



**TEACHER TRAINING AND TEXAS
EDUCATIONAL REFORM:
A STUDY IN CONTRADICTION**

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Independent Institute Working Paper Number 35

May 2001

Lone Star Foundation
Driskill Hotel, Austin, Texas
December 7, 2000

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By
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I want to begin by thanking the LoneStar Foundation for this opportunity to share my thinking with such a distinguished group. Texas has been in the forefront educational improvement nationally because Texans have taken a no-nonsense, lets-look-at-the-bottom-line approach to the issue.

I applaud that approach and will today try to suggest how you can cut through some of the educational fog and see what else needs to be done.

My Background and Perspective

Let me begin by telling you a little about my background and my point of view regarding educational reform. I am a University of Florida graduate, a licensed educational psychologist, a licensed school psychologist, and a professor of educational psychology. For nearly 30 years I have been on the front lines of teacher training.

Today, however, I will not be talking to you as a professor. Instead I will be talking to you as an educational expert who believes that over many years theorists in the education community have lost sight of the public's educational aims and that this misalignment between what the public wants and what experts believe is best is the primary source of dissatisfaction with public education.¹

Several years ago, my kids were attending the laboratory school at my university. The school had recently hired new leadership and the new leadership decided that we should implement year-round schooling. There were committees and meetings and explanations were mailed out to parents, but after all was said and done about 85% of parents were opposed. Not incidentally, the off-the-record feedback from teachers was that most of them were opposed as well.

I had made a point of looking into the research on the benefits of year-round schooling and found that despite the principal's representations to the contrary, year-round schooling—at least the kind where the 9 months of school were broken into 4 nine- week sessions—had no effect on achievement. Being an ivory tower type, I thought this information should have some bearing on the issue.

How little did I know.

I will spare you the details but I can tell you that that experience taught me a number of important lessons about how schools operate and about how much schools are influenced by the aims and concerns of parents and taxpayers. Probably the most important conclusion I drew was that in the education marketplace, the interests of education's providers and those of its consumers **overlap** but do not **coincide**. Where they do not overlap, the parents and taxpayers, i.e., the parties who furnish the students and the money, have very little ability to influence school policy.

Another conclusion I drew was that parents and the lay public are very limited in their ability to get straight information about what is going on in the schools. Virtually everything the public knows about public education comes from the schools themselves. Even the reports in the media are mainly based on what schools decide to make public.

Part of the problem is jargon and communication of unfamiliar ideas. Education has a rich history and many of the theories in which educators are trained are not all that well understood by the public or by the educators that rely on them.

The other part of the problem is that some of the language used by educators is misleading. For example, the term "best practice" is widely used by educators and most laymen take it to mean teaching practice that is well known to be effective in producing student achievement. In fact, the term is used to mean teaching practice that is consistent with certain favored educational theories.²

Finally, it must be recognized that consumers and producers do not have the same interests when it comes to the information that is made available to the public. Generally speaking, consumers want an **accurate** impression of how well their school or their student is performing. By contrast, schools, like any organization want to build a **favorable** impression. Clearly, these are distinct interests.

My experience as a parent led me to form the Education Consumers ClearingHouse—a grassroots Consumers Union for the consumers of public education. We are a web site and a list serve (www.education-consumers.com) that provides networking opportunities, information, and access to consumer-friendly expertise for parents, taxpayers, policymakers, and all others on the consumer side of the education marketplace. We are supported by paid subscriptions--\$2.95/month. If we fail to serve the interests of education's consumers we will go out of business.

As a spin-off from the ClearingHouse, we also formed an Education Consumers Consultants Network. The Consultants Network is a group of education professors and experienced educators who are committed to providing consumer-friendly consulting. As I am sure that all of you have seen from time to time, it can be very difficult for policymakers to obtain independent assessments of educational policies, plans, and practices. School boards and other education oversight bodies typically have to accept on faith that a given recommendation or action serves the ends that they have in mind.

What our Network does is provide board members, legislators, business organizations, parent groups and all other consumer stakeholders access to educational consulting that is independent and sympathetic to the aims and interests of education's consumers. Our role in the education marketplace is conceptually similar to that of Dun & Bradstreet or similar organizations in the world of finance and business.

I am going into this detail about my background and my perspective because I want you to know why my view is largely unlike what you would hear from most professors of education. Rather, what I will tell you today is spoken with the consumer's interest foremost in mind.

