

New Educational Foundations

A Trans-ideological Journal of Criticism, Research and Review

Ten More Years of Dumdums: Dissenting Thoughts on Education Reform II

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The Rot Festers: Another National Research Council Report on Testing

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New Educational Foundations, a refereed online journal of ideas and dialogue, has been established as a forum for independent-minded educators, administrators, and researchers.

We favor no particular ideological bent. We unanimously reject the cultures of complaint and compliance; our audience will be professionals who question conventional thinking and the roar of the crowd.

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Schoolhouse Solutions 1.1: Tax the Stupid

by Wade A. Carpenter

[Editor's note: For a decade, Wade Carpenter's "Behind Every Silver Lining" column in Educational Horizons critiqued current bandwagons, often with a dash of humor. In New Educational Foundations, he plans a more positive approach, offering suggestions for improvements in education, still with a dash of humor (and sometimes satire) whenever possible. He will also be contributing the occasional full-length scholarly article.]

In a recent issue of *Education Week*, Mary Ann Zehr describes the implementation of policies in twenty-seven states linking teenagers' drivers licensing to behavior and achievement in school.¹ At first I viewed "No-Pass, No-Drive" with some distaste, but that quickly turned to delight as an idea formed which could go far toward solving America's public school problems: tax failure. This idea would spur dramatic increases in government revenues, with little risk to educational attainment or economic growth, and more important, with no political risk at all.

First let me say that *as a citizen* I am generally leery of expansive government, particularly when it impairs the economy of the nation, the ability of an individual to earn a decent living, or intrudes unnecessarily into private life. Usually pretty apprehensive of reform agendas, I regard government as having an "Inverse Midas Touch"—most everything it touches turns to [garbage]. However, I also acknowledge that government has its legitimate functions, most of which cost money, and I'll even go so far as to admit its occasional capacity for

doing something successfully. Also, *as an educator* and a loyal public school advocate, I will of course put my prejudices in abeyance and recall John Dewey's inspiring *Pedagogic Creed*, which articulates our common vision:

I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform. . . .

I believe that every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling; that he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the right social growth. . . .

I believe that in this way the teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God.²

Therefore, this article will dismiss conservative quibbles about imperialism, messianism, and *hubris* and deal with practicalities alone.

That being said, I still don't like the No-Pass, No-Drive laws for several nonpolitical reasons.

As Ms. Zehr notes, the practice of withdrawing or withholding student drivers' licenses for academic failure finds very little support in the research literature. Although there is an intuitive common sense and appeal (to teachers, anyway), most evidence of these laws' effectiveness is merely anecdotal. Indeed, Zehr points out that the one scientifically conducted study reporting academic improvement did not tease out whether the gains were due to the threat of loss or to the counseling assistance that was given to those threatened.

Second, there are humanitarian objections to be made. Zehr quotes Yael Kidron, senior research analyst for the American Institutes for Research, as arguing that these policies "don't address the challenges that prevent students from attending school. Barring a youth from getting a driver's license doesn't help the student get adequate housing, develop strong social-emotional skills, get counseling, or receive tutoring support that may help him or her to succeed in school."

Third, smart underachievers and their parents can avoid the whole treatment by opting for home schooling, which is much less vulnerable to government assistance.

Fourth, this practice foolishly impairs those kids' ability to enter the workforce and contribute to the economy (i.e., flip hamburgers),

and it does so at what must be considered a pivotal moment in our nation's economic history.

Finally, I generally have a reluctance to rely on punitive solutions in avoidance–avoidance conflicts, which by definition have aversive consequences already built-in, and most typically result in vacillation or escape rather than bankable improvements.³

To justify such a punitive approach to this issue, I believe, the benefits must be considerably greater than the educational, moral, or political hazard. No-Pass, No-Drive carries no demonstrable academic gains for the kids, and no monetary benefits for anyone.

So, in the spirit of Dewey's vision and the near-universal understanding that any business or institution is either expanding or contracting, and once it begins contraction it is on a slippery slope toward dessication, strangulation, or even extermination, I propose a better idea. If public school advocates insist on this sort of expansion into private life, let's at least do it right. I suggest that the IRS levy a 1 percent lifelong increase on the yearly income tax of every student for each F earned on a public school report card. If they won't be lifetime learners, they can at least be lifelong contributors.

A tax on failure (some might call it "the F-ing Tax," although that might not adequately distinguish it from other forms of revenue enhancement) would not hinder any youngster's ability to get to work, would not retard social development, and would not carry the cost of counseling or remediation programs. By proposing or supporting it, an astute candidate can please both public and private school advocates, and given low achievers' correspondingly low rates of political participation, that would be accomplished with very little political risk, if any.⁴ It is not likely to be automatically rejected as either progressive or regressive by economists—it hits neither the poor nor the rich disproportionately, just the dull and/or foolish. It wouldn't impair public schools' ability to retain desirable (i.e.. high-scoring) students, nor the ability of private schools to attract them. On the other hand, the stupidity surcharge could lower the retention rate of those students who either cannot or will not improve, while motivating intelligent underachievers who could substantially raise average scores to engage and do better, knowing that the financial penalties for failure would be lifelong, rather than merely a temporary, inconvenience. With the No Child Left Behind Act's drop-dead date of 2014 fast approaching, I suspect most public school officials would be delighted to eliminate low-percentage, recalcitrant students

who threaten their Adequate Yearly Progress. And by lowering the numbers of poor students, the Tax on Failure would help their former teachers look better under any incentive pay schemes that may catch the electorate's fancy. Similarly, it would discourage youthful indolence, adding to the nation's overall work ethos, perhaps even extending it beyond our immigrant population.

Furthermore, if NAEP results are any indication, the amount of revenue generated for the government from the irredeemably and unexcludably stupid would be massive for many years to come.⁵ Thus, helpful government programs, all of which would provide jobs as well as social benefits (i.e., votes and campaign contributions), could be funded without any danger to economic growth, and legions more public servants—especially teachers—could also be employed to collect, monitor, report, assess, and cook . . . I beg your pardon, *improve* the data. And as with most jobs in the public sector, the employees could be counted on to remain loyal to the party in power for as long as they wanted to keep their jobs. That would also undoubtedly arouse the enthusiasm of accountability advocates, who are always impressed by numbers, especially when it costs them little.⁶ Likewise, with clever tweaks such as tax breaks for A students when budgetarily feasible, it could increase legislators' support by indebting voters to those statesmen who lightened the burdens of successful, smart, and productive young people.

Frankly, I see no downside to a Stupidity Tax if one accepts Dr. Dewey's vision of the schools as a powerful force for social improvement. As with all education reform proposals, something must be done. This is something. Therefore, this must be done.

Notes

1. Mary Ann Zehr, "No-Pass, No-Drive Laws Spreading," *Education Week* (January 26, 2011), 1, 14.
2. *School Journal* 54 (January 1897), 77-80.
3. The classic work on this is Kurt Lewin, *A Dynamic Theory of Personality*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1935. I was startled to find one study suggesting a good shot of ethanol could at least reduce the stress levels. (See J.G. Mansfield, 1979, "Dose-related effects of ethanol on avoidance-avoidance conflict behavior in the rat. *Psychopharmacology* 66 (1): 67-71). Undoubtedly, that would come as good news to politicians seeking votes in the early-primary grain-producing states, not to mention some remote areas of my native North Carolina.

4. Educational level has long been understood to be a strong predictive factor of one's likelihood of voting. In the 2008 election, young people with college experience were almost twice as likely to vote as those without college experience (62 percent versus 36 percent). See Center for Information and research on Civic Learning and Engagement, *Circle Fact Sheet*. <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_youth_Voting_2008_updated_6.22.pdf>.

In addition, there is now some suggestive research linking genetics to voter turnout.

5. A recent report of bad news is available at <<http://nces.ed.gov/nation-sreportcard/>>.
6. Begin with *Education Week's* September 2004 issues sheet on "Accountability" available at <<http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/accountability>>. Further surfing will take you to seemingly endless complaints about unfunded mandates, discussing No Child Left Behind with special venom.

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Free Market Ideologues and Charter School Scandals

by Gary K. Clabaugh

It was a rainy day in May 2009 when the darling of the Philadelphia charter school movement pulled into an area commuter train station, parked, and then shot himself to death.

It was an act of desperation. Local authorities and the FBI were closing in. His arrest was imminent. What had begun as complaints by a couple of parents at one of his two charter schools had slowly but inexorably metastasized into investigations of theft, financial mismanagement, suspect real estate deals, bribery, nepotism, and conflicts of interest. Lurid stories about him and his subordinate's financial double-dealings dominated the TV news and splashed across the pages of both local daily newspapers.

I knew and liked the man. Originally a much-admired School District of Philadelphia administrator, he decided to lay aside that career and start his own charter schools. Shortly after the first opened he invited both of my graduate education classes to visit and gave them the royal tour. Located in a remodeled factory, the school proved bright, clean, cheerful, and happily inclusive. Parental involvement was widely evident, the curriculum was imaginative, the teachers content and the kids under control.

He stayed late into the evening to detail for my students how charter schools work. On other occasions he spent considerable personal time with me detailing his pedagogical and school business practices, introducing me to the school community, and proudly

explaining how he was adding to the school's financial resources by selling things such as uniforms and tasty lunches to the kids.

Rumor had it that he skirted the requirement that admission be lottery based, but I saw no concrete evidence of that. In fact, on numerous visits I never saw a single sign of impropriety. That is why, even now, it is difficult for me to imagine the rampant corruption that eventually surfaced.

I doubt that this individual set out to bilk taxpayers or that corruption existed from day one; but it must have been ridiculously easy to begin stealing. As is the case with far too many charter schools, neither the federal or state government, nor the local school district, offered anything more than a veneer of oversight. So it must have been tempting to take a little, and then, when that proved ridiculously easy, take a little more. I imagine that it was in this way that he slowly sank into the quicksand of corruption a millimeter at a time.

The City of Brotherly Love has been the site of more than half a dozen major charter school scandals in the past few years. For instance, the former CEO of a Philadelphia charter school recently pleaded guilty to misusing nearly a half a million dollars in public funds to finance her private school and to prop up her failing health food store and restaurant. Her charter school also failed to make required tax withholdings or pension payments and sometimes bounced employee's checks. She even used school funds to provide a contractor with an office in the school despite the fact that he provided no services for it. He was working on her restaurant.¹

One might think that Philadelphia is just particularly fertile ground for municipal nonfeasance, misfeasance, and malfeasance. After all, it is the city that repeatedly reelected a state senator who was eventually convicted of 137 different counts of corruption.

It turns out, however, that Philadelphia's charter school scandals are hardly unique. More than \$12 billion is now spent on charter schooling annually.² And a lot of larcenous people around the country are wetting their beaks in this vast lake of public money.

Consider that there are only about six thousand charter schools in the United States. But a Google search for "charter school fraud" yields an astonishing 2,890,000 hits. "Charter school corruption" triggers another 1,850,000, and "charter school scandals" results in 1,060,000 more.

Here is a sampling of what one finds when we start clicking on the above:

- This past February the Italian financial newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore*—Italy's *Wall Street Journal*—reported that the Turkish Gulen Movement is illegally using its 120 U.S. charter schools and education consulting companies to fund their organization and promote the teachings of a self-exiled Turkish Islamic leader, Fethuyllah Gulen.
- The *Hawaii Free Press* reports that the movement has also been laundering charter school money and sending it back to Turkey through excessive "consulting contracts" with Gulen front companies. The *Free Press* also revealed arranged salary kickbacks to the movement by 1,851 Gulen teachers who were imported from Turkey on work visas, even though American teachers were readily available.
- The *Washington Post* reports other alleged Gulen Movement charter school abuses including: dubious admissions practices; routing school funds to close associates; maltreating contractors; participating in rigged, Gulen Movement-created 'competitions;' bribery; using the schools to generate political connections; undertaking science fair projects fabricated by teachers; and unfair hiring and termination practices. And the Gulen movement's charter schools are currently under investigation by the FBI and the U.S. Department of Education for "illegal use of education funds, criminal conspiracy, extortion and violation of immigration laws. And all of this is a product of the largest charter school operation in the United States."³
- In Houston, Texas, the Prepared Table Charter School had its charter revoked and four administrators (a pastor and three relatives) indicted on twenty-six counts, including the embezzlement of millions of dollars in federal and state of Texas funds.⁴
- The Jesse Jackson Academy (with campuses in both Houston and Fort Worth) closed when it was charged that school officials had misappropriated \$3.2 million in federal funds.⁵
- The founder of the now-defunct California Charter Academy, a chain of sixty charter schools serving ten thousand students around the golden state, faced 113 felony charges related to misappropriating \$23 million in state and federal funds. The

charges include fifty-six counts of grand theft, fifty-six of misappropriating public funds, and one of failing to file a tax return. He faces a possible sixty-four years in prison.⁶ In the same case another California Charter Academy official, who also is a Hesperia, California, city councilman, faces fifteen counts of grand theft, fifteen of misappropriating public funds, five of failing to file a state tax return, and one of filing a false federal tax return.⁷

These and hundreds of other examples of charter school corruption are revealed when one begins clicking on those Google search results. Nearly all of them are a consequence of deregulation that has resulted in weak federal, state and local oversight. In short, no one is watching the store!

Greg Richmond, the president and CEO of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, an organization made up of the agencies that approve charter schools, testified to the House Committee on Education and Labor in February 2010:

Over the past fifteen years, the federal government has allocated \$2 billion to support the creation of new charter schools. . . . Yet during that same time, the federal government has invested almost nothing, less than \$2 million, or one-tenth of one percent, to ensure that those schools are held to high standards and properly monitored by a competent authorizing agency. It is as if the federal government had spent billions for new highway construction, but nothing to put up guardrails along the sides of those highways.⁸

How has this neglect come to pass? It has its primary origins in the actions of politicians who uncritically embrace the self-perpetuating worldview that free market economics is the only possible salvation for our public schools. For some this free market mantra has evolved into a self-sealing worldview that has its very own gods, heroes, and myths. "Only the cleansing fire of free enterprise unfettered by regulations can save us," they say. One can only wonder what it would take to get them to change their mind?

Admittedly, an unknown number of these "enthusiastic" free market politicians aren't really true believers. They just pretend to be to get votes and open the public purse to their campaign contributors. But that doesn't make any difference when it comes to their "reasons" for supporting a free market approach to school "reform."

Let parents choose their children's school and things will inevitably improve, they say. But will they?

Consider recent events in Ohio. In spite of prior statewide charter school corruption of epic proportions, House Republicans have set out to emasculate already weak charter school regulation. Blinkered by ideology and incapable of humility, they propose giving charter school operators carte blanche and then protecting them from the consequences of any misdeeds that might transpire.

