship as a new teacher instilled in me a deep sense of hope about the potential impact my practice can have on individual students as well as society as a whole. I credit Knowles immensely for the joy I find in teaching today. Looking back on my first few years, and recognizing how I experienced pivotal moments and overwhelming challenges as a classroom teacher, has me feeling grateful to have been part of the 2014 Cohort of Knowles Teaching Fellows. Teaching is hard, and the Knowles Fellowship gave me the tools to reflect on and take meaningful action in the way I teach students science.

-BRENDA MINJARES, SENIOR FELLOW

Being a Knowles Fellow has impacted my teaching career because it has created a community of driven, passionate, and ambitious science and math teachers from whom I can learn and grow, and also with whom I can share my struggles and successes!

-EMILY BERMAN, 2015 TEACHING FELLOW

Being a Knowles Fellow has significantly impacted my teaching career in more ways than I can count. One of the most pressing is how the Knowles Fellowship, through Harry's and others' generosity, has shown teachers that we are valued as professionals. Too many educational professional development experiences happen at the expense of the teacher, or aren't in a comfortable setting, or aren't really beneficial to a teacher's professional development. As a Knowles Fellow, I've been reminded that teachers are professionals. We are worth the time and money. Through Knowles, I have participated in professional development in comfort (physically and financially), and in turn, I have been pushed to think outside of my comfort zone (educationally). I have learned that teachers can truly thrive together when they are shown that their profession is valued.

-KELLIE STILSON, 2016 TEACHING FELLOW

The first few years of teaching can be extremely isolating. In my first job, I was the only person at my school teaching my classes, didn't have a planning partner, and had no set curriculum. That kind of freedom can be nice, but as a new teacher it can also be intensely overwhelming! The Knowles Fellowship gave me a network of teachers that I could not only get ideas from, but with whom I could be vulnerable. The ability to meet and talk with teachers outside of my context was invaluable. The financial support allowed me to do and learn things that would have otherwise not been possible. I am the teacher I am today in a very large part due to this Fellowship.

-BEVERLY STUCKWISCH, SENIOR FELLOW

The Knowles Fellowship has been the most impactful experience of my teaching career. From project-based learning to student-centered classroom discussions, the professional development provided by Knowles directly and the outside professional development Knowles funded has allowed me to make major shifts in my pedagogy. The most valuable piece of the Knowles Fellowship has been the community—I know I can always find a critical friend to help me work through an idea or push me further.

-SHANNON MOREY, 2015 TEACHING FELLOW

It is hard to put into words how much the Knowles Fellowship has affected me. The knowledge I've gained through Knowles meetings has helped me grow more in five years than I could have imagined. As much as I thought it wouldn't be possible my first year, I feel confident in my classroom and as a teacher leader, having an overflowing toolbox filled with opportunities afforded to me through Knowles.

-KYLIE BERTRAM, 2015 TEACHING FELLOW

I can say, hands down, that I would have left education long ago if it weren't for the Knowles Teacher Initiative. The support and opportunities to connect with other educators provide me with the perspective and resources I need to foster the grit required to stay in teaching. Anyone who knows this job well knows it takes more than just commitment. Knowles helps me connect with the "why" I teach, which in turn energizes me to stay in the classroom.

-KELLY MELENDEZ LOAIZA, SENIOR FELLOW

It was through Knowles that I first started leading workshops and speaking to large groups. Through those experiences, I realized that I have something of value to share with the world. It made me feel like I had something to contribute. It was this disposition that helped lead me to politics, and now I'm the mayor of Montpelier, Vermont, running unopposed for re-election in March 2020. The community I developed through Knowles has been a family and a source of confidence for me

that has been important in helping me get to where I am now.