Aims of Texas School Reform

The primary aim of educational reform in Texas is improved student learning.

Here is a quote from the recently updated State Board of Education Long-range Plan for Public Education:

Texas has moved from an education system that prescribes procedures to one that emphasizes achievement. In Texas public education, academic excellence is the standard by which rules, policies, programs and instructional practices are judged.³

Here is one other relevant quote from the Long-Range Plan:

Academic excellence, determined by the levels of individual and institutional performance in Texas public schools, and equity, measured by each student's achievement of rigorous learning standards, are the starting points and the fundamental indicators of the quality of public education planning in Texas.⁴

Parents realize that the possession of knowledge and skills is critically important to a child's future. If nothing else, they can see its importance from their own experiences. Even individuals who themselves have had little education can see how that deficiency disadvantaged them. This common understanding among adults is probably the core reason that compulsory schooling is so widely supported. Responsible adults understand that schooling is valuable precisely because it equips children with knowledge and skills that they cannot yet recognize as important.

What do adults want kids to learn?⁵ Plainly the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic are the indispensables because they are the tools that permit acquisition of everything else. So called higher order thinking skills are important too; but contrary to the theorizing of some pedagogical experts, thinking skills cannot be optimized without knowledge and without the tool skills needed to gain more knowledge. Bottom line: Practically everyone agrees that schools should at least ensure that kids learn the basics.

Beyond the basics there is the general rule that the more a person knows, the easier it is for them to acquire additional knowledge and understanding.⁶ Thus the general aim of most schools is to establish a broad based curriculum that affords students enough background to gain additional knowledge should they choose to do so. Parents and the employers favor practical and career objectives too but not to the exclusion of the general background knowledge.

Speaking at a more theoretical level, there is an enormous social, cultural, and economic advantage to a broad educational foundation—which is the reason that virtually all literate societies support it. The advantage is that the members of succeeding generations are able to begin with a base of knowledge that previous generations had to struggle to discover for themselves. Instead of each succeeding generation figuratively having to reinvent the wheel, each can build on the hard won discoveries of their ancestors. The beneficial aspect of cumulating knowledge across generations is abundantly clear in areas such as science.

Determination of what should be included in a common curriculum is a messy process, but scholarly societies, state boards of education, school boards, and other interested parties muddle through and come up with a kind of “best of” what is known; and these are the facts and skills that come to be what students are expected to know. Of course, it is these goals and expectations that are translated into course and grade level objectives, tests of achievement, report cards, and other materials that communicate to parents, teachers, and students what students are expected to learn.

You may be wondering why I am spending so much time reciting what may seem obvious, but I have a purpose. I want to be clear about the primary aim of education insofar as parents, the consuming public, and most policymaking representatives are concerned. It is that schools should ensure to the extent possible that each member of the coming generation is equipped with the knowledge and skills that are believed essential to adulthood.

I should add that this aim in no way implies that schooling outcomes should be limited to mindless memorization of facts and information or should be unconcerned about all other outcomes. Rather I am simply making the point that the public considers the acquisition of the knowledge and skills prescribed by the curriculum to be the **primary** outcome of schooling⁷ and their view is supported is supported by good and sufficient reasons.

Texas Objectives and Learner-Centered Schooling

Early on in this talk I said that it is my belief that a prime reason for the public’s dissatisfaction with public schooling is a misalignment between the public’s educational aims and certain theoretical ideals widely held within the education community. It is my unhappy duty to report that as I reviewed the various policies and other documents pertaining to Texas’s educational reforms in preparation for this talk, I detected the very kind of misalignment that I earlier referenced; and I believe it will retard if not undermine your otherwise commendable reform efforts if not corrected.

Earlier this year I wrote an article that was published in *The State Education Standard*—a new journal published by the National Association of State Boards of Education. The title was “Aligning Teacher Training with Public Policy” and it discussed the discrepancy that exists between certain pedagogical doctrines that are idealized by teacher-educators and the educational aims of most parents.⁸ I could as well have written it about the teacher training reforms that have been undertaken in Texas.

Teacher training in Texas is guided by a document titled *Learner-Centered Schools for Texas, A Vision of Texas Educators*. It was published by the State Board of Educator Certification.⁹ The learner-centered concept is the very type of doctrine I believe is impeding educational reform in many states—especially reform that is standards-based and accountability-driven. It is impeding reform by encouraging teachers to do their job in a way that subtly but significantly undermines the educational priorities intended by public policy.