Sound like an exaggeration? The *Columbus Dispatch* reports this proposed legislation's key features:

- Specifies that funds paid to the operator by the school not be considered public funds.
- Allows for-profit entities to set up schools through the Department of Education without a sponsor.
- Permits any of these entities to sponsor up to one hundred schools.
- Permits a school's governing authority to delegate any or all of its rights and responsibilities to the operator.
- Requires a governing authority to give one hundred eighty days' notice to operators before terminating a contract, and requires the school to offer the operator the chance to renew its contract before seeking another operator.
- Makes the renewal of a contract between a charter school and its sponsor subject to approval of the school operator.
- Allows "entities" and "groups of individuals" to form charter schools as for-profit corporations.

Apparently these Ohio Republicans can't imagine how this could go wrong. But Terry Ryan of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a sponsor of seven Buckeye state charter schools, can. According to the *Dispatch*, "Ryan says that this legislation will take Ohio back to the 'chaos' of the early 2000s, when then-state Auditor Jim Petro issued a blistering report of the Department of Education's performance in overseeing charter schools."⁹

Charter school scandals would hardly surprise traditional Christians, who believe that man is in rebellion against God and is fundamentally flawed. Those who know their history also find such

corruption quite unremarkable. Historic events bear witness to what happens when free market ideology frees greed:

- In the 1860s lack of oversight led to rampant Civil War profiteering and shoddy war supplies. In fact guns so procured sometimes blew the thumbs off of the soldiers who fired them.
- In 1873 the type of free market worshipped by right-wing ideologues led to dicey loans by greedy bankers and the worst economic collapse of the nineteenth century.
- In 1929 laissez-faire government policies helped to bring about Black Thursday and the Great Depression.
- In the 1980's Congress and President Reagan deregulated the savings and loan industry. Many of them subsequently made reckless loans and went bankrupt. Taxpayers had to foot the bill.
- In 1999 Congress and President Clinton repealed the banking and investment regulations enacted to prevent another Great Depression. Resultant abuses and excesses helped spawn the current Great Recession.

Now, as the November elections approach, both President Obama and Mitt Romney have jumped aboard the school-deregulation train by promising ever more charter schools. In the end, maybe it will be worth the inevitable increase in fraud and corruption to gain the advantages charter schools offer. Just remember that research suggests consistently superior academic results are not one of them. Sure, *some* charters get better results than some traditional public schools—at least as measured by standardized tests. But some traditional public schools test better than *some* charter schools too. And when we compare overall test results for both type schools, there is no clear-cut winner.¹⁰ So whatever advantages the increase in charter schools offers, do not count on improved learning being one of them.

What, then, can we count on as charter schools proliferate? Well, if the past is prologue (and in this case it almost certainly is) we can count on a proportional increase in public corruption and cronyism. That offers a brighter future for unemployed relatives of well-positioned politicians, as well as assorted bunko artists, flim-flam men, confidence tricksters, and defrocked storefront preachers. No longer will they need to sell the equivalent of a boy's band to the right kind of parents in River City. They can just set up a taxpayer-financed,

deregulated, charter “public” school and feed off the gullibility of the public.

Notes

1. Chris Satullo, “Former New Media Technology Charter School CEO Pleads Guilty to Fraud Scheme,” *Newsworks*, January 20, 2012, <http://www.newsworks.org/index.php/local/item/32941-new-media>.
2. Center for Education Reform, K-12 Facts, http://www.edreform.com/Fast_Facts/K12_Facts/.
3. Sharon Higgins, “Largest Charter Network in U.S.: Schools Tied to Turkey,” *Washington Post*, March 27, 2012, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/largest-charter-network-in-us-schools-tied-to-turkey/2012/03/23/>.
4. Ed.gov, U.S. Department of Education, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oig/invtreports/tx072004.html>.
5. Jennifer Radcliffe, “State Says Jesse Jackson Academy Owes \$3.2 Million,” *Houston and Texas News*, December 4, 2008, <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/6147652.html#ixzz1NEMWuNbT>.
6. “Two Charter Schools Are Shut in County,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 12, 2004.
7. “More Delays in Charter Academy Trial,” *Hesperia* (Calif.) *Star*, April 14, 2011.
8. Testimony before the House Committee on Education and Labor H.R. 4330, the All Students Achieving through Reform Act of 2009, http://republicans.edlabor.house.gov/UploadedFiles/2.24.10_richmond.pdf.
9. Jim Siegel, “Charter Backer Says House Proposal Weakens Oversight,” *Columbus Dispatch*, April 30, 2011, http://www.dispatch.com/live/content/local_news/stories/2011/04/30/charter-backer-attacks-rules.html
10. Amanda Paulson, “Study: On Average, Charter Schools Do No Better Than Public Schools,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 29, 2010, p. 1.

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The Persistent Purpose of Schooling: Institutionalizing Conscience

by Edward G. Rozycki

Those who are too lazy and comfortable to think for themselves and be their own judges obey the law. Others sense their own laws within them.

—Hermann Hesse (1919)

Introduction

Suppose research showed that teachers who permitted their elementary school students to exhibit persistent back-biting, bullying, and bigoted behavior received superior results on standardized tests. (We can imagine our more entrepreneurial confreres touting "the 3-B method."¹) Nonetheless, would many parents want to subject their kids to such persistent abuse, even though math and reading achievement improved?²

Legality (or "following the rules") and morality are not the same. They are somewhat complexly related, independent concepts. What is illegal ("breaks the rules") is not necessarily immoral. What is not immoral is not necessarily legal ("following the rules"). Some common, possibly controversial or situation specific, examples illustrate these distinctions:

	Legal	Not Legal (-ly relevant: sometimes meant as "illegal")	Illegal	Not Illegal
Moral	Showing your driver's license to the officer who pulled you over.	Allowing 15-year-olds to drink wine during a religious ceremony	Allowing 15-year-olds to drink wine during a religious ceremony	Giving to charity.
Not Moral (-ly relevant: sometimes meant as "immoral")	Trumping spades in pinochle	Gambling Throwing bean-balls	Winning at poker by raising the bid "too high" (in an illegal game.)	Brushing your teeth twice a day.
Immoral	Jim Crow Laws	Ribaldry	Murder	Gambling
Not Immoral (permissible, but does not equal "moral")	Late payment	Gossiping about a neighbor	Fishing out of season	Getting drunk at home.

Chart 1

The chart gives us some insight why kids and their parents—who normally have no sense of the school's functional priorities—often find educator concerns "precious," if not bizarre.

The fact is that in everyday life kids will confront situations—for example, fining people for fishing out of season (it is illegal)—without being expected to feel or believe that some moral offense has been committed. Such conundrums only support their inclination to take school preachments conflating rule breaking (legality) with moral offense with more than a grain of salt.

It is an important function of many kinds of schooling to conflate the distinctions between morality and legality in the minds of its pupils, so that the importunities of the State (or of the Authorities) will be taken as the importunities of Deity, a portent of unspecified disaster. (Consider school kids' admonishment one to another, "You're gonna get in trouble!"³)

Nonetheless, public disdain for "school morality" has reached the point that parents tend to dismiss cheating as a reason for lowering grades and many don't think that plagiarism should be treated as an offense.⁴

Authority versus Truth

Textbooks are notorious carriers of NoThink. Their publishers find it more convenient to pay a penalty rebate to their customers, school systems, for including mistakes than to recall the texts and

make editorial changes. Communally unpleasant possibilities—e.g., that the Cherokees were cheated out of their lands in Georgia—are expurgated before publication, or the texts are just not bought.⁵

Textbooks also possess a second attraction by helping to hold down school expenditures. Despite their purchase being, on the average, about one percent of the school budget, they can last for years and years, since they are little read. And because few in authority in the school district are likely to care much about the contents—after all, the books were chosen from an approved list—the books are impervious to obsolescence.

Textbooks may be considered authoritative, but what is authoritative is not necessarily true: it may well be false. And what is not authoritative—e.g., external reading, new shows, documentaries—is not necessarily false.

Let's consider a chart similar to that provided above for legality and morality. It will not really be contrastable, since truth is normally taken to concern accuracy of description, but authoritativeness is taken to be a judgment of institutional acceptability, or dominance.⁶

	Authoritative	Not Authoritative (-ly relevant: oftimes meaning "Unauthoritative")	Unauthoritative	Not Unauthoritative
True	The US Constitution guarantees no right to education. —Supreme Court	In base 10, 1+1=2	"My cousin confided to me that he's in the CIA"	"My history professor claims he has evidence that Ben Franklin was a British spy?"
Re: Truth, (not relevant or undecidable)	This shall be our systems history text.	?	?	?
False	This history text is adequate for our students.	In base 10, 1+1=3	"My cousin confided to me that he's in the CIA"	"My history professor claims he has evidence that Ben Franklin was a British spy?"
Not False (undecidable?)	?	?	?	?

Chart 2

The point of school socialization is to seduce, persuade, or coerce kids into demoting their personal experience as a touchstone of truth: to make it subordinate to the organizationally recognized and therefore authoritative truths of the school.

Teachers, however, are reminded daily that class work and schoolbooks are not about truth. Class interruptions by the administration set the priorities: what is primary is smooth organizational functioning.

Kids learn soon that socialization, good behavior, is of primary concern, not so much academic achievement. Worry about testing is a façade, an invitation to talk about academics with stern-faced solemnity, but seldom with seriousness.

Yet there is irony here: our multi-ethnic, multireligious roots work to seriously restrict the authority of the public schools to narrow intellectual pursuits within the school building. Many educators, though, insist on introducing something called “multiculturalism” into the classroom in ever-greater proportion, without considering what effect that might have on conceptions of authority or truth necessary to the schooling process.

What Is Truth?

Let’s not jump to the conclusion, however, that Truth is to be found in our personal, individual experience. That is wishful thinking, a long tradition of which has dimmed the insights of many an educational theorist.

Here it is: a belief is reasonably acceptable as “true” if it results from our personal experience tested critically—usually in a communal context—against the experiences of others whose sincerity we feel we can trust. (To invoke a mathematical metaphor: “Truth”—or “Reality”—indicates a set of limit points. By using certain self-correcting procedures, we can approach some of them empirically, but never actually reach them. How we can tell we are getting closer is a discussion for another day.)

Even those who believe that they speak directly to God must (may?) concede that they personally are fallible and must base their faith on the presumption that whom they talk with has been correctly identified. Such presumptions do not get us to some kind of “naked hold” on Truth or a “direct apprehension” of Reality.⁷

Conclusions

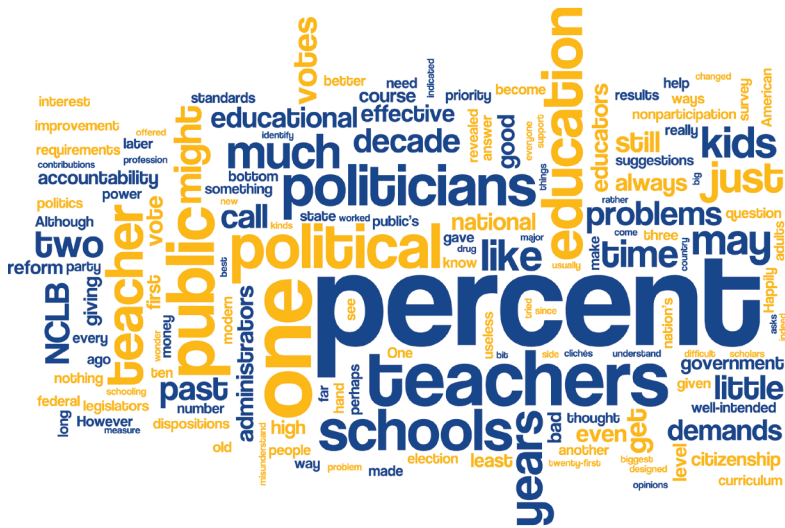
To paraphrase someone whose identity lies beyond my ever-shortening recall, “When we are children, we think like children. To become adults, we have to think like adults.” Schooling takes us

from the family and inducts us further into group life, its taboos and terrors as well as its joys and blandishments. Schooling accompanies the recently whelped beast on the path to becoming more fully human.

That is why schooling is not necessarily, and often not, frequently, education. Education takes us beyond mere allegiance to received authority, to critical acknowledgment that we ourselves have a part in determining what is authoritative and true.

Notes

1. This might be celebrated as a revival, e.g., Werner Erhard's "est for Kids." (This comment is based on conversations with est participants in the 1980s.—EGR)
2. Almost three decades ago, John Goodlad found that parents as well as students were not anywhere near as interested in intellectual goals as in personal goals. See *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 62–69. To judge by parental complaints about NCLB, this hasn't changed much.
3. A source, perhaps, of middle-class free-floating anxiety: like the taunt, *nyaah - nyaah - nyaah - nyaah - nyaah*, a warning so standardized that it has its own melody.
4. See Edward G. Rozycki, "Preventing Cheating: Transforming Educational Values," available at <http://www.newfoundations.com/EGR/Transformation.html>.
5. See Gary K. Clabaugh, "Textbooks and True Believers," available at <http://www.newfoundations.com/Clabaugh/CuttingEdge/Textbooks.html>, for one teacher's story of encounter with local school realities.
6. Something has to be pronounced as "authoritative" via some, even informal, ceremony of recognition. Authoritativeness has what philosophers call a "performative" aspect to it. That something is true is generally not taken to be merely a matter of human decision to accept it as such. Imagine someone saying, "When I and members of my club come to a red light, we just rebaptize it as "green" and proceed through." They risk more than just a ticket.
7. See Edward G. Rozycki, "Questionable Assumptions in Social Decision Making," available at <http://www.newfoundations.com/EGR/FalsePresupp.html>.



Ten Years of Dumdums: Dissenting Thoughts on Education Reform II

by Wade A. Carpenter

I believe that . . . the teacher always
is the prophet of the true God and the
usher in of the true kingdom of God.

—John Dewey¹

Shut up, ye saints of God!
His kingdom He will bring
Whene'er He will so just sit still,
You cannot do a thing!

—spoof of "Rise Up, Ye Saints of God"²

HAPPILY, BOTH DEWEY'S MESSIANIC pretensions
and the Lamé Doc's false humility miss the mark.

Schoolteachers are not likely to usher in The Kingdom all by our lonesomes. Nonetheless, politics and red tape haven't totally neutered our profession yet; we are still able to accomplish feats of brilliance and beauty.

But won't be able to do so much longer unless we can stop our political leaders from corrupting us. Certainly educators have long faced problems of pedagogy, inequality, curriculum, culture, drug abuse, poverty, parental apathy, student misbehavior, et cetera, et cetera, and good people can still disagree over how to solve them. But events of the past decade, from the NCLB disaster to the Atlanta and Philadelphia cheating scandals, have clearly revealed the root of most of our problems. The partisanship and budgetary brinkmanship of 2011 made the situation unmistakable, so it's time educators started pointing fingers (your choice as to which one): The underlying problems of American public education are political, and more specifically, politicians. It's not surprising that for over a decade politicians have directed the public's opprobrium onto educators through a sustained campaign of teacher bashing.³ The likelihood that everybody has had at least one bad teacher at some time makes that storyline plausible. But what astonishes me is that we ourselves have believed them! The past few months of appalling misconduct in our nation's capital have shown us the true character of our representatives: We have met the enemy, and they is them.