-ANNE WATSON, SENIOR FELLOW

This is just the tip of an iceberg of impact that Knowles has had on my life. Knowles has:

Taught me the power of collaboration

Connected me with a community of talented educators

Given me the financial freedom to choose job opportunities and summer positions that align with my teaching goals and passions

Taught me what it means to be treated like a professional

Taught me to be a critical friend and consumer

Modeled how to not just talk the talk, but walk the walk

Helped me to understand my privilege and learn how to teach in more equitable ways

-MADISON PARK, SENIOR FELLOW

The professional learning experiences and networks I've been part of as a Knowles Fellow have changed my life in so many ways. I am now an instructional coach, and I credit that to my experiences with high-quality professional development as a Knowles Fellow and classroom teacher (including developing the ability to reflect on my instruction and learn and grow through my own classroom inquiry) and my involvement in the Knowles Coaching Network as a Senior Fellow. Knowles provided me with the chance to be a [Knowles] Academy instructor and push

myself to lead professional learning experiences. Knowles helped me develop into a teacher leader and inspired me to also pursue certification in school leadership to make a positive difference in education. Knowles has and always will reinforce in me the belief that true educational change comes about through supporting and building up our teachers.

-KRISTIN MONGELLI, SENIOR FELLOW

Being a Knowles Fellow has been one of the most valuable experiences of my teaching career. I was exposed to a variety of teaching techniques, empowered through teacher inquiry, and trained to be a leader in my school and beyond. Above all though, it's the community of teachers, educators, mentors, and friends that has impacted me the most. I'm constantly inspired, humbled, consoled, motivated, and pushed by Knowles Fellows and staff. They've picked me up after a tough day in the classroom, celebrated when I had a breakthrough with a student, and helped me define why I am a teacher. They are the reason I am still in this profession. I am forever grateful to the late Harry Knowles for the opportunity to be a member of such an incredible community of professionals.

-KATE MILLER, SENIOR FELLOW

One of the biggest fears I've heard and witnessed about the teaching profession is being "alone on teacher island": having to create curricular materials by yourself, fight daily struggles with your own self-doubt, and problem-solve everything on your own. I would not be as excited and confident to battle these everyday issues had I not been a member of the Knowles community. Knowles has been the family I needed during such a crucial time in my teaching career—the beginning! Being a Knowles Fellow provided support that I might not habitually get in my place of teaching and I am so grateful. I would not be the teacher that I am today had it not been for the thoughtful community provided by Knowles.

-ANTHONY TEDALDI, 2016 TEACHING FELLOW

To say I can't imagine where I'd be in life without the Knowles Fellowship would be an understatement. Through the support of the Knowles community, so carefully crafted by the staff and supported by the generosity of Harry and others, I continue to believe that science and math education are fields worthy of investment. The Knowles Fellowship was, and continues to be, a constant reminder that educators are valuable and that we must continue to support excellence in teachers and schools. STEM education is a lifelong passion of mine, and the Knowles Fellowship fuels this forever-flame.

-CARLEE MADIS, SENIOR FELLOW

My career as a teacher would not have survived without the support of Harry Knowles and the Knowles Teacher Initiative! In my second year of teaching, I received a Knowles Fellowship that allowed me to finish my teaching credential and help me to transform from a teacher that just liked his job into one that was passionate about improving my students' lives through learning about physics and engineering. I am currently in my 17th year of teaching and still going strong. Thank you, Harry!

-CHARLEY SABATIER, SENIOR FELLOW

While it's hard to predict what would have happened if I hadn't received the Knowles Teaching Fellowship back in 2009, I think it's likely that I might not still be a classroom teacher today. Being a Knowles Fellow has impacted me in many ways that boosted my morale, skills, and motivation—often at just the right moment when I needed support to keep moving forward. In the first few years of the Fellowship, Knowles provided a close-knit community of peers and mentors who could empathize with my struggles, and share in the joys of being a new teacher. Together we discovered and swam in the vast sea of questions that we could ask in order to improve our practice. Even at this early stage in our careers, we were treated like professionals with something to contribute to the profession. We had deep discussions about science that, while not always 100% germane to our teaching, still made us feel connected to and passionate about the subjects we

taught. With support and advice from veteran teachers, we collaborated to design lessons based on best practices that also honored creativity and playfulness. (I'm thinking of a particular lesson that involved Britney Spears and Justin Bieber lost in a cave, trying to figure out how to use some basic circuit elements to light their way out.)