First I will briefly describe learner-centered instruction and then I will show how it disagrees with Texas’s educational aims and priorities.

Learner-centered instruction is a type of teaching idealized by most professors of education. A 1997 Public Agenda survey of teacher-educators found that the vast majority of teacher-educators hold a view teaching “that differs markedly from that of most parents and taxpayers.”¹⁰ Public agenda characterized it as a teacher-as-facilitator view.

In fact, it is essentially the same view that was known as “progressive education” in the nineteen twenties, “child centered education” in the thirties, “open education” in the sixties, and a long list of other names that have come and gone in the course of the twentieth century. The “developmentally appropriate instruction”¹¹ mentioned in the State Board of Education’s recently updated Long Range Plan for Public Education is another example.

The term “learner-centered” implies teaching fitted to the learner’s unique characteristics, e.g. the student’s developmental stage or learning style or gender. In concept, it assumes that if teachers are able to “connect with learners, rather than simply covering the curriculum,”¹² students will learn more or less spontaneously, i.e., without the structure and teacher direction ordinarily considered necessary.

It is an appealing concept but unfortunately one that is largely unsubstantiated by experimental evidence.¹³ For example, there are many studies of student learning styles but almost none have demonstrated that student achievement can be improved by fitting teaching to particular learning styles.¹⁴ In medical terms, there is plenty of diagnosis but little in the way of proven treatment.

The same problem exists with most other attempts to fit teaching to student diversity. Yes, there are all kinds of differences among students and it might be supposed that if the

school did a better job of accommodating to these differences, students would learn more. But the problem is that proven treatments are lacking. So instead of teachers being trained in an armamentarium of approaches proven effective with different learners, they are trained in theory and given to believe that if they correctly fit their teaching to each learner's uniquenesses, learning will more or less spontaneously emerge.

By the way, when learner-centered teaching fails, professors presume that the teachers are at fault. In other words, if a teacher uses learner-centered methods and fails to bring about expected outcomes, it is presumed that they applied the theory incorrectly. Often it is assumed that they lacked proper training. In the alternative, it might be assumed that they lacked a proper sensitivity to student differences or lacked the creativity to make an adaptive response. Teacher-educators consider insensitivity and lack of creativity to be negative predictors of a successful career in teaching; so not surprisingly, most teachers prefer to accept the idea that they need more training.

The lack of studies showing that it is possible to increase achievement by fitting teaching to learning styles, developmental stages, and other such characteristics is, in a sense, an inherent aspect of learner-centered instruction.¹⁵ The learner-centered approach is really not intended to bring about preordained learning outcomes. Rather it is intended to bring about the kind of spontaneous, self-directed sort of learning process that educators believe is the optimal educational experience. It is optimal because it is natural and it comfortably fits the interests, talents, and inclinations of the learner, not because it results in the learner acquiring expected knowledge and skills. Instead, learner-centered instruction is said to produce educational "growth," i.e., some undefined increase in a wide range of intellectual outcomes. It may produce outcomes prescribed by a curriculum but only incidentally and inefficiently, i.e., as part of a broad pattern of growth.

Here is how the ideal learner-centered teacher is described in *Learner-Centered Schools for Texas, A Vision of Texas Educators*.¹⁶ By the way, this same statement is included in the manual that newly trained teachers study to prepare for the Examination for the Certification of Teachers in Texas (ExCET):

The teacher is a leader of a learner-centered community [i.e., classroom], in which an atmosphere of trust and openness produces a stimulating exchange of ideas and mutual respect. The teacher is a critical thinker and problem solver who plays a variety of roles when teaching. As a coach, the teacher observes, evaluates, and changes directions and strategies whenever necessary. As a facilitator, the teacher helps students link ideas in the content area to familiar ideas, to prior experiences, and relevant problems. As a manager, the teacher effectively acquires, allocates, and conserves resources. By encouraging self-directed learning and by modeling respectful behavior, the teacher effectively manages the learning environment so that optimal learning occurs.¹⁷

Notice that the ideal avoids any suggestion that the teacher should direct or require or expect any particular educational result. Also notice that it in no way suggests

that the teacher direct or require students behave themselves, pay attention, and make an effort when they don't feel like it. Rather it assumes that the ideal teacher is one that is somehow able to fit classroom conditions to learners in such a way that they will be transformed from the kind of young people we see in everyday life to ones who undergo a spontaneous burst of self-directed and collaboratively undertaken educational growth.