From Silver Bullets to Dum-Dums

A decade or so ago I argued in *Phi Delta Kappan* that the Kappan/Gallup Poll's evidence showed that the previous decade's educational reform efforts—"ten years of silver bullets"—had been little more than a loud misfire.⁴ I offered a critique of research and implementation, and a few suggestions. My criticisms were generally charitable: I thought most had been good ideas from well-intended scholars, but inadequately researched and unevenly executed. Since then, the weaknesses of educational research have changed little. However, several of my suggestions have been implemented—though not in ways I'd endorse.

For instance, I suggested a moratorium on K-12 reform and a total rewrite of teacher education. Since then, we have seen quite

a number of changes in teacher education programs, imposed largely to impress accrediting agencies. While some have been helpful, accreditor and administrative demands for datagathering have become so burdensome that one might call it *databoarding*, and I must confess to a (tiny) bit of sympathy for Guantanamo detainees. One revealing example is the current obsession over "teacher dispositions." Character and judgment are, of course, rather difficult to measure, so "dispositions" and politically correct clichés seem to satisfy our accreditors nicely. But intuitively, it seems silly to spend time quantifying dispositions and clichés. A typical one for teacher ed students might be "I believe every child can learn." Well, of course they can. But that begs questions like what *should* they learn, and to what levels of mastery? Supposedly, "standards" will answer that at the K-12 level. But what if those standards are a cakewalk for some kids (and hence, stultifyingly boring), and for others a useless load of gobbledygook? Holding everyone to those standards holds back the advantaged and may hold down the disadvantaged.⁵

Likewise, since the *Kappan* article appeared we have had a near-moratorium on silver bullets at the K-12 level. There has only been one effort really worth discussing, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) which has delivered a shattering volley of dum-dumshollow project(ile)s that leave a big hole. I had suggested "zero-sum reform": that for every new duty imposed on teachers, a comparable burden should be removed. NCLB did address teacher overloading, but did so by addition rather than subtraction. My most positive interpretation of NCLB is that it attempted to lighten teachers' burdens by focusing us on academics and de-emphasizing the other crosses we've borne ever since Dr. Dewey's unfortunate descent into megalomania. Unfortunately, it was designed and marketed by corporate and political bigshots who knew little about the classroom.⁶ Perversely, teachers' burdens were *increased* when a bipartisan Congress and two successive administrations added unbelievably useless "accountability" requirements to our load. One egregious example was instituted in a nearby high-poverty school system, where teachers were required to spend inordinate amounts of time preparing "standards-based bulletin boards" to satisfy roving inspection teams. It is difficult to imagine a stupider waste of educator time, nor a more useless intrusion on the education of high-needs kids.

On the good side: politicians and the administrators who answer to them have at least ended the old bickering over "subject-centered" versus "teacher-centered" versus "student-centered" instruction. On the bad side: they replaced those stale arguments with a forced

consensus revolving around a “standards-based” curriculum and test-driven evaluation schemes that were ill-considered and essentially punitive. When kids do it to kids, we call it bullying. When adults do it to kids, we call it classroom management. When adults do it to adults, we call it accountability.⁷ The military has found that rigid accountability won’t go half as far as situational flexibility in the twenty-first century, so perhaps we can inform electioneers of the foolishness of micromanagement in our own arena of combat.⁸ If so, maybe they will reverse administrators’ “current best practice” and return to the ancient wisdom that really does get results: Hire quality, then let ‘em teach.

Although the past decade’s ham-fisted approach to accountability may sometimes result in better instruction, the distrust on which it is based is, on its face, incompatible with anything I’d care to call education. My most negative interpretation of NCLB is that it was deliberately designed to give the maximum bad publicity to the public schools. I can think of no other explanation for the wooden-headed application of AYP requirements and the air-headed development of unrealistically high goals, not to mention the damn-near Wilsonian ideal mandated into a thoroughly damnable law that everybody will be at grade level by 2014, all of which have inexorably led to miseducators fabricating outcomes.⁹ Happily, even Arne Duncan has finally figured out how bad an idea *that* was.¹⁰ But perhaps I’m being overly charitable again: maybe it was just his boss suddenly realizing that he still needed teachers’ votes.

As discussed a decade ago, public education has long been subjected to periodic enthusiasms devised by well-intended scholars and administrators, which are rolled out with great fanfare, but which then usually fade from the public’s interest, though seldom from teachers’ workloads. Typically, they make little if any sustained improvement in the education of children. The difference over the subsequent ten years has been that most of the fads have been developed by politicians, and I’m not sure that all of them have been well-intended. What remains the same is how much improvement has resulted.

The Results¹¹

The short answer: Not much, except in testing companies’ bottom lines and administrators’ turf, counterbalanced by a decline in the public’s perception of teachers and schools. For the past decade No Child Left Behind has dominated the public discourse about

education, giving us something of a race to the bottom between those who mandate progressively sillier ways to carry it out. In 2010 22 percent of the public indicated their belief that NCLB was helping the schools, 28 percent thought it was hurting, and a whopping 45 percent thought it made no difference. In 1987's Kappan/Gallup survey, 26 percent of the public gave grades of A or B to the nation's schools. By 1997 that figure had dropped to 22 percent. In 2007 it hit bottom at 16 percent. Three years later it had risen only to 18 percent. On the other hand, in 1987 13 percent gave the nation's schools Ds or Fs, which rose to 21 percent by 1997, 23 percent by 2007 and 26 percent in 2010. *Kappan's* yearly polls show much more parental confidence in their oldest child's schools. In 1987 69 percent of parents gave those schools A's and B's, in 1997 that figure had fallen to 64 percent, in 2007 it was inching up to 67 percent, and three years later it achieved a modern high at 77 percent. Interestingly, the share of parents giving them a D or F has stayed relatively stable, between 7 and 11 percent, with a record low of 5 percent in 2010. The late Gerald Bracey regularly argued that this startling discrepancy was due to negative political rhetoric and media bias. David Berliner and Bruce Biddle followed this line of reasoning with their book, *The Manufactured Crisis*.¹² While their arguments were a refreshing balance to the almost-uninterrupted barrage of cheap shots, complaints that they whitewashed what was really happening in way too many schools were not without merit.¹³

Opinions on how to address education's problems have changed some over the past decade as NCLB sparked and then fizzled. Merit pay for teachers, always a controversial issue, is now a bit more popular with the public, with 68 percent in favor in 1984, compared to 73 percent in 2009 and 71 percent in 2010. Teachers' opinions may have moderated considerably, but there is very little support for tying salary to standardized test scores.¹⁴ Much the public (44 percent) gives top priority to instructional improvement. However, the poll in 2009 indicated a strong support for *multiple* forms of teacher evaluation. Nearly everyone agrees that the dropout rate is a major problem, but opinions vary on how best to deal with it. The two most highly regarded options are making high school classes more interesting (52 percent "very effective" and 37 percent "somewhat effective" [2010]) and encouraging attendance at nontraditional high schools, at 23 percent and 51 percent respectively. Charter schooling is increasingly popular, but it remains unclear how well the public understands how they would operate. Most of the central office

administrators I encounter are just about as vague when the subject is brought up, and Gary Clabaugh's column in a forthcoming issue of this journal will discuss the dangers of their being operated dishonestly. Public opinion has varied considerably over the years when identifying the "biggest problem" facing the public schools. The 2010 survey revealed that 36 percent consider funding the worst, followed by discipline and overcrowding. Happily, drug abuse was rated way down from previous years. On the other hand, "government interference" made an astonishing jump from 15th on the 2009 list to number *five* in 2010! As startling as this leap is, it may still reflect an inadequate understanding of the operation of public schools, which are, of course, governmental, and hence, political through and through.¹⁵ One may wonder what the rating might be if the pollsters asked about government *involvement* in education: In another recent survey, only 17 percent of those polled by Gallup viewed the federal government positively, ranking it last in a list of 25 major industries.¹⁶

The Politicians

At first, "accountability" was directed from the state capitals, where one out of four legislators do not even possess a four-year degree, and few ever consider educators' opinions.¹⁷ However, both the Bush and Obama administrations worked steadily to increase the federal level of control, particularly in the realm of curriculum. Most state governments cheerfully knuckled under, presumably because they had come to see education as a political and budgetary liability.¹⁸ It is easy to be uneasy about that. On one hand, a well-founded suspicion of big government has always been a part of American political culture. On the other, it was hard to see how the feds could possibly screw things up any worse than some states already had. But the results thus far suggest we may have underestimated our national officials. The old quip that giving money and power to politicians is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenagers is true enough, but every two years they still persuade otherwise intelligent and rational people to give them even more money and power!¹⁹ Now, in view of the crass partisanship, deadlock, and permanent electioneering starkly revealed this year, Washington, D.C., reminds me of nothing quite so much as one of the deeper circles of Hell.²⁰ Why are the national parks *still* "America's Best Idea"? Maybe because most of them are so remote!

Please don't misunderstand: it's not that our legislators are "dysfunctional," as so many broadcasters claim. In fact, they are very

effective at their primary task: the election of carefully groomed individuals to redistribute wealth from undifferentiated taxpayers to favored supporters. For more than two hundred years politicians have been habitually buying votes with taxpayers' money. Among primitives that would be considered theft. We call it entitlements or stimuli, depending on which party we identify most closely with. Again, please don't misunderstand: I'm not taking a Tea Party-type position against redistribution *per se*, which has been powerfully advocated by the sacred scriptures of all three Abrahamic faiths, and by both classical and modern political theorists. I am arguing against the corrupt and corrupting redistribution accomplished by classical and modern political practitioners. It's always alarming to see virtuosity become a vice.

We need to understand that although education is the biggest single factor in state budgets, and is not inconsiderable in the federal, the kids are *not* the first priority for legislators. Even charitably assuming goodwill, politicians' priority is, of course, political. Given the complexities and time demands of educational dealmaking, if they don't get (re)elected, they will not get much of whatever good intentions they may have accomplished.²¹ Why is that so hard for educators to understand? Although nobody is against kids, *other people's* kids aren't number one for anybody, including our political masters.²² Which raises the disturbing question: To what extent has the politically-generated reform of the past decade been intended to improve learning, and to what extent has it been intended to harvest contributions and votes? Or even more apprehensively, one might ask if it was indeed a calculated measure to discredit public schools and revive interest in privatization?²³

Professionals

Although I think it's time to shift the blame for the twenty-first century's educational problems to politicians, that does not excuse those of us in the classroom from examining our own consciences. There are indeed a lot of teachers who bring the rest of us into disrepute, and what have we done about them? If the teacher next door is known to be ineffective, have you offered help? Even "innocently" sharing a method successfully tried in yesterday's class is better than nothing. There is such a thing as constructive teachers' lounge gossip, in which teachers offer colleagues ideas they found worked with a particular kid. Just letting your colleague know which parent gets results can lead to breakthroughs. There are thousands of ways

teachers can help one another, and if we don't, we may be hurting them, their kids, and sooner or later, ourselves.

Second, we need to realize that we are soft targets: voteseekers know that given the diversity of goals schoolpeople have shouldered, we will always be failing at something that can be exploited for political advantage. The first question for the politician is very much like the first question for the preacher: when confronted by a new idea or an old sin, the minister asks: "Will it preach?" The officeseeker asks if it will get votes—or at least garner the campaign contributions that will buy them.²⁴ More happily, we should also realize that politics is an unusually forlorn profession and politicians are distinctly defeatable. Rare is the lawmaker who leaves office an unmitigated success, and most are removed involuntarily. Teachers should know that politicians are just like children: they'll do what we let them get by with.

So how can we stop them, or at least balance things? Clearly, public schooling is a public concern, not just a professional one. But just as clearly, our political masters have had little interest in what professionals say. There is at present no effective voice for teachers with the politicians, much less symmetry of power over our own jobs. Our institutions have failed us. The Department of Education's press releases often make the department seem like little more than the education wing of the party in power.²⁵ Teacher unions, like much of organized labor, have suffered a highly successful assault on their credibility. And some of our own most prominent educational leaders have given us all a bloody nose by coercing their systems into cheating scams as idiotic as they were unprincipled. And given the penury that renders teachers themselves incapable of the one sure-fire way to influence candidates (hosting fundraising events), it is easy to despair. But perhaps a teacher version of asymmetric warfare might be more effective than anything we've tried thus far. Given the national disillusionment at the workings of the *res publica*, this election cycle might be precisely the moment for it.

I wonder what would happen if we were to collect a small set of teacher demands of national importance—not inputs, not desires, not requests, but *demands*—and then threaten to withhold teachers' votes? As evenly as this country is divided, politicians need our three million votes. For too long one party has assumed we're in the bag, and the other has not even bothered with us.

That goes against the grain: we're supposed to be examples of good citizenship. But there are two kinds of citizenship, just like there

are two kinds of cities. Just over seventeen hundred years ago Saint Augustine wrote: "Two cities have been formed by two loves . . . : In the one, the princes . . . are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princes and the subjects serve one another in love." I choose the second, and its version of citizenship doesn't look much like the one that's mugged teachers for the past ten years. How did we get suckered into the cruel and stupid heresy that it is always better to vote for "the lesser of two evils" than it is to not vote at all? How did people who are supposed to teach critical thinking come to thoughtlessly accept the textbook-quality *non sequitur* that "if you don't vote you can't complain"? For some problems, "just say no"—principled non-participation—is both moral and practical: not betting on a crooked game is usually the smartest response to a sleazy dealer. Vocal non-participation may be the smartest act of citizenship when faced with as rigged a game as American educational politics has become. In future issues of this journal I will develop the justifications for principled nonparticipation, and explore the circumstances under which it might be advisable. So, what demands would you make? Please send your suggestions for reasonable requirements of general applicability to wcarpenter@berry.edu. I will not identify you without permission, but would request that you include your area of the country, to help us assess what problems are truly national. I will include the "biggies" in these follow-up articles. Maybe it's time to send a wakeup call, one that might go something like this:

Dear Mr./Ms. Candidate: Our votes are for sale. These are our demands: _____. If you do them (not just promise them) we will vote for you. If you don't, we won't. And if nobody will do them, we'll just stay in our classrooms on election day. We don't vote for nothing.

Notes

1. John Dewey (1897), "My Pedagogic Creed" [Article V], *School Journal* 54 (January): 77-80. Found at <<http://dewey.pragmatism.org/creed.htm>>.
2. A spoof of "Rise Up, Ye Saints of God," by an elderly teacher of my acquaintance ("The Lame Doc") who is still going around the block, but would rather do so anonymously.
3. Unfortunately, teacher-bashing is not limited to the United States, nor is it limited to "them." The term appears to have been of British coinage, and for an interesting but slightly depressing Australian study of the phenomenon, see Brian Crossman (2008), "Images of Teachers at

Conferences: Developing Teaching as a Profession, Demographics and Life Long Learning," *The Journal of Educational Enquiry* 8 (2): 1-14.