Later in the Knowles Fellowship, I was encouraged to start thinking of myself as a teacher leader in ways that validated my current role in the classroom and pushed me to explore the impact I could have outside the classroom as well. The questions we started to ask ourselves in years four and five centered on how we could connect with other educators in our building, district, or region to improve the experiences and outcomes for all students who walked through our doors. In particular, I remember investigating the support systems for students with special needs at a new school I had just joined. What I found was that there were many colleagues I could collaborate with to help my struggling students, as well as many systemic obstacles that the school still needed to address—and I felt empowered to be a part of that process.

Now, as a Senior Fellow, I am in charge of my own professional development and the degree to which it involves Knowles. I've chosen to continue participating in the Knowles community through my work with the Engineering Leadership Team. As a result, I get to stay connected to an amazing group of peers who continue to sustain me, both personally and professionally. On my own, I never would have considered leading a summer workshop for teachers about engineering design back in 2015, when I was essentially in my sixth year of teaching. However, collaborating with this group of Senior Fellows to create the workshop gave me confidence to try out this new role. We had a collective vision of what good professional development should look like, based on our experiences in the Fellowship. I also had plenty of practice positioning myself as a learner, and seeing that this makes for a more effective facilitator than someone who considers themselves to be an expert. As we've revised and refined our workshop and resources, I've learned a ton about myself as a teacher, and the trajectory I ultimately want my career to take.

I applaud Harry for recognizing that teachers (no matter what their level of experience) can and should be leaders and change-makers in their profession. It's had a profound effect on me, my colleagues, and my students.

-LINDSAY WELLS, SENIOR FELLOW

Being a Knowles Fellow has magnified the impact I can have on my students by growing my teaching practice. Moreover, I feel part of a greater, national movement of teachers committed to both professionalizing and strengthening the STEM teaching profession.

-HAI TRAN, SENIOR FELLOW

Being a Knowles Fellow has provided me with a steady reminder that teaching is important and my contributions to this work matter. Knowing that a person like Harry Knowles and the outstanding educators and staff of the Knowles community believe in me has given me confidence to take risks and try new things in my classroom. With Knowles I always knew that I could ask questions without judgement, that I could offer ideas without risk of ridicule or just being ignored. Knowles gave me a professional community where I felt valued, seen, and heard. And that has made all the difference in the world.

-CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON, SENIOR FELLOW

Finding my voice in education and the classroom: this is what the Knowles community has done for me. Teaching these past 16 years, I have found myself redefining what it means to be a teacher of science and more importantly a teacher of high school students. The experiences I have had as a member of the Knowles community have pushed me and helped sustain me as a teacher. It has given me the opportunity to think about teaching in ways that many of my colleagues have not been able to experience, regardless of years of experience. Knowles has empowered me to lead from the classroom and to be a strong voice in bringing educational opportunities to each student that I teach. The experiences

and philosophies that I have been fortunate to experience and construct through the Knowles mission have impacted my work and interactions with teachers and students beyond the Knowles community. The Knowles Teacher Initiative has truly kept me in the classroom and helped me to keep that fire going, which for many teachers without this experience, I have seen extinguished. It has kept my flame burning brightly and will keep it burning for years to come.

-KEVIN HENSON, SENIOR FELLOW

I honestly don't know where I'd be without the Knowles organization and community. I can't even say for certain that I'd have managed to stick it out in the classroom for nine years and counting. Harry, thank you for everything. For the grants that provided modeling materials, field experiences, National Board Certification, technology and equipment for my classroom, professional development workshops, graduate courses, attendance at professional conferences, summer stipends, and the amazing staff of the Knowles Teacher Initiative. I, my students, and my school community are indebted to Harry's generosity and vision. May we all strive for such a far-reaching legacy, and may we all be granted such a peaceful end to a long, full life. We will miss you, Harry. Summer Conference will never be the same.

-BRITTANY FRANCKOWIAK, SENIOR FELLOW