Plainly, what the Texas “Vision” describes is an ideal form of teaching, one that is suited mainly to ideal students, i.e., students who need only to be coached, facilitated, and otherwise assisted in their largely self-directed efforts. Most other students--especially those who may be poorly prepared, poorly behaved, inattentive, weakly motivated, or otherwise not well equipped for school, i.e., the other 90%--are not well served by this type of teaching.

The late Professor Jeanne Chall of the Harvard Graduate School of Education emphasized this point in her posthumous *The Academic Achievement Challenge*:

Based on research, history, and experience, my first recommendation [for improving academic achieve in America's public schools] is that schools that are not already doing so put a greater emphasis on a traditional, teacher-centered education. Traditional teacher-centered schools, according to research and practice, are more effective than progressive, student-centered schools for the academic achievement of most children. And that approach is especially beneficial for students who come to school less well prepared for academic learning—children of less educated families, inner-city children, and those with learning difficulties at all social levels.¹⁸

I would urge anyone who would like to further examine learner-centered instruction and how it compares to traditional teacher-led instruction to read *The Academic Achievement Challenge* (Chall used the terms “student-centered” and “teacher-centered”).¹⁹ At the time of her death in 1999, Chall was one of America's best-known and most respected educational authorities.

Her book is the capstone of a 50-year career in research and teaching; and in essence, her analysis explains why successful schools such as Houston's Wesley Elementary or the No Excuses schools that you will hear about from Samuel Casey Carter are not widely imitated. Their methods are effective but at odds with the learner-centered ideal.

How Learner-Centered Instruction Reorders Priorities

It is clear that the public wants teachers to employ methods of instruction that will bring about the outcomes prescribed by the curriculum. It is also clear, however, that they want teachers to teach in ways that students will find stimulating, engaging, and enjoyable. Teachers who have been trained to use learner-centered teaching methods agree with both of these objectives but there is a critical difference in their priorities. The public and especially parents are concerned, first and foremost, about the whether

students are learning that which they are supposed to learn. To them, the child's longer-term educational well-being is more important than any immediate satisfactions in the learning experience. They agree with the notion that school should be a stimulating, rewarding, and joyful experience, but not at the expense of the longer-term educational outcomes.

Teachers who employ learner-centered teaching methods act on the basis of the opposite priorities. The learner-centered viewpoint taught in schools of education presumes that the student's engagement in the learning process is more important than any specific result sought by the teacher because they believe that enjoyment will somehow eventually lead to learning. Teachers are taught to believe that if a child is interested and engaged in an educational activity, they are learning something valuable even if that outcome is not the immediate objective.

For example, rather than systematically teach children how to sound out words, children taught to read by the learner-centered, whole language approach are encouraged to guess at words about which they are uncertain. Whole language instructors believe that guessing permits children to become engaged in reading more quickly and naturally than they would if they began by learning to correctly decode the letters printed on the page. The problem, however, is that in the case of reading, putting enjoyment and engagement ahead of decoding skills invites the development of habits that can seriously undermine long-term proficiency. It is the same kind of handicap that is created when people learn to keyboard by the hunt and peck method.

Many children become proficient readers, writers, etc. despite learner-centered instruction but many more could gain expected knowledge and skills if, instead of being encouraged to explore and "discover," their learning experiences were structured and sequenced in ways that have been proven effective. It is this reluctance to structure and direct learning that characterizes learner-centered instruction, and it is this subtle difference in educational priorities is responsible for striking differences between the views of educators and education's consumers with regard to a number of critical schooling issues.

Assessment of Student Achievement

Achievement testing is a prime example. Parents, policymakers, and taxpayers believe that schools ought to be accountable for student achievement as measured by standardized tests. To them, schooling that somehow fails to produce acceptable levels of measured achievement cannot be considered good schooling.²⁰

To the contrary, teachers are taught that a student can experience "good" teaching and yet not learn that which is tested. From the learner-centered perspective, if the student's learning was not reflected in the test score, it means that the test was too narrow, not that the teaching was ineffective.²¹

It is this difference in priorities that leads educators to call for achievement tests that emphasize generic “thinking skills” instead of facts and information. In their view, the notion that the primary outcome of schooling should be the acquisition of a prescribed body of knowledge and skills is wrongheaded. Instead they call for the use of “authentic assessment,” and student “portfolios”—assessment schemes that effectively permit the student’s response to define the expected outcome.