4. Wade A. Carpenter (2000), "Ten Years of Silver Bullets: Dissenting Thoughts on Education Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan* 81 (5): 383-389.
5. See Wade A. Carpenter (2009), "The Other Side of Data-Based Decision-Making." *Educational Horizons*, 87 (4): 218-223. See also Valerie G. Chapman and M. Duane Inman (2009), "A Conundrum: Rubrics or Creativity/Metacognitive Development?" *Educational Horizons* 87 (3): 198-202, and Wade A. Carpenter, "Behind Every Silver Lining: The Other Side of Rubrics," *ibid*: 156-161.
6. See Dara Wakefield and Beverly Smith's "The Relocation of Education Governance: Trail of Fears," in this issue of *New Educational Foundations*.
7. Diane Ravitch (2010) provides a perceptive insider account in *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic).
8. Re military combat, see David Paschal (2007), *Irregular Warfare: Impact On Future Professional Military Education* (Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College). See also David H. Petraeus (2006), "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering," in <<http://usacac.army.mil/CAC/milreview/English/JanFeb06/Petraeus1.pdf>>.

BTW, it wouldn't hurt those who keep prattling about "twenty-first-century skills" to remember that the first combat action of this century for the world's most advanced military was a horse-cavalry charge in Afghanistan. See Doug Stanton (2009). *Horse Soldiers: The Extraordinary Story of a Band of U.S. Soldiers Who Rode to Victory in Afghanistan*. New York: Scribner.

9. For a helpful synopsis of news coverage, including access to the official report on the Atlanta cheating scandal, see the Atlanta Journal Constitution (2012), "Atlanta Public Schools Cheating Scandal," <<http://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta/atlanta-public-schools-cheating-1026035.html>>. In fairness, also see the response of former Superintendent Beverly Hall (2011), "The Scandal Is Not the Whole Story," *Education Week* (August 21), 1. For the basics on the Philadelphia scandal, see Michael Winerip (2011), "Pa. Joins States Facing a School Cheating Scandal," at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/01/education/01winerip.html?pagewanted=all>>.
10. "Ed. Secretary: States to Get School Test Waivers," at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/08/446590useducationoverhaul_ap.html?r=1316242328>. See also Sam Dillon (2011), "Overriding a Key Education Law," at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/08/education/08educ.html>>.

11. The data for this section comes primarily from the past two decades of PDK/Gallup polls, published in September issues of *Kappan*, the most recent being September 2010, 92 (1): 9-26.
12. David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle (1995) *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley).
13. One especially perceptive review is in Lawrence Stedman (1996). "Review of Berliner and Biddle *The Manufactured Crisis*." *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 4 (23, January).
14. Jane G. Coggshall, Amber Ott, Ellen Behrstock, and Molly Lasagna (2011), "Supporting Teacher Talent: The View From Generation Y," at <<http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/supporting-teacher-talent-view-from-Generation-Y>>. The report, after trumpeting a 70 percent approval rate for incentive pay among young teachers, then goes on to admit that only ten percent endorsed tying it to test scores: "Despite openness to incentive pay, it is not Gen Y's first choice as a strategy for improving teaching. The idea of tying teacher rewards to student performance ranked last among 12 proposals, including requiring new teachers to spend more time teaching in classrooms under the supervision of experienced teachers, requiring teachers to pass tough tests of their knowledge of the subjects they are teaching, and ensuring that the latest technology is available in each classroom to aid instruction."
15. Joel Spring has been one of the most insightful authors on this subject, with regular updates of his textbooks *American Education* and *Conflict of Interests: The Politics of American Education* (McGraw-Hill and Longman, respectively). For a more positive view, see Janet Newman and John Clarke (2009), *Publics, Politics and Power: Remaking the Public in Public Services* (London: Sage).
16. Frank Newport (2011), "Americans Rate Computer Industry Best, Federal Gov't Worst," at <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/149216/Americans-Rate-Computer-Industry-Best-Federal-Gov-Worst.aspx>>. See also Felicia Somnez's contribution to *The Washington Post's* "Politics" blog at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/2chambers/post/poll-only-17-percent-view-federal-government-favorably/2011/08/29/gIQA5NRQnJ_blog.html>.
17. According to a William T. Grant Foundation study of six focus groups of policymakers—congressional aides, state and local superintendents, state legislators, school board members—when "asked to name factors that influence changes in education policy and practice, education leaders did not mention any 'breakthrough research,' nor did they cite any findings they felt had had a dramatic effect on policy or practice. When they did talk about research, the report goes on to say, participants expressed skepticism about findings or noted the limitations of studies."

They thought scholarly literature would be more useful if packaged in easy-to-read briefs, discussed sustainability, and "took into account local political and educational contexts." See Debra Viadero (2009), "Policymakers Find Little Value in Studies," *Education Week* (September 30): 4. For a more thorough and wide-ranging study, read Richard Ingersoll (2003), *Who Controls Teachers' Work? Power and Accountability in America's Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard). See also Winnie Hu (2011), "Many State Legislators Lack College Degrees," *New York Times* (June 13): A14.

18. Again, see Wakefield and Smith (*infra*, 2012). As good a background source as any is the Council of Chief State School Officers, which provides regular updates of the deliberations at <http://www.ccsso.org/federal_programs/13286.cfm>. The U.S. Department of Education's website at <<http://www.ed.gov>> can also provide lots of links for those strong enough of will (and stomach) to pursue them. Of course, *Education Week* does as good a job as any for journalistic analysis.
19. Dante, *Divine Comedy, Inferno*. I'd especially mull over Circles 2-10, inclusive.
20. Personally, I have no problem with private schooling, but decent people do not promote it in ways that hurt kids and teachers. Ever. See my 2005 article "The Other Side of School Choice," *Educational Horizons* 83 (2): 87-91.
21. If your customary altruism causes you to doubt this, ask yourself "If it came down to my kid going to college versus somebody else's kid going to college . . . ?" Are there any further questions?
22. Articles about the correlation of campaign advertising and vote getting can be informative. Just google the phrase "cost per vote" and surf awhile.
23. For a general but restrained and balanced view, see Joe Newman (2006), *America's Teachers: An Introduction to Education*, 5th ed. (Boston: Pearson), 329-372.
24. See <<http://www.gallup.com/home.aspx>>, accessed September 1, 2011.
25. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/01/education/01winerip.html>>. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2011) discusses the D.C. scandal in "Despite Cheating Scandals, Testing and Teaching Are Not at Odds" in *The Washington Post's "On Leadership"* at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-leadership/despite-cheating-scandals-testing-and-teaching-are-not-at-odds/2011/07/19/gIQADU3b3NI_story.html>. Christine Samuels (2011) provides an insightful commentary on these and other school corruptions in "Experts Divide on Responses to Cheating," *Education Week* (August 10): 1, 15.



The Rot Festers: Another National Research Council Report on Testing

by Richard P. Phelps

Hout, M., and Elliott, S. W. (2011). *Incentives and test-based accountability in education*. Committee on Incentives and Test-Based Accountability in Public Education. Board on Testing and Assessment, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

IN RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS THAT have been “captured” by vested interests, the scholars who receive the most attention, praise, and reward are not those who conduct the most accurate or highest quality research, but those who produce results that best advance the interests of the group. Those who produce results that do not advance the interests of the group may be shunned and ostracized, even if their work is well-done and accurate.

The prevailing view among the vested interests in education does not oppose all standardized testing: it opposes “externally administered” testing with consequences based on the results—i.e., testing that can be used to make judgments of educators but lies outside educators’ direct control. The external entity may be a higher level of government, such as the state in the case of state graduation exams, or a nongovernmental entity, such as the College Board or ACT in the case of college entrance exams.

One can easily spot the moment vested interests “captured” the National Research Council’s Board on Testing and Assessment (BOTA). BOTA was headed in the 1980s by a scholar with little background or expertise in testing (Wise, 1998). Perhaps not knowing whom to trust at first, she put her full faith, and that of the NRC, behind the anti-high-stakes-testing point of view that had come to dominate graduate schools of education. Proof of that conversion came when the NRC accepted a challenge from the U.S. Department of Labor to evaluate the predictive validity of the General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB) for use in unemployment centers throughout the country.

Fairness in Employment Testing, 1989¹

From the 1960s to the 1990s, the field of personnel psychology (a.k.a. industrial-organizational psychology) produced an impressive body of technically advanced research on the costs and benefits of testing for personnel selection. Thousands (yes, thousands) of empirical studies were conducted in the United States alone, demonstrating that a fairly general aptitude or achievement test is the best single predictor of performance for the overwhelming majority of jobs—better than all other factors that employers generally use in hiring. The estimated net benefits of using tests for personnel screening were huge, with costs minuscule and benefits enormous.

In the late 1980s, the U.S. Department of Labor considered providing the federal government’s GATB, which was used for hiring in federal jobs, to local employment offices for use in hiring outside the federal government. The test would have been made available to job applicants who wished to take it, and test results would have been made available to employers who wished to review them.

The Labor Department asked the Board on Testing and Assessment at the National Research Council to review the question. Its report is extraordinary. In the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the board declared the following: there was only negligible evidence

to support the predictive power of the GATB, and tests in general provided no benefits in personnel selection. Their conclusions were reached through tortuous illogic and contradiction, as well as a judicious selection of both committee members and research sources (see Phelps, 1999).

For example, not one of the hundreds of academic psychologists who studied personnel selection was invited to participate in writing the report, whereas several education professors who were well-known opponents of high-stakes testing were. Many of the world's most-respected personnel and GATB testing experts were appointed to a "liaison committee," but it was never consulted; their names, however, were then published in the final report, as if to imply they approved of the report.

They did not. Members of the liaison committee accused the NRC of deliberately choosing a committee they knew would be hostile toward the GATB research. Moreover, only one of the thousands of empirical studies on personnel selection was discussed. In the face of thousands of predictive validity studies on general aptitude tests in employment, the study committee wrote: "very slim empirical foundation," "the empirical evidence is slight," "fragmentary confirming evidence," "very little evidence," "no well-developed body of evidence," and "primitive state of knowledge."

The board dismissed the benefits of hiring better qualified applicants for jobs by arguing that if an applicant were rejected for one job, the applicant would simply find another somewhere else in the labor market, since all are employed somewhere. (No matter that the other job might pay less, in an undesirable field or location, part-time, temporary, or even prove nonexistent. In the view of the report, "[U]nemployment is a job.") The board continued with the astounding contradiction that whereas selection (and allocation) effects should be considered nonexistent because all jobs can be considered equivalent, general tests like the GATB cannot serve as predictors because such tests do not account for the unique character of every job.

Constants on NRC testing study committees for the past quarter-century have been the multiple participation of members of the federally funded Center for Research on Educational Standards and Student Testing (CRESST), headquartered at UCLA, and members of an even more radical (anti-) testing research center at Boston College.² Committee memberships are then rounded out with scholars known in advance to support CRESST biases and a few others

with recognizable names and ideological sympathies, but little familiarity with the study topic. The many scholars who disagree with CRESST's point of view are neither invited to participate nor cited in the study reports.

High Stakes, 1999³

The most revealing aspect of the National Research Council's 1999 report, *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation* (Heubert and Hauser) is its choice of source material. Sources were included that buttressed the views of the BOTA, and hundreds of sources that did not were ignored. The majority of citations went to CRESST research and CRESST researchers. At the time, NRC's Board was chaired by a CRESST director. The "Committee for Appropriate Test Use," the entity responsible for the particular study, included three CRESST stalwarts and one individual from Boston College.

With huge resources at its disposal (a budget of more than \$1 million), the NRC board minimized its research effort. On issue after issue, it threw its lot in with a single or a single group of researchers. The chapter on tracking is really about the work of just one person—UCLA's Jeannie Oakes. The counterevidence and counterarguments on that issue are kept completely hidden from the reader. The early childhood, readiness testing, and promotion and retention sections also feature only one person's point of view (that of CRESST's Lorrie Shepard). Chapter 10 cites just three sources (an earlier NRC report and Shepard and Linn of CRESST); Chapter 11 essentially only two, George Madaus and Walt Haney of Boston College. Two-thirds of the citations in the report refer to less than a dozen research sources.

For a book on a psychometric topic, the NRC report strangely ignores psychology research. Only ten of four hundred citations come from psychology journals, and they pertain only to a discussion of assessment standards and theoretical concepts of validity. The report avoids, in its entirety, the huge mass of accumulated empirical evidence on high-stakes selection from psychology journals. The report refers exclusively to research in education journals and reports, and even then only the work of a small group.

The opinions of the general public are dismissed just as effortlessly. The report (pp. 44–45) acknowledges the high level of public support for high-stakes, but discounts it thus:

Despite some evidence that the public would accept some of the potential tradeoffs, it seems reasonable to assume that

most people are unaware of the full range of negative consequences related to . . . high-stakes test use. Moreover, it seems certain that few people are aware of limits on the information that tests provide. No survey questions, for example, have asked how much measurement error is acceptable when tests are used to make high-stakes decisions about individual students. The support for testing expressed in polls might decline if the public understood these things.

Then again, it might not. Almost all adults are experienced former students. It so happens that they know something about school.

High Stakes includes more than forty recommendations. With some exceptions, any one of them taken alone seems reasonable. Taken together, they would impose a burden on the states that none could feasibly meet. The report even floats a proposal to require pre-testing the examinations before they can be used for high-stakes purposes, using a new, very general standard of predictive validity. Because testing proponents argue that high-stakes tests promote more learning or better employment, the NRC board argues that we should hold off certifying the use of any particular high-stakes test until it can be proved that, over time, the test does increase learning (say, in college) and improve employment outcomes. It would take years, of course, to conduct such an experiment, even if the experiment were feasible. But, naturally, it is not. One cannot test the effects of high-stakes tests when the stakes are not high as, presumably, they would not be during the life of the experiment.

High Stakes was released at a propitious time, just before the debate over and design of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. For those who regarded the National Research Council's work as objective and trustworthy, it would serve as a caution, and nothing more. A century's worth of program evaluations and experimental research on the optimal design of high-stakes test-based accountability systems was ignored, relegated to an information abyss. When the nation needed the information most and was most ready to use it, the National Research Council suppressed it.

In response to the NRC's deliberate neglect of the research literature, I began to study it myself. Because I lacked the NRC's considerable resources, it took me some time—a decade, as it turned out—to reach a satisfactory stage of completion. I hedge on the word "completion" because I do not believe it possible for one individual to collect all the studies in this enormous research literature that CRESST officials claim does not exist.

After reading more than three thousand studies, I found approximately a third of them appropriate to include in a summary of qualitative studies and meta-analyses of quantitative and survey studies. Most had been available to the NRC study group as well, but were implied not to exist. A summary of the study has been published in the *International Journal of Testing* (Phelps, 2012). Source lists can be found here:

<http://npe.educationnews.org/Review/Resources/QuantitativeList.htm>

<http://npe.educationnews.org/Review/Resources/SurveyList.htm>

<http://npe.educationnews.org/Review/Resources/QualitativeList.htm>

Perhaps not surprisingly, a review of a great expanse of the research literature, rather than just the selective, tiny portion covered by the NRC report, leads to quite different conclusions and policy recommendations.