In the eyes of learner-centered educators, these alternative forms of assessment are desirable not because they do a superior job of measuring whether students have learned the knowledge and skills valued by the public, but because they are consistent with the kind of outcomes that learner-centered teaching is intended to produce.

Research as a Guide to Teaching Practice

Learner-centered educators and the consuming public also differ markedly with regard to the value of research as a guide to effective teaching.²² Over the course of the 20th century, public schooling has been roiled by a succession of educational fads. A recent book by the educational historian Diane Ravitch—*Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms*--provides a comprehensive and insightful history.²³ Recent examples include the “whole language” reading instruction that was rejected in California²⁴ and the “fuzzy math” that was repudiated last year by 200 or so distinguished scientists and mathematicians.²⁵ Thirty years ago “open education”²⁶ and “self-esteem” enhancement²⁷ were the rage. Virtually all of these faulty ideas were variants of learner-centered schooling and virtually all of them originated in schools of education.

Learner-centered educators have little interest in quantitative studies of teaching effectiveness, i.e., the kind of clinical and experimental trials used in medicine, because they do not agree that teaching methods should be judged on the basis of whether they produce specific expected results—improved performance on an objective test, for example.²⁸ Instead, they prefer *qualitative* studies that focus on teacher, student, and expert opinion about educational effectiveness.²⁹ As a result, learner-centered educators are entirely comfortable in urging the adoption of new educational programs or practices on the grounds that they are promising and favored by teacher opinion rather than carefully tested and proven—a posture that opens the door to faddish educational practice.

Over decades, parents, school boards, and other lay decision makers have been assured that various innovations were supported by research when, in truth, the available research indicated only that the innovation was promising.³⁰ For example, years ago proponents of self-esteem enhancement were telling policymakers that research suggests that student success in school is dependent on the development of positive self-esteem. As a result, a generation of teachers was taught techniques of self-esteem enhancement.

The research cited was, in fact, a body of correlational evidence showing that high achievers have higher self-esteem and lower achievers the reverse. There was no convincing evidence that it was possible to somehow artificially boost student self-

esteem and get higher achievement as a result. In fact, subsequent experimental studies showed that the reason self-esteem and achievement were correlated was because success in school boosts self-esteem, not the reverse.³¹

Assuring that schooling practices are proven rather than merely promising is not a high priority issue among educators but it is very important to consumers, especially parents. **Parents no more want their children taught with untested teaching practices than they want them treated with untested medical procedures.** When it comes to safety and well being of their own children, virtually all parents are conservative and risk averse. They presume that teachers are using safe and effective practices yet, in truth, the history of innovation in the public schools clearly suggests that children have been made the involuntary subjects of poorly tested pedagogical schemes.

Policymakers have given public education's history of learner-centered fads and failures far less attention than it deserves. The reason may be that educators themselves are not inclined to think of teaching methods as the factor responsible for failure. **For example, a 1988 study of 5000 psychological assessments written by school psychologists found no instances of student failure blamed on inappropriate teaching.**³² School psychologists questioned about the study opined that reports of teaching failure are not well accepted by the school culture. The study also noted a well-documented bias toward "child-as-the-problem" explanations in textbooks and in the school psychology research generally.

The same institutional mindset that makes school psychologists reluctant to assign student failure to faulty teaching appears to operate with respect to policy recommendations too. In district after district and in state after state, faddish practices have resulted in failure for which there has been minimal accountability. When programs fail to produce expected results, new programs—often ones founded on some other untested ideas—are launched to replace the old. Instead of careers or reputations suffering, the responsible parties may be commended for finding a new grant or another innovative program. In broad terms, the unintended but observable result of this process has been to reward failure with new programs and more funding.

Studies of the waste created by particular educational fads are virtually unknown, yet the numbers must be staggering. For example, California alone is currently spending billions on remedial reading instruction and revised teacher training to undo the whole language fad. A smaller scale but more conspicuous example is the \$150 million Prince Georges County, Maryland has had to spend on building interior walls in schools that were constructed to accommodate the open education fad of the sixties. Teachers found that without walls, classes were so noisy and disorganized that they couldn't teach. Schools designed to accommodate open education were built all over the U. S. including here in Texas.³³

I could cite other examples of fads and waste but such a discussion would overlook the larger point. **The real cost of these flawed innovations is the irretrievable loss of opportunity and life prospects for the students who were subjected to them.** In over

thirty years of reviewing educational research, I have yet to see an education journal article that discusses the human cost, i.e., the personal financial damages, caused by a given educational fad. I am sure, however, the numbers would be staggering. If the damages stemming from disabling auto accidents or medical malpractice run into millions, how much greater would be the damage resulting from the use of an ill tested educational practice applied to millions of students over a period of years?

This observation brings me back to my earlier point about accountability for failed innovations. The education community's approach to teaching-failure is very forgiving. Even where responsibility is clear, the guilty parties are said to be well intentioned and the matter of harm done to students is more or less forgotten. I believe that this collective amnesia is a mistake—a mistake that permits the cycle of fad and failure to be endlessly repeated. **When a child's life prospects are damaged by the imposition of poorly tested educational practice in a school that they were compelled to attend, I believe there needs to be careful consideration of what happened and why.**

I raise this point because there is a certain moral and ideological dimension to the education community's unquestioning adherence to the learner-centered ideal and its lax approach to educational innovation.³⁴ Proponents of learner-centered instruction frame the choice between their view and more traditional approaches to teaching as one of an enlightened, progressive-minded approach that is centered on the needs of the child versus an approach that is uninformed, utilitarian, and indifferent to the child—a factory model of education. They see it as a conflict between those who are concerned about how the child feels versus those who don't care. They see it as the compassionate versus those who lack compassion, the warm-hearted versus the mean-spirited, the morally superior versus the morally inferior.³⁵

The rhetoric of this debate is well known to teachers.³⁶ For example, traditional teacher-led, results-oriented instruction is commonly characterized as joyless and harmful. It is derided as “drill and kill.” It is said to promote a “one size fits all” curriculum comprised of “mere facts”—facts that students are expected to memorize “by rote.” Other canards include claims that teacher-led instruction undermines creativity, causes burnout, and represents a return to the days of the hickory stick—all assertions unsupported by credible evidence. In its more extreme forms, the rhetoric in opposition to teacher-led instruction suggests that children must be saved from the traditionalist threat at any cost!

My purpose in describing this debate is to alert you to the point that bringing about a change in the education community's thinking on these matters will take much more than a declaration of purpose. Most educators have been taught that the use of correct methodology (i.e., best practice) is more important than the attainment of results. Most educators have also been taught that objective achievement tests stress facts and information at the expense of open-ended thinking skills (i.e., “real learning), and most educators have been taught that teaching methods that are designed to produce specific learning outcomes are inhumane if not ethically questionable. In short, teachers have been given to believe that deviation from the learner-centered ideal is more than a pedagogical question; it is a matter of professional ethics.

The use of untested, learner-centered practices will continue to be thought of as benign and compassionate, and well-intentioned failure will continue to seem the ethically superior alternative so long as the human cost of education's fads and failures is ignored. If, however, a concerted effort is made to study and understand the causes of fads and failures and to look at these costs as parents and taxpayers see them, I predict that the education profession will begin thinking about educational innovations in the same way other professions look at newly proposed practices, i.e., very carefully. **In my opinion, the cause of improved public schooling would be greatly benefited if the education community, in general, and the teacher-training community, in particular, came to understand that whatever are the supposed risks of traditional teacher-led instruction, they must be balanced against the enormous and well documented dangers of untested and ineffective instruction.**

Regulatory Collaboration and Flawed Standards

I want to spend these last few minutes talking about the role of the agencies that regulate teaching profession. In theory, at least, they exist to defend the public's interest in safe and effective schooling. Practice, however, is a different matter.

In every state, state education agencies and teacher licensure agencies work closely with schools of education and other education stakeholders to develop professional standards for the teaching profession. The professional staff of these agencies is put in a difficult if not impossible position: They attempt to develop policies that serve the public's aims and interests while meeting the approval of the education community's representatives.