Common Standards for K-12 Education?, 2008⁴

Almost two decades ago, while working at the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO, now called the Government Accountability Office), I managed a study to estimate the extent and cost of standardized testing in the United States. At the time, then-president George H. W. Bush had proposed a national testing program, and the U.S. Congress wanted to know how much it might cost and the effect it might have on then-current state and local testing programs.

On every quality indicator (e.g., survey response rates, fact-checking) the study exceeded GAO norms. A who's who of notables in the evaluation, statistical, and psychometric worlds reviewed various aspects of the study. Nothing like it in quality or scale had been attempted before—it included details from all forty-eight states with testing programs and from a representative sample of more than five hundred U.S. school districts. One might think the education research community would have been interested in the results (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1993).

I left the GAO for other employment before the report was actually released, however, and apparently the pressure to suppress the report and its findings—essentially, that standardized testing is not that burdensome and does not cost that much—descended even before it was released. Over the ensuing months, I gradually became aware of further efforts to suppress the report's findings. Panels were held at CRESST conferences (panels to which I was not invited) eviscerating

the GAO report and suggesting that better studies were needed.⁵ The characterizations of the report were completely false: the critics claimed information was omitted that, in fact, was not and information was included that, in fact, was not. But reasonable people, allowed to hear only one version of the story, believed it, and the GAO report, along with the most thorough and detailed data base on testing practices ever developed, faded into obscurity.

In its place, other reports were written and presented at conferences, and articles published in mainstream education journals, purporting to demonstrate that standardized tests cost an enormous amount and were overwhelming school schedules in their volume. The studies were based on tiny samples—a single field trial in a few schools, a few telephone calls, one state, or in some cases, facts that were simply made up. The cost studies among them that actually used some data for evidence tended to heap all sorts of non-test activities into the basket and call them costs of tests.

I contacted the researchers making the erroneous claims and the CRESST directors by email, postal letter, and telephone.⁶ In a few cases, I received assurances, first, that the matter would be looked into (it was not) and second, that an *erratum* would be published in the CRESST newsletter (it never was).

When I submitted articles based on the GAO study to mainstream education journals, they were rejected for outlandish and picayune reasons, or because “everyone knows” that the GAO report was flawed.

Ultimately, a summary of the GAO report won a national prize and was published in a finance journal (Phelps, 2000, Winter). I suspect, however, that if the GAO report had arrived at “correct” conclusions (i.e., that standardized tests are enormously expensive and otherwise bad) any article derived from it could easily have been published several years earlier in most mainstream education journals.

One would think that the assault on the GAO study might have ended in the 1990s, given how successful it was. But perhaps the report’s quality or the GAO name is so durable that education insiders feel the need to condemn it even fifteen years later, as they have in *Common Standards for K–12 Education?*, a National Research Council report.

To my observation, the CRESST and NRC prefer to suppress information by ignoring or declaring nonexistent any research that contradicts theirs. There are several advantages to this practice, the “dismissive review” (see Phelps 2009):

- first, it is easier to win a debate with no apparent opponent;
- second, declaring information nonexistent discourages efforts to look for it;
- third, because it is non-confrontational, it seems benign and not antagonistic; and
- fourth, there is plausible deniability, i.e., one can simply claim that one did not know about the other research.

When only one side gets to talk, of course, it can say virtually anything it pleases. With no counterpoint apparent, "facts" can be created from thin air, with no evidence required. Solid research supportive of opposing viewpoints is simply ignored, as if it did not exist. It is not mentioned to reporters; it is not cited in footnotes or reference lists. It is treated as if it was never undertaken.

Dismissive reviews are not credible to outsiders, however, when contradictory research is widely known to exist. Thus, the research that remains—that which cannot credibly be dismissed as nonexistent—must, instead, be discredited. In such cases, the preference for dismissive reviews must be set aside in favor of an alternate strategy: misrepresent the disliked study and/or impugn the motives or character of its author.

And, so it has been with the GAO report on testing costs. The GAO manifests a prominent profile and a reputation not easily demeaned. Nonetheless, the federally funded research center CRESST has worked tirelessly for two decades now to achieve exactly that. And in that quest, CRESST has had a distinct advantage: it is mandated and funded to disseminate its findings, whereas the GAO is not. Once a GAO report is released and a GAO official testifies to its only client—the U.S. Congress—no further agency effort promotes the work. By contrast, CRESST's mission and funding include promotion of its work through marketing and conferences.

This 2008 NRC report, released fifteen years after the GAO report on testing costs, asserts, again, that the GAO report left something out and so underestimated the cost of testing.⁷ Again, the assertion is false. This time, the NRC accused the GAO of neglecting to consider the cost of standard-setting during test development; in fact, this cost was fully counted in the GAO estimate.

But yet again, claiming a void in others' calculations is used as an excuse to bulk up their own cost estimates massively. Here are just

a few ways that the NRC's *Common Standards for K-12 Education?* overestimates the cost of testing:

- One-time-only start-up costs—e.g., standard setting—are counted as annual recurring costs.
- Educator travel and lodging expenses for serving on standard-setting and other test development panels are counted twice, both as direct educator expenses and in the budget of the state education agency (which, in fact, reimburses the educators for these expenses).
- The full duration of all testing activities at a school—said to be 3–5 days—is allotted to each and every educator participating. So, for example, the time of a fifth-grade teacher who administers a one-hour math exam on Tuesday of testing week, and who otherwise teaches regular class that week, is counted as if s/he were involved in administering each and every exam in every subject area and at every grade level throughout the entire 3–5 days. Moreover, the time of each and every teacher in the school is counted as if each and every teacher is present in each and every testing room for all subject areas and grade levels. By this method, the NRC overestimates the amount of educator time spent directly administering tests about twentyfold.

Another way of looking at it is to ignore the fact that a school administers a series of one-hour tests across the tested subject areas and grade levels over the span of 3–5 days but instead assume that all classes in all subject areas and grade levels are sitting for 3–5 days doing nothing but taking 3–5-day-long exams— which, in fact, is not what happens.

- The NRC calculates the number of teachers involved by using a federally estimated average pupil-teacher ratio rather than an average class size estimate. Pupil-teacher ratios underestimate class sizes because they include the time of teachers when they are not teaching. By this method, the NRC overestimates the number of teachers involved in directly administering tests by another 50 percent.
- The NRC counts all teachers in a school, even though only those in certain grade levels and subject areas are involved in testing—usually amounting to fewer than half a school's teachers. By this method, the NRC overestimates the number

of teachers involved in directly administering tests by another 50 percent or more.

- In calculating “data administration costs” of processing test data in school districts and states, the NRC classifies all who work in these offices as “management, business, and financial” professionals who make \$90,000 per year. Anyone who has worked in state and local government data-processing departments knows that this would grossly overestimate the real wages of the majority of these employees who essentially work as clerical and oftentimes contingent staff.
- The NRC is told by one school district that its average teacher spends twenty hours every year in professional development related to assessment and accountability. Despite how preposterous this number should sound, this one piece of hearsay is used by the NRC to estimate the amount of time all teachers everywhere, whether involved in testing or not, spend annually in related professional development.
- Moreover, professional development related to testing and accountability is assumed to be unrelated to regular instruction and, so, is counted as a completely separate, added-on (i.e., marginal) cost.
- The NRC counts educator time working on standard-setting and other test development panels as “two or three days,” which as anyone who has worked in test development knows, is a high estimate. One to two days is more realistic.

Finally, the NRC studies testing and accountability in a limited number of school districts in only three states. According to the NRC studies, however, the GAO report, which analyzed details from all forty-eight states involved in testing and more than five hundred school districts, is the study that left stuff out. In the end, the NRC estimates for testing and accountability costs are, in the council’s own words, “about six times higher” than previous estimates.

***Incentives and Test-Based Accountability in Education, 2011*⁸**

The celebrity professor is a new phenomenon and not a good one. In celebrity-driven academia, ‘getting ahead’ means beating other people, which means establishing a personal reputation and denying it, to the extent possible, to rivals.

—Harry Lewis

By coincidence, a draft copy of the most current National Research Council study was released about the same time I was writing up the results of my decade-long research summary and meta-analyses of the effect of testing on student achievement. Naturally, then, I was interested to see how much more the resource-rich NRC could do with the same material. As it turns out, they have remained true to form: this report covers only a highly selective, tiny fraction of the research literature, although it implies that it is all there is to be found and ignores or declares nonexistent the vast majority of relevant research.

For my work, I examined studies published in English between 1910 and 2010 that I could obtain and review before a self-imposed deadline in 2010. My coverage of the research literature is far from complete. It includes 244 qualitative studies (e.g., direct observations, site visits, interviews, case studies), 813 individual item-response group combinations from 247 survey studies (e.g., program evaluation surveys, opinion polls), and 640 separate measurements of effects from 177 quantitative research studies (e.g., regression analysis, structural equation modeling, pre-post comparison, experimental design, or interrupted time series design). In total, I analyzed 1,671 separate effects from 668 studies.

The domain of coverage for the NRC study is nominally larger than mine because that study purported to analyze non-test incentives and effects on outcomes other than achievement.

Nonetheless, they include but eighteen studies in their analysis.

They whittle down the number by eliminating from consideration all qualitative and survey studies and studies conducted before the past two decades. For “pre-NCLB” studies from the 1990s to the mid-2000s, the NRC simply expropriates a meta-analysis conducted by Jaekyung Lee (2008) that covered only fourteen “cross-state,” preponderately large-scale studies—the type least likely to find a strong effect. Unlike small-scale studies and, particularly, experiments that can focus on the factor of interest, empirical studies of large-scale testing programs comprise hundreds of factors for programs with multiple goals and objectives. In statistical lingo, such studies are full of “noise.”

Lee calculated an average effect size across the fourteen cross-state studies of 0.08, a positive, but very weak effect. That is what the NRC goes with. The council concludes that, prior to the date the NCLB Act’s stakes kicked in (about 2006), studies of the effect of testing on student achievement found a 0.08 average effect size.

I include all of Lee's studies, and his calculations, in my own analysis of quantitative studies that meet the NRC criteria for inclusion, but I also include a multitude of studies the NRC deliberately leaves out. Counting only relevant studies from the same time period (1990 to 2005), the mean effect size is 0.82, ten times larger than the NRC's. Moreover, that is the simple, "bare-bones" effect size, unadjusted for measurement artifacts—adjustments that would make it even larger.

For the post-NCLB period, the NRC includes seven other large-scale studies that accumulate feeble effect sizes and thirteen studies published between 2002 and 2010 of "incentive experiments using rewards" from India, Israel, Kenya, and the United States.

On the whole, the NRC selection of studies is quite odd, and absurdly unrepresentative of the research literature it purports to summarize. One consistency in the selection is apparent, however. Only studies finding very small effects are included.

In my review of the 1999 study *High Stakes*, I criticized the NRC for restricting its literature survey to U.S. education research, ignoring relevant research conducted in other countries and in other disciplines, such as psychology and economics.

Behold. This newer report mentions some relevant work conducted overseas and by psychologists and economists. Still, the highly selective sample excludes the most seminal work in the field. The NRC finds a small group of work that reflects the in-group bias, and the larger world of research and researchers is once again ignored as if it did not exist.

Most notably, in addition to the usual education researchers, this NRC study covers the work of a crew of young economists, who reach the preferred conclusions (of feeble effect sizes). It turns out that this group of economists shares another characteristic in common with the NRC veterans from CRESST and Boston College—dismissive reviews.

One economist whose work is discussed at length in *Incentives and Test-Based Accountability in Education* claims to have conducted the first systematic empirical study of teacher cheating (in the early 2000s); the first case study of an urban school district comprehensive accountability system (in 2003); one of the first studies of school-based accountability utilizing individual student data (in 2002); one of the first studies of high-stakes testing (in 2002); and one of the

first studies of the effect of grade-promotion testing (in 2002). The same fellow declared (in 2001) there to be no empirical research on minimum-competency-testing programs or high school graduation exams. The research literature fluffed off by just this one economist includes several hundred studies dating back to the 1910s.

Another economist well-regarded by the NRC also declared (in 2002) that little to no evidence of the effects of testing or accountability systems existed. A third economist declared (in 1999) that little to no empirical work on school-based incentive programs existed. A fourth declared (in 1996), "Virtually no evidence exists about the merits or flaws of MCTs [minimum competency tests]." A fifth claimed (in 2005) "there is almost no research on the impact of remediation on student outcomes." A sixth claimed (in 2000) that a paper he had just written ". . . provides the first empirical evidence on the effects of grading standards, measured at the teacher level."

Whereas all but a trivial amount of the great mass of relevant research is ignored, the work of NRC study committee members is cited liberally. Daniel Koretz wins the prize for the most citations and references with twelve and nine. Overall, forty-eight citations and forty references (of two hundred) go to committee members' work. More than thirty references cite CRESST work. The bulk of the rest cite the work of close friends and colleagues, or earlier NRC studies.

At the same time, a who's who of the leading researchers in the field, past and present, goes missing—names such as John Hattie, Roddy Roediger, John Bishop, Frank Schmidt, W. J. Haynie, Harold Wenglinsky, Linda Winfield, C. C. Ross, E. H. Jones, Mike McDaniel, Lorin Anderson, J. R. Nation, J. H. Block, Carol Parke, S. F. Stager, Arlen Gullickson, Lynn Fuchs, Douglas Fuchs, Kathy Green, Max Eckstein, Harold Noah, Benjamin Bloom, Jeffrey Karpicke, Michael Beck, Stephen Heynemann, David Driscoll, William D. Schafer, Francine Hultgren, Willis Hawley, James H. McMillan, Elizabeth Marsh, Susan Brookhart, Gene Bottoms, Gordon Cawelti, Lorna Earl, Mike Smoker, David Grissmer, Arthur Powell, Harold Stevenson, Hunter Boylan, Elana Shohamy, Aletta Grisay, Chris Whetton, Steve Ferrara, Glynn Ligon, Micheline Perrin, Thomas Fischer, A. Graham Down, Nigel Brooke, John Oxenham, Caroline Gipps, Arthur Hughes, D. Pennycuick, John Poggio, Anthony Somerset, John O. Anderson, Noel McGinn, Anne Anastasi, Nick Theobald, David Miller, Linda Bond, David Grissmer, Gordon Cawelti, Nancy Protheroe, Floraline

Stevens, Thomas Corcoran, Clement Stone, Suzanne Lane, and state agencies in Massachusetts, Florida, and South Carolina.

And those are names of just some folk who have conducted one or more individual studies. Others have summarized batches of several to many studies in meta-analyses or literature reviews, for example (in chronological order): Panlasigui (1928); Ross (1942); Kirkland (1971); Proger and Mann (1973); Jones (1974); Bjork (1975); Peckham and Roe (1977); Wildemuth (1977); Jackson and Battiste (1978); Kulik, Kulik, Bangert-Drowns, and Schwalb (1983–1991); Natriello and Dornbusch (1984); Dawson and Dawson (1985); Levine (1985); Resnick and Resnick (1985); Guskey and Gates (1986); Hembree (1987); Crooks (1988); Dempster (1991); Adams and Chapman (2002); Locke and Latham (2002); Roediger and Karpicke (2006); and Basol and Johanson (2009). Long lists of many more relevant names and studies that, in most cases, accumulated results unwanted by CRESST and NRC researchers can be found in Phelps 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2008/2009a.

One will find none of this research and none of these researchers mentioned in *Incentives and Test-Based Accountability in Education*, yet the report claims to summarize the relevant literature. Meanwhile, as in earlier NRC reports, this one declares that important research questions remain unanswered, the implication being that the dismissive reviewers should be provided millions of dollars to undertake the research they have declared nonexistent.

Finally, this NRC report advances its pet theory of “test-score inflation” while excluding the full abundance of counterevidence, thus recommending exactly the wrong policy to address a very serious and very topical problem (see Phelps, 2011a, 2011b).

In the 1980s, a young medical resident working in a high-poverty region of West Virginia heard local school officials claim that their children scored above the national average on standardized tests. Skeptical, he investigated further and ultimately discovered that every U.S. state administering nationally normed tests claimed to score above average, a statistical impossibility. The phenomenon was tagged the “Lake Wobegon Effect” after Garrison Keillor’s “News from Lake Wobegon” radio comedy sketch, in which “all the children are above average.”

The West Virginia doctor, John Jacob Cannell, M.D., would move on to New Mexico and eventually California, but not before documenting his investigations in two self-published books, *How All Fifty*

States Are Above the National Average (1987) and *How Public Educators Cheat on Standardized Achievement Tests* (1989).

As usual after newsworthy school scandals, policymakers and policy commentators expressed disapproval, wrote opinion pieces, formed committees, and in due course, forgot about the problem. Deep dives into the topic were left to professional education researchers, the vast majority of whom worked then, as now, as faculty at graduate schools of education, where they shared a vested interest in defending the status quo.

Dr. Cannell cited educator dishonesty and lax test-administration security as the primary culprits in the Lake Wobegon Effect, also known as "test score inflation" or "artificial test score gains." It is easy to understand why. Back then, it was common for states and school districts to purchase nationally normed standardized tests "off the shelf" and handle all aspects of test administration themselves. Moreover, to reduce costs, it was common to reuse the same test forms (and test items) year after year. Even if educators did not intentionally cheat, over time they became familiar with the test forms and items and could easily prepare their students for them. With test scores rising gradually, administrators and elected officials could claim credit for increasing learning.

Security was so lax because the tests were diagnostic and school officials were monitoring tests that "didn't count"—only one of the dozens of state tests Cannell examined was both nationally normed and "high-stakes"—involving direct consequences for the educators or students involved.

Regardless of the fact that there were no stakes attached to Cannell's tests, however, prominent education researchers blamed "high stakes" for the test-score inflation he found (Koretz, et al., 1991; Koretz, 2008). Cannell had exhorted the nation to pay attention to a serious problem of educator dishonesty and lax test security, but education insiders co-opted his discovery and turned it to their own advantage (Staradamskis, 2008; Phelps, 2008/2009b, 2010).

"There are many reasons for the Lake Wobegon Effect, most of which are less sinister than those emphasized by Cannell," said the co-director of CRESST (Linn, 2000, p. 7). After Dr. Cannell left the debate and went on to practice medicine, this federally funded education professor and his colleagues would repeat the mantra many times—high stakes, not lax security, cause test-score inflation.

It is most astonishing that they stick with the notion because it is so obviously wrong. The SAT and ACT are tests with stakes—one’s score on either helps determine which college one attends. But they show no evidence of test-score inflation. (Indeed, the SAT was re-centered in the 1990s because of score deflation.) The most high-stakes tests of all—occupational licensure tests—show no evidence of test-score inflation. Both licensure tests and the SAT and ACT, however, are administered with tight security and ample test form and item rotation.

	High security	Lax security
High stakes	No test-score inflation E.g., SAT, ACT, licensure examinations	Test-score inflation possible E.g., some internally administered district and state examinations
No/Low stakes	No test-score inflation E.g., NAEP, other externally administered examinations	Test-score inflation possible E.g., some internally administered district and state examinations, such as those Cannell investigated

Table 1: Spot the Causal Factor

Current test cheating scandals in Washington, D.C., Atlanta, and Pennsylvania once again draw attention to a serious problem, and this time there is no doubt that stakes are involved. With the No Child Left Behind Act, schools can be rewarded with cash, or punished through reconstitution or closure, depending on their students’ test scores. So, as they have now for over two decades, most educators blame the stakes and alleged undue pressure that ensues for the cheating. Their recommendation: drop the stakes and reduce the amount of testing.

Meanwhile, twenty years after J. J. Cannell first showed us how lax security corrupts test scores, regardless the stakes, test security remains cavalierly loose. We have teachers administering tests in their own classrooms to their own students, principals distributing and collecting test forms in their own schools. Security may be high outside the schoolhouse door, but inside, too much is left to chance. And, as it turns out, educators are as human as the rest of us; some of them cheat and not all of them manage to keep test materials secure, even when they aren’t cheating.

The furor over educator cheating scandals in Atlanta and Washington, D.C., could lead to real progress on test security reform so long as the vested interests do not continue to control the debate and determine the policy outcome, as they have with Dr. Cannell’s legacy.

And they are trying to. In *Incentives and Test-based Accountability in Education*, the National Research Council again asserts a causal relationship between stakes and test-score inflation and ignores test security's role. Their solution to the problem is not to increase security, but to administer no-stakes "audit tests" to shadow the high-stakes test administration over time, under the presumption that any no-stakes test's scores are trustworthy and incorruptible. Thus, resources that could be used to bolster the security of the test that counts will be diverted instead toward the development and administration of a test that doesn't. That other test that doesn't count will almost certainly be administered with little security by school officials themselves.

With any high-stakes test subject to audit by any low-stakes test, its perceived quality will be determined entirely by the low-stakes test. Indeed, those who oppose high-stakes testing could add an easily manipulated and unmonitored low-stakes test and tailor it to discredit score gains on their jurisdiction's externally mandated and monitored high-stakes test.

Even worse, the same education researchers who have co-opted federally funded and National Research Council work on educational testing are attempting to compromise the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, which after more than a decade is currently being revised. The *Standards* is a set of guidelines for developing and administering tests. In the absence of any good alternative it has been used by the courts as a semi-official code of conduct, and thus, it has profound impact beyond the boundaries of the relatively tiny community of testing professionals. The education insiders have incorporated into the draft revision of the *Standards* their notion that stakes, not lax security, cause test-score inflation and audit tests are the way to control it. Meanwhile, in more than three hundred pages, the draft *Standards* says next to nothing about test security.

The most-fundamental issues in these school scandals are neither cheating, nor pressure, nor testing: they are power and control. Standardized test scores will prove trustworthy if responsible external authorities control their administration. It is that simple. Leave control of testing, or "audit testing," to school administrators themselves, and wide-scale institutionalized cheating on educational tests will be with us forever.

Conclusion

The latest report sponsored by the Board on Testing and Assessment, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education,

of the National Research Council faithfully continues a quarter-century tradition of bias, obfuscation, misinformation, and dissemblage. The National Academies describes its study process reassuringly:

The reports of the National Academies are viewed as being valuable and credible because of the institution's reputation for providing independent, objective, and non-partisan advice with high standards of scientific and technical quality. Checks and balances are applied at every step in the study process to protect the integrity of the reports and to maintain public confidence in them.

This description may validly describe reports that the National Academies produce on other topics. Since 1989, however, the several reports under their nameplate, the National Research Council (NRC), on standardized testing have been anything but—neither independent, objective, nor balanced. Rather, they have been partisan reports, with no checks on rampant, self-interested bias.

But bias isn't the only problem: the process is corrupt. This particular type of corruption does not involve money. The currency of scholars is attention, with the "richest" among them achieving the most—genuine fame—celebrity status that floods a confluence of honors, awards, and remuneration streams.

The NRC reports mentioned above are not just used to proselytize and mislead; more emphatically, they are expropriated to showcase the careers of those involved. At the same time the report authors declare the work of other researchers nonexistent, they liberally cite their own work and that of their close friends and package the combination as if it were all that anyone who matters should care for.

The behavior is arrogant. It is also unethical, dishonest, and cowardly. Nonetheless, it has worked efficiently to gloriously advance the professional careers of the few researchers inside the NRC tent and to relegate massive research literatures to oblivion.

Journalists, unfortunately, simply assume that those who get the most attention in the research world are also the most deserving of that attention. They simply assume that education research dissemination is objective and fair. They couldn't be more wrong.

Some journalists, though, step further into an ethical abyss—they help promote dismissive reviews. No journalist has the time to validate such claims: it can take years to learn a research literature. So, every time a journalist writes, "There is a paucity of research on this

topic" or the like, they're just taking one very self-interested person's word for it. Every time a journalist writes, "There is little research in this area" or "So-and-so's study is the first of its kind," he or she is complicit in the corruption.

The capture of the National Research Council's BOTAs by vested interests and the tragic results illustrate how federal money can concentrate power to achieve exactly the opposite result from that which was intended. For a quarter-century, U.S. taxpayers have funded just one research center to study educational testing, the Center for Research on Educational Standards and Student Testing (CRESST). Its mandate is to review all the research available on the topic objectively; instead the center promotes its own material and declares most of the rest nonexistent. Its mandate is to serve the interests of all the U.S. taxpayers who fund its operations; instead it serves the interests of its own members and that of the education status quo.

Few experts in education research or testing are willing to criticize the work of the CRESST fixtures, even when the flaws are obvious. CRESST officials are too influential; they can too easily derail a career. Several CRESST officials have been elected president of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and most CRESST researchers are well-represented on powerful and well-funded boards, commissions, and committees, like those at the National Research Council. The current arrangement works very well for them; they are unlikely to initiate any effort to change it.

Until those in positions of responsibility who can distinguish right from wrong are willing to take a stand, CRESST folk will continue to obscure the vast bulk of a century's worth of research on educational testing and accountability and replace it with the very warped bit of their own making. And we taxpayers will pay for it.

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Notes

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2. The Lynch School of Education at Boston College is large and diverse. It houses, for example, a U.S. Education Department center for analyzing international test results and a large higher education research center. The group I refer to here comprises several testing and measurement scholars who work on the regular faculty and have at times called themselves The National Commission on Testing and Public Policy, the Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation, and Educational Policy (CSTEPEP), or The National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy.
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5. For example, 1993 CRESST Conference: "Assessment Questions: Equity Answers: What Will Performance Assessment Cost?" Monday, September 13; 1994 CRESST Conference: "Getting Assessment Right: Practical and Cost Issues in Implementing Performance Assessment", Tuesday, September 13; 1995 CRESST Conference: "Assessment at the Crossroads: What are the Costs of Performance Assessment?", Tuesday, September 12. CRESST report #441 still contains largely erroneous claims related to the GAO report, on pages 5 and 64–66, and mostly erroneous claims about CRESST's work on the issue, in the first seventeen pages.
6. Among the researchers directly contacted (by email, letter, and telephone) were: Picus, Monk, and Tralli. Organizations directly contacted

were the federally funded, taxpayer-supported CRESST and CPRE (for Center for Policy Research in Education, based at U. Wisconsin and U. Penn), and the U.S. Education Department. Individuals at those organizations directly contacted included: Baker, Dietel, Linn, Resnick, Odden, and Sweet. With the exception of Lauren Resnick, who treated the matter in a professional way, my appeals were met with years of inaction and animosity.

7. On pp. 8–9 of the background paper “The Resource Costs of Standards, Assessments, and Accountability” (Harris and Taylor, 2008) one reads, “On the other hand, neither Phelps nor the GAO study ascribes any costs to standard setting. . . .”
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educational oversight to state and federal governments. At each step of the way political commissions, such as the Education Commission of the States (ECS, 2010) and the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE, 1983), have dictated the agenda of public school reform. Aided by ever-growing numbers of opportunistic politicians and assorted policymakers, the commissions have transformed public schools, once the pride of the "greatest generation," into political scapegoats for any number of perceived problems: economic conditions, fitness for employment, or international competitiveness (Iyengar, 1991; Lutz, 1987). Yet less than five percent of the participants in U.S. education commissions, boards, and alliances represent P-12 educators. The ratio of P-12 educators to commission members is 1:22.

Let's examine how political education commissions have framed public conversations about education over the last half-century. The title of a recent *Washington Post* article (Strauss, 2011) substantiates the near-complete absence of P-12 educators on U.S. education commissions: "How to be taken seriously as a reformer (don't be an educator)."

The Education Commission of the States (more than three hundred members but only twelve P-12 educators) is the body that originally introduced the concept of standards-based education. The historic context of the commission is significant. In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* initiated school desegregation and provided the civil rights movement with new impetus. When Sputnik, three years later, focused the Cold War on technology and associated economic factors, and public schools appeared ill equipped to produce the extra scientists and engineers called for. In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled prayer and Bible reading inappropriate in public education and further exposed striking disparities among the nation's public schools. In 1964, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act and the "Great Society" began.

Three years later, the Education Commission of the States was created to address national education needs and the increasingly obvious issues of disparity in schools. This massive political commission of representatives from the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories initiated substantial change in public education. The commission's members are primarily politicians: only two current members are identified as teachers. This commission played a pivotal role in public school reform, shifting education oversight from local communities to states, promoting standards-based education (ECS, 2010).

The Education Commission of the States was by no means the last commission to seek new directions for American education.

In 1983, the newly formed National Commission on Excellence in Education (eighteen members, one a P-12 educator) introduced the notion of test scores equaling international standing, adopted "achievement gap" terminology, and accused education institutions of actions tantamount to acts of war. That charge led by 1988 to the establishment of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB, 2010) (twenty-six members, three P-12 educators), which gave us National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing and the "Nation's Report Card."

The Alliance for Excellence in Education (AEP, 2010) (eighteen members and no P-12 educators) and the Commission on No Child Left Behind (2010) (eighteen members, two of them P-12 educators) have advanced the federalization of public education through their support of Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top.

Redefining Public Education

The Education Commission of the States was a catalyst in shifting the main public school paradigm from character building to knowledge acquisition. Communities once considered character building a key function of public education: in a rural or small-town setting one might compensate for lack of academic acuity through character and industry.

Community autonomy diminished as the commission recommended *state* and *federal* policymaking to address emerging issues, trends and challenges in education (ECS, 2010). Primarily agrarian schools emphasizing character became technologically oriented schools that emphasized knowledge. Larger-than-community solutions were needed to ameliorate the effects of poverty, but resources were limited.

The notion of educating citizens out of poverty took hold: educating everyone would conquer poverty! Strong state-run schools were needed to combat poverty while expanding the nation's workforce and international competitive edge. In 1971 the Supreme Court mandated busing for desegregation, hastening the demise of community schools while proliferating consolidated school districts. Soon, school districts were consolidating community schools into large, racially balanced schools that emphasized standards-based education.

In 1963 Martin Luther King, Jr., stated, "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their

character." Only a few years later, the Education Commission of the States had committed our society to judging children by the knowledge in their heads.

A Nation at Risk

Arguably, the most influential commission of all was the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), which gave us *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The NCEE placed teachers squarely in the public crosshairs by linking global viability with what it called an "achievement gap." The commission met for only eighteen months during President Ronald Reagan's first term, yet its findings profoundly shape U.S. public education to this day. This history-making body consisted of eighteen politicians, university presidents, business representatives, professors, school administrators—and *one* high school foreign language teacher (NCEE, 1983).

A Nation at Risk framed a connection between education and the nation's shaky global position amid spiraling debt and manufacturing competition from the Asia. The national deficit increased from \$72 billion in 1973 to \$442 billion in 1983 (Manuel, 2010)— in inflation-adjusted dollars, a nearly fourfold increase. U.S. manufacturing hit an all-time low in 1980 (France-Presse, 2009). Second and Third World nations cheap resources, few restrictions, and hungry workforces became increasingly large factors in international trade (Nationsonline, 2010). *A Nation at Risk* framed the widening manufacturing gap as an academic "achievement gap" between the United States and global competitors (Lutz, 1987). The gap may have been contrived and exaggerated (Stedman, 1997), but it was politically effective.

Referencing the *Third International Math and Science Study* (TIMSS), *A Nation at Risk* also claimed that U.S. achievement test scores were appreciably lower than those of other nations. At least three unaddressed issues surface when comparing testing data:

- Poverty is the first issue. A correlation of the levels of poverty found in *The Human Development Indices* (U. N., 2010) and academic rankings demonstrate nations with the least poverty tend to have the highest scores. Nearly fifteen million children in the United States (21 percent of all children) live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2011).

- Second, varying population sizes make most comparisons pointless. Finland and Singapore's entire student populations fit easily within the U.S. top quartile. China and India can accomplish the same with the United States.
- Third, definitions of "nation" vary significantly. Ours comprises fifty states, the District of Columbia, and various territories. Finland, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore are much less heterogeneous. Comparing the United States to the European Union or the Middle East might prove more realistic.
- Finally, the "smartest" countries are not, nor will likely become, global competitors (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). The connection between test scores and global influence is questionable (Stedman, 1997).

The *coup de grace* in *A Nation at Risk* was its famed jeremiad:

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (p. 5)

Note the lack of any comment about the impact poverty might have on performance.

Thus, the educational conversation for the future was framed and the seeds for No Child Left Behind were planted.

The Nation's Report Card

In 1988 Congress developed yet-another club with which to pound education. President Reagan and Congress established an independent, non-partisan board, the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), to monitor nationwide academic achievement (NAGB, 2010). The board's members were primarily non-teachers (NAGB, 2010). Its most significant contribution toward establishing accountability was the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), more commonly known as "The Nation's Report Card."

With the NAGB's help, a new education reform assumption materialized: that achievement test scores measure a nation's global economic viability. This assumption was an extension of the truism that educated populations out-perform uneducated populations. However, the current dilemma was not a comparison of haves and have-nots, but haves and also-haves.

The federal focus on achievement testing allowed politicians, policymakers, and voters to call for "higher scores" against the backdrop of averages, unrelenting centralizing tendencies, and the aforementioned trends. Educators found themselves in a no-win situation—previously documented variables, biases, and inequities in testing were present, but it was assumed teachers could equalize them.

Goals 2000 and the Higher Education Act of 1998

From 1989 to 1993, President George H. Bush continued deflecting political accountability in the midst of an unsure economy, increasing inner city violence, and deficit spending (White House, 2010). In 1992 he lost his bid for reelection and President Bill Clinton took up the accountability torch. Democrats and Republicans alike continued to leverage accountability to reform public education for almost two decades. By the late twentieth century, the Cold War had ended and U.S. manufacturing had strengthened, but teacher bashing remained a political staple.

Goals 2000 and the Higher Education Act of 1998

President Clinton weighed in on education reform with Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Goals 2000, 1998), which became law in 1994 and was amended in 1996. Clinton's reform sought to improve student learning and mandated that states submit biennial reports to Congress. A key component of Goals 2000 was implementing standards-based reform. The law supported state efforts to develop "clear and rigorous standards" for what every child should "know and be able to do" (Goals 2000, 1998). The act encouraged, but stopped short of mandating comprehensive statewide testing programs to measure standards.

Addressing policymakers in 1998, President Clinton called on states to require new teachers to pass challenging tests of knowledge and teaching proficiency (Clinton, 1998). This challenge became law in the 1998 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 1998), a significantly amended version of the Higher

Education Act of 1965. (One should note the original act correlated closely with the establishment of Education Commission of the States.)

President Clinton and Congress feared a national teacher shortage as the tide of “boomer” children washed through public schools (Feistritzer, 1998). Policymakers wanted more teachers from more sources more quickly. Unfortunately, most states required additional college-level course work and supervised internships for teacher licensure. Such requirements added significant hurdles for those transitioning into education from other fields. Hindsight suggests policymakers thought state-approved teacher pipelines were too narrow and too slow.

Under President Clinton, Congress mandated nationwide testing of would-be and new teachers. The reauthorized Higher Education Act required states to annually submitting test score averages of teacher candidates and newly licensed teachers to the federal government (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Federal testing of teachers focuses primarily upon content (CISA, 2001). Unfortunately, traditional testing biases/trends appeared in candidate testing: candidates from poverty were significantly less likely to become teachers under the new accountability measures (Bennett, McWhorter, and Kuykendall, 2006). Many would argue that pre-professional testing has resulted in a lower proportion of minority candidates even considering teacher licensure (Gitomer, 2001).

No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001) dwarfed previous federal incursions into education. The act virtually federalized public education, making test scores the *summa doctrinae* of the nation.

NCLB federally mandates student testing in reading, math, and eventually science in grades 3 to 8 and once in high school. Schools must also furnish averages for at least 95 percent of minorities, non-English speaking, low-income, and students with disabilities. Testing averages for school subgroups must improve each year to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Schools fail AYP if test scores for *any* group fall below state proficiency goals (Peterson, 2005). The number of students passing achievement tests in reading and math must increase every year until 100 percent are passing by the close of the 2014 school year (Peterson, 2005).

States may offer alternative tests to no more than two percent of students—those with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Unfortunately, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2009) reports, disabled students in public schools represent about 13.5 percent of the total population. The test fails to differentiate non-English speakers—at least 50 percent of public school children will be taking tests in their second language by 2020 (Chen, 2009). In addition, the U.S. Census Bureau (2009) reports 14.3 percent of American children live in poverty.

Race to the Top

President Barack Obama will leave his mark on education through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Race to the Top initiative. A salient feature of the Obama administration's reform is a federalized, standards-based core curriculum (Weidle, 2010). Whereas NCLB federalized testing, Race to the Top would federalize the curriculum. A national curriculum will ostensibly define the knowledge needed to graduate high school "fully prepared" for college and careers. According to Weidle (2010), core standards focus all students on college and include rigorous content and application of knowledge.

However, the new core curriculum will no doubt prove significantly narrower than previous versions (Crocco and Costigan, 2007; King and Zucker, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010). The non-core portions of the public school curriculum are likely to survive only if dedicated local educators strive to keep important subjects alive: social studies (civics, economics, geography, history, political science, psychology, etc.), arts (music, theater, visual, etc.), and physical fitness (recess, fitness, nutrition, sports, etc.). Further, after a decade of test-driven education, colleges and universities have found that "high-performing" high school students are often ill prepared for college; as a result, many institutions have backed away from using test scores as indicators of future success (Jaschik, 2008).

Another feature of Race to the Top is "pay for performance," linking teacher pay to student achievement test scores (Rose, 2010). Pay-for-performance will almost certainly reiterate the relationship between test scores and socioeconomics without addressing poverty—the real problem. Title I schools are those with a significant number of students living below the poverty level. More than fifty thousand schools in the United States receive Title I funding (U.S. Dept. of Ed.,

2010)—most of them in the South and Southwest. One can reasonably expect pay and performance in these schools to be significantly more challenging for teachers. A formula leveling the playing field between Title I and non-Title I schools will likely become necessary if pay-for-performance actually goes into effect.

Conclusion

John Barge (2011), the newly elected superintendent of the Georgia Department of Education, shared a few insights in an update he emailed to district superintendents and shared among educators across the state in March 2011.

Over the past several weeks I have been contemplating the current vision statement of the Georgia Department of Education. While "Leading the nation in improving student achievement" sounds like a challenging and worthy vision, I find it very difficult to measure. We can't point to growth in CRCT, EOCT, or GHSGT scores as those are all state specific tests and cannot be compared to other states. We can't point to graduation rates as every state has used something different to measure their rates. While SAT and ACT scores are national tests, participation rates vary tremendously across the country and those tests only measure upper level high school students. Finally, there is the NAEP test that is administered consistently across the county. Again, we are only talking about a random sample of 4th and 8th graders. . . . Therefore, we will begin immediately with creating a new strategic plan: "Making Education Work for All Georgians." Our . . . core mission should be preparing students to be successful after they leave us regardless of their respective post secondary paths. It is critical to note technology has effectively eliminated community isolation and limitations on accessible knowledge and content for teachers and students. Modern schools need not be deprived or isolated from educational resources by physical location.

Barge makes three critical points well worth repeating. First, he clearly demonstrates the measurement dilemma faced by all states—among the states, testing proves virtually nothing. Second, he adopts a compelling, fresh resolution: a focus on local community and student needs rather than national or international rankings. Approximately 15 percent of Georgia's students live below the poverty level (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2011). For them, talk of going to college is like talk of going to Mars. Finally, Barge notes, the Internet has ended academic isolation, making the world's knowledge, innumerable lessons, and gifted teachers ever-more accessible. Education need not be bound to big buildings with large faculties.

Yet Vice President Joseph Biden, lamenting that the United States is ranked ninth in graduation rates, has suggested the answer is getting more students into college than any other nation (Garber, 2011). More bad news may be just around the corner. The NCLB generation has yet to prove its preparedness for higher education. What will colleges and universities do with all the students, trending toward average in reading, writing, and math, who are trained simply to circle correct answers and take few intellectual risks?

In the midst of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asserted, "[T]he only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." Yet, today, fear and angst fuel education politics. Politicians and commentators regularly spread fear and blame based upon dubious international rankings in education.

State and local education can do better.

Federalized education has effectively *decreased* creativity and originality in our schools (Robinson, 2006). Tom Brokaw (1998) suggested that the "greatest generation" overcame fear because it valued character, industry, and ingenuity. Brokaw describes a generation committed to duty and sacrifice—passionate in responsibility and sacrificial in service. The average citizen was fortunate to complete high school, much less college. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (1947) more than 50 percent of the population above twenty years of age completed the equivalent of the first year of high school, 10 percent had less than five years of schooling, and approximately 5 percent finished college.

In many respects Germany and Japan were technologically superior to the United States prior to World War II. Perhaps what Americans knew best was how to work, solve problems, and maximize opportunities. Hard work and ingenuity often resulted in success in the Land of Opportunity. In the past the context for education was overcoming seemingly impossible hurdles. Today, seemingly "impossible" hurdles—like China's and India's billions of motivated workers—strike fear into reformer-politicians. Rather than tackling the next hurdle, they seem to be tackling the hurdlers. They forget that a few with *new* knowledge may outwit a million with *old* knowledge.

Enough with the fear tactics and federalization of public education.

It's time to take back education in our states and communities. Reading, writing, and math have been given priority at the expense of social studies, science, physical education, foreign languages, and the arts (King and Zucker, 2009; Dillon, 2006). Excellence and passionate learning are not on the national agenda. The longer NCLB is in effect, the more likely it is that a school will fail (Jennings and Rentner, 2006). Current accountability measures have the effect of tightening a noose around the necks of our most vulnerable children and schools (Kohn, 2000).

Let us hope the next president and congress will establish a Commission for Returning Education to the States.

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EDUCATION ECONOMICS

The College Student as “Customer”

by David George

The economic collapse that began in 2008 caused this writer to hope that the religion of free markets would lose many followers. Unfortunately, events since then have shown that the true believers have, if anything, only intensified their felt need to impose their vision on whatever pockets of resistance remain in our society. Who knows, the very idea that a college “grants” degrees may soon seem hopelessly outdated. With customers who pay money for a degree, shouldn’t we be more willing to simply say that we “sell degrees”?

While it used to be instinctively known that there was something wrong with a “diploma mill,” a world that sees the student as little more than a paying customer is a world in which the straightforward purchase of a degree will be harder to criticize. Already we are most of the way there. Consider the proliferation of for-profit universities. They are unabashedly designed to make shareholders money. In effect, they are selling degrees, or the promise of same, to “customers” in order to make a profit. Yet state departments of education have little or no trouble granting them legitimacy.

Students as Consumers or Workers?

The one characteristic that makes students seem more like consumers than workers is that they pay money to, rather than receive money from, their college. Since as a general rule “demanders” (customers) pay money and “suppliers” receive the money, it is understandable that many have decided to think of higher education as a market with the student as the paying customer. But the consumer model of education is a disaster the full effects of which are yet to

be realized. And this is particularly so when the consumer view is applied to college students.

Actually, there are many more reasons to think of students as workers. Consider the similarities. Workers are expected to devote certain amounts of time to their job. It is similar for college students, and the expected time commitment is roughly the same.

The average job requires forty hours a week. The long-standing expectation in most colleges and universities (whether honored or not) is that for every hour in the classroom, two hours of outside study should occur. That translates into a forty-hour week of class time and study time for the conscientious student. No business, as far as I know, would ever place time expectations on customers. The average job is "evaluated" by the employer or manager and the worker who fails to perform well can be "fired." Professors can similarly "fire" students who do poorly in class by failing them. No business would ever do anything comparable by "firing" a customer. True, a bar or restaurant may ask an unruly customer to leave, but that can be understood as a case in which the unruly are imposing costs on other customers, not as a case where the customer has failed to "do the job."

Schools are just a special kind of labor market in which colleges demand students (their "workers") and students are the suppliers, and where the supply and demand curves happen to cross at a point that results in the wage being negative. After all, entry-level positions pay very low salaries at least in part because of simple supply and demand reasons and internships frequently pay nothing. In the extreme case of students, the "worker" simply doesn't produce something that yields revenue to the university but instead adds to a university's costs. It follows that there will be demand only for these special types of "workers" if the "wages" paid to them are negative.

The Rise of Advertising and Marketing

Perhaps the clearest evidence of a change in the way that we think about higher education is the dramatic rise in advertising and marketing over the past thirty years. How is it possible that back when fewer attended college and tuitions were lower, colleges chose not to advertise while when in an age when far more choose to attend and inflation-adjusted tuition is considerably higher they feel this need? Wouldn't you think that with college now described

as a "necessity" by many that this would be precisely the time that advertising would be seen as less necessary, not more?

Were you to ask people thirty or forty years ago when college advertising was rare why they chose not to advertise, you would probably get an answer such as "nobody did it" or "it just wasn't done." While somewhat question-begging (*why* was it "just not done"?) such an answer does reflect the role of simple custom in analyzing economic change. However, I would suggest that a significant reason for not advertising was the more widely held view of the relationship of professor to student as more like employer to worker than like seller to buyer.

Consider why employers so seldom advertise job openings, at least in the modern, marketing sense of "advertise." Although job openings are made known and are thus "advertised" in the broadest sense of the word, those announcements are more informational than persuasive in nature, indicating what the job consists of, what the requirements are, what the salary will be, and the like. The general absence of persuasive advertising can be partly explained by the fact that for most positions, the supply of applicants well exceeds the demand. But the fact remains that for most jobs firms do not have to try to convince people to take them.

With higher education, too, tuitions were once set at levels which ensured that the number applying for admissions would exceed the number of openings. While this is still true, particularly at elite institutions, the rising tuition rates are having the likely effect of lowering the gap between applicants and spaces available. At least as important, by thinking of students more as consumers than "workers," the gates have been opened to trying to influence their demand for the services provided.

Advertising can indeed play an informative role and the tendency for students to look farther from their home area in seeking a college is at least partly attributable to more expressive advertising. But that advertising can also be wasteful is undeniable. Certainly some of the overall rise in the cost of college can be traced to the decision to advertise more. And more significantly, advertising sets the tone of "student as customer" and with it a number of predictable shifts in the whole college experience.

Damaging “Discounts”

Higher education provides a particularly interesting case, one in which it is possible to lower non-monetary costs to the “customer” without at the same time creating higher costs for the college. To see this, consider the main reason someone attends college. While acquiring knowledge is certainly important, acquiring a degree looms larger. Even for someone who loves learning for its own sake, I often point out to students, attending college would be far less valuable if a respected degree didn’t await one at the end of the process.

Ask yourself: what would you have been willing to pay for a full education at Harvard under the condition that no one would ever know that you had attended? It is not just learning but being able to announce to the outside world that you have learned that seems to matter. In short, getting the degree is terribly important. And lowering the cost of getting this degree will be very attractive to those considering going for it. To the extent that the costs that are lowered are the non-monetary costs, colleges (at least those run by those without a well-developed sense of professional standards) stand to gain. Depressingly, three developments suggest that such lowering of the non-monetary costs have indeed been occurring.

First, there has been that forever talked-about but seldom -solved problem of grade inflation. The suggested reasons for grade inflation are several. Some would argue that the demise of tenure and greater reliance on adjunct faculty brings with it higher grades, since those having to worry about remaining employed have to worry about keeping the customer happy. Whether consciously or not, the tendency to grade more generously likely follows. Then there is just an overall societal trend of inflating the way we describe things. “Fabulous,” “outstanding,” and similar words tend to be used more in a market society where advertising makes up a large percentage of the total discourse. It might well be that what counts as a grade of A (“excellent”) or a B (“very good”) has simply expanded. But also to be considered is that grade inflation might be traced to simply asking less of students. A student can react in one of three ways to easier grading. She might (1) work outside class precisely as much as before the change in grading policy while getting much higher grades, (2) might work much less and get the same grades as before, or (3) might work somewhat less while getting somewhat higher grades. The available evidence certainly supports option 3: students are working less at the same time that grades are rising. That is fully consistent

with the pressure on the university to lower the non-monetary costs of obtaining an education.

Must Learning Be Enjoyable?

Another development relating to the student as consumer is a rise in the belief that learning should be "enjoyable." Think about it: if attending class, studying, writing papers, and whatever else is required are actually enjoyable, then there really is no cost of any consequence other than tuition. What a marketing coup! Suddenly many costs of getting an education are miraculously eliminated.

While it is certainly possible that some learning carries no effort cost or time cost with it, such learning is surely the exception. To speak as economists do of education being a costly process is not to say that it is in any sense "painful." It is just to say that the student would prefer doing something else with her time.

As I explain to my students, the fact that they often want to be somewhere else than in the classroom with me is not grounds for concluding that my teaching has failed. Thinking back, I cherish much of my undergraduate education, yet I have to admit that I liked having the occasional cancellation or the regular breaks between semester. And trying to make education truly entertaining will mean that a huge percentage of what we currently include in our curricula simply could not survive.

"Accelerated" Learning

A particularly ominous development has been the relatively recent rise of "accelerated learning." Properly understood, it is hard to see this as little more than a reduction in the time cost of a getting a degree. Less study time is a cost-reduction trend that's been under way for a long time. This other time reduction is something that is more immediately obvious to the prospective student (often "the busy professional") who well prior to accepting admission discovers that there will be a reduced time cost.

Then there is "distance learning," which offers still another discount. You don't actually have to attend. You don't even have to do your own work or take the tests if you have someone who can take them for you.

Conclusion

For at least the past thirty years, the trend has been to regard college students as “customers” or “consumers.” That has weakened if not outright displaced the willingness to treat the student more as a “worker,” subject to work responsibilities and expected to put in a certain amount of time “on the job.” Regardless of whether the class is accounting, physics, or European history, pressures exist to see our students as customers who have paid money and who are entitled to the diploma they have paid to receive. This perspective undermines the entire process of higher education.

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THE PRACTITIONER'S TOOLBOX

Intrinsic Motivation and Compulsory School Attendance

You can take a horse to water, but you
can't make him drink.

—Proverb

by Gary K. Clabaugh

When my son was an adolescent he became deeply involved in his high school's theater program. He painted scenery, designed and printed playbills, played lead and supporting roles, and even designed the complimentary tee shirts kids received for participating in drama competition, all solely because he enjoyed doing it. It was intrinsically valuable to him.

In contrast, he was a reluctant participant in the school's gifted education program. Here his motivation was purely extrinsic. He just wanted to pass.

When he and I met with the gifted education teacher to select his annual "learning project," I suggested using one of his theater activities. But my son quickly said he would prefer to write a paper. Afterward he explained why: "If kids get academic credit for participating in theater it will ruin the program. It will be filled with people who have no real interest." In other words, there is no substitute for intrinsic motivation. Mix in the extrinsically motivated and the whole effort loses authenticity.

That's an interesting idea. Let's consider compulsory school attendance in this context. Forcing kids to go to school has been extant so long that we take it for granted. Yet compelling kids to attend school changes everything so far as motivation is concerned. The presence of so many "students" with only extrinsic or even no interest creates an atmosphere that poisons authenticity the same way my son worried about.

That is the price we pay for imposing compulsory schooling on the reluctant and antagonistic. It provides day care, takes troublesome kids off the street, and even helps socialize youngsters (provided they don't attend schools where predatory hoodlums rule). But it also makes teaching similar to commanding a naval vessel with a shanghaied crew. Too often the "scholars" are sullen, unwilling, and prone to mutiny.

In the good old days ship captains could rely on the cat-o'-nine-tails to extrinsically motivate shanghaied sailors. Similarly, teachers were able to wield the rod to augment the enthusiasm of reluctant scholars. Nowadays, the only extrinsic motivation teachers command is praise, carping, and grades. Combating indifference, passive-aggressive resistance, and outright mutiny with these feeble tools is like trying to put out a forest fire with a squirt gun.

What about kindling the intrinsic interests of reluctant scholars? Competent and caring teachers try their best to do that. Occasionally they even pull it off. But the last thing the average kid thinks of in school, particularly beyond the primary grades, is learning for learning's sake. The fact is, most of them couldn't care less about the contents of the curriculum—which is far more political than pedagogical to begin with.

It seems that for authentic learning to take place, intrinsic motivation is likely critical—yet critics charge that teachers are so preoccupied with performance that they often fail to consider motivation at all. Then there is the related allegation that teachers who do think about motivation don't trust the intrinsic variety because that is not how people motivate them. Some critics even contend that teachers mindlessly prefer short-term, moment-to-moment approaches.

All this is humbug! If today's teachers are preoccupied with performance, we can thank No Child Left Behind. And so far as intrinsic motivation is concerned, veteran teachers have long recognized that when compulsion comes in the door, learning for its own sake flies out the window.

Did draft-era Army drill instructors rely on intrinsic motivation? Of course they didn't. Do traffic school instructors rely on intrinsic motivation? Not if they want to keep their jobs. Do prison guards rely on intrinsic motivation? Not if they value their lives. And here is why. Compulsion extinguishes intrinsic motivation as effectively as a fire hose douses a cigarette.

Experienced teachers know that. The more perceptive among them also realize that unless and until intrinsic interest motivates learning, little of lasting value is accomplished. Recognizing this reality sucks much of the joy out of most teaching, but it is no less real.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DEAD

H. L. Mencken

The editors at New Educational Foundations confess that we often find ourselves baffled by the relentless surge of nonsense that plagues our chosen field. Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top—where is this all taking us? If only we could consult some truly wise people—from, say, an age with no TV or Internet—perhaps then we could chart our way out of this wilderness more easily.

But wait! Through an elaborate, secret set of codes and intermediaries, we have contacted one of the most eminent public intellectuals of the twentieth century, the esteemed H. L. Mencken. What's more, H. L., so often irascible in life, agreed to share a bit of his time . . . or whatever it's called in eternity. But it was an honor and a privilege to spend a few moments, er, have a brief conversation, with him.

Interviewer: Mr. Mencken, so glad to reach you. How long since you left us?

Mencken: I have been dead fifty-six years. And, on the whole, it's been a relief.

Interviewer: How so?

Mencken: I once wrote that "those upon whom we lavish our veneration are reduced to absurdity in the end by dying of cystitis, or choking on marshmallows or dill pickles." In my case, I had become temporarily famous—the "Sage of Baltimore," they called me—and I was content to meet a similarly ignominious end. Instead a cerebral hemorrhage left me fully aware but almost completely unable to speak, read, or write. Imagine, loving language as I did and then having it stolen from you. And it took another eight long years until I could achieve the ultimate, irrevocable act of death.

Interviewer: But you can speak now; and I was hoping you would share your thoughts on education.

Mencken: Education? Sure, why not? I was never hesitant to share my thoughts when I was alive.

Interviewer: Let's begin with higher education. You've made fun of professors in the past. Have you changed your mind?

Mencken: Not at all. There is still no idea so stupid that you can't get some professor to believe it. Not only that, but collegiate pedagogues have an unprecedented talent for saying nothing in an august and heroic manner. And what is a university professor's function? Simply to pass on to fresh generations of numskulls a body of so-called knowledge that is fragmentary, unimportant, and, in large part, untrue.

Interviewer: Hasn't that improved in recent years?

Mencken: Not at all. As a matter of fact, since my death this nothingness has been raised to a higher power by many professors inserting enormous slugs of mathematics into their jottings. This has made their works even more laborious and muggy, incomparably tangled, and utterly unintelligible, the self-evident made horrifying, the obvious in terms of the staggering.

Plus since my death, athletics has made academe morally and intellectually bankrupt. It is impossible to think of games among young men and women save as reversions to an earlier stage of growth. A really intelligent educational policy would try to discourage the taste for them, just as it tries to discourage the taste for making mud pies.

If they must insist on these games to raise revenue, they should at least make some adjustments. For instance, college football would be much more interesting if the faculty played instead of the students, and even more interesting if the trustees played. There would be a great increase in broken arms, legs and necks, and simultaneously an appreciable diminution in the loss to humanity.

Speaking of university trustees, they are a major reason for the sterility of higher education. A professor's whole professional activity is circumscribed by the prejudices, vanities, and avarices of a committee of soap-boilers, nail manufacturers, bank directors, and politicians. The moment he offends these vermin he is undone. He cannot so much as think aloud without running a risk of having them fan his pantaloons.

Interviewer: You speak of professors as if they are all male. But many more females have joined the occupation since your death.

Mencken: Yes, forgive me for losing track of that. By and large, the increase in female professors represents a vast improvement. The truth is that neither sex, without some fertilization by the complementary characters of the other, is capable of the highest reaches of human endeavor. Man, without a saving touch of woman in him, is too doltish, too naive and romantic, too easily deluded and lulled to sleep by his imagination, to be anything above a cavalryman or a theologian. And woman, without some trace of that divine innocence which is masculine, is too harshly the realist for those vast projections of the fancy which lie at the heart of what we call genius.

Interviewer: I hesitate to ask you about schoolteachers, but that's next on my list.

Mencken: The essential difficulty of pedagogy lies in the impossibility of inducing a sufficiency of superior men and women to become pedagogues. And no wonder, for how can one imagine an intelligent person engaging in so puerile an avocation? The educationists have invented a bogus science of pedagogy to salve their egos, but it remains hollow to any intelligent eye. What they may teach or not teach is determined not by themselves, or even by any exercise of sound reason, but by the interaction of politics on the one side and quack theorists on the other.

Interviewer: What about public schools? Their alleged poor quality is much in the news.

Mencken: The public schools of the United States were damaged very seriously when they were taken over by the State. So long as they were privately operated the persons in charge of them retained a certain amount of professional autonomy, and with it went a considerable dignity. But now they are all petty jobholders who show the psychology that goes with the trade.

Interviewer: But at least they teach kids to read and to think.

Mencken: You are erroneously assuming that the aim of public education is to fill the young of the species with knowledge and awaken their intelligence and to make them fit to discharge the duties of citizenship in an enlightened and independent manner. Nothing could be further from the truth. The aim of public education is not to

spread enlightenment at all; it is simply to reduce as many individuals as possible to the same safe level, to breed and train a standardized citizenry, to down dissent and originality.

Interviewer: But, overall, hasn't public education reduced human ignorance?

Mencken: Not really; the curse of man, and the cause of nearly all his woe, is his stupendous capacity for believing the incredible. And public education tries to cure that at its peril.

Interviewer: You are famed for your newspaper reporting on the Scopes "monkey trial." Eighty-seven years later the fight over teaching evolution in the public schools is still going strong. Some, including former President George W. Bush, and a few recent Republican presidential candidates such as Rick Perry and Michele Bachman, think the answer is to teach creation science along with evolution so that the kids get both sides of the story. Their opponents say creation science isn't science. What do you think?

Mencken: I think both sides miss the point. Imagine the Creator as a stand-up comedian—and at once the world becomes explicable.

Interviewer: You seem a terrible cynic.

Mencken: Yes? Well cynics are right nine times out of ten. But a cynic is a man who, when he smells flowers, looks around for a coffin. I don't always do that.

Interviewer: Then what do you think has value?

Mencken: I am strongly in favor of common sense, common honesty, and common decency, which makes me forever ineligible for public office.

Interviewer: Our allotted time is up. Do you have a last thought or request?

Mencken: Before I died I wrote my own epitaph: *"If, after I depart this vale, you ever remember me and have thought to please my ghost, forgive some sinner and wink your eye at some homely girl."* I'll stick with that.

(This "interview" was constructed of actual quotes taken from a variety of sources. While minor modifications were made to fit the venue, Mencken's thoughts and sentiments remain scrupulously intact.—Eds.)

*I never considered a
difference of opinion
in politics, in religion,
in philosophy, as cause
for withdrawing from
a friend.*

— Thomas Jefferson