I do not have detailed knowledge of how educational policies and practices have emerged in Texas; but I can tell you that in many states, regulatory collaboration verges on regulatory capture. Rather than serve the public's aims, accreditation and licensure regulations have been conformed to the education community's ideals. The result has been teacher training and licensure standards infused with pedagogical idealism. As idealism has led to fads and fads to failure, state regulatory agencies have revised and re-revised standards but without much effect on the problem. The reason, of course, is that the revisions typically reflect the same voices and the same views as the standards they replace.

The bottom line here is that the regulatory process has allowed the consumer's interest to slip through the cracks. **Despite all of the standards and regulatory mechanisms that have been developed and refined over many years, fully trained and certified educators have employed and continue to employ every fad that has come along. If professional standards in medicine or engineering worked this way there would be a public outcry. In education, it has come to be expected.**

In fact, teachers typically learn educational fads from fully approved and accredited teacher training programs. If Texas were to survey teachers and principals as to how they came to adopt fads like open education or self-esteem enhancement, I predict that you

would find that most were informed about these innovations by the most prestigious and authoritative educational sources in Texas, i.e., institutions that are fully approved by both by state education authorities and by national standard setting bodies such as the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.³⁷ Again, my point is that the regulatory process is not protecting the consumer's interest.

I regret to say that Texas's newly instituted Accountability System for Educator Preparation (ASEP) seems to be an example of the kind of regulation I am describing. The ASEP program is intended to make teacher-training programs accountable for the quality of their graduates and it judges the quality of their graduates on the basis of ExCET scores. The ExCET exam is the Examination for Certification of Educators in Texas and it is basically a measure of whether novice teachers have learned that which their teacher training programs taught them. **The effect of such an accountability system will be to further ensure pedagogical correctness, not effective teaching.**

A Regulatory Alternative

Happily for policymakers, I believe there is an alternative that will permit policymakers to see in a more direct and clear-cut way whether teachers are being trained in teaching methods that respect the public's aim of improved student achievement. It avoids the blending of objectives that has resulted from collaborative regulation. Some school districts in Texas and the state of Tennessee have adopted a value-added indicator of teacher effectiveness.³⁸ Value-added assessment is a statistical methodology that quantifies annual student achievement gains in a way that takes into account student differences. It is the most accurate and objective way of determining teacher effectiveness currently available. Instead of relying on indirect indicators like ExCET scores, it measures teacher effectiveness by looking at the measured achievement of the students who were taught.

Value-added assessment can be used to measure teacher preparedness for licensure, advanced certification and, of course, the scores earned by newly graduated teachers can be used as an indicator of how well they were trained. Of critical importance, it measures teacher effectiveness in a way that respects the public's aims.

I would offer one caution about the use of value-added analysis, however. You are aware that there are problems with TAAS test and with the curriculum framework that is intended as a basis for the test. Value-added scores derived from poorly conceived testing will lead to the same result you are now getting from the ASEP accountability system.

So long as teacher-training is not aligned with public policy, misdirected practice at the classroom level will continue to waste resources and undermine efforts at educational improvement. Instead of permitting collaborative policymaking to blend the public's aims with those of the teacher training community, I would urge Texas policymakers examine how fads and failures have come about in the past and what they have cost, and

then to begin looking at the ability of teacher training graduates to produce the value-added achievement gains that are the consuming public's top educational priority.

The Attempt to Change the Learner-Centered Ethos in Britain: A Cautionary Tale

Changing the learner-centered ethos will take time and persistence. Melanie Phillips' 1996 *All Must Have Prizes* is an award winning account of the ongoing disaster that is educational reform in Great Britain.³⁹ Phillips was a columnist for the politically liberal *Manchester Guardian* who abandoned her political soul mates when her own investigations revealed the frightful decline of British schooling. Her observations about the conservative Thatcher government's attempts to reform the schools through implementation of the National Curriculum offers a telling parable for American policymakers. Here are a few quotes:

The National Curriculum became a battleground in which the attempt to bring basic educational concepts back into schools was ferociously and to a large extent successfully resisted.⁴⁰

The result was that despite bringing about some improvements, the National Curriculum actually made matters worse in some important ways, by institutionalizing some of the worst attitudes and giving them the force of law.⁴¹

The [educational community] culture that the ministers found themselves up against was not confined to a few extremists working for far-left, Labour-run local [education] authorities. It was, rather, a mind set that characterised virtually the entire education establishment. The doctrines of cultural relativism and child-centered, progressive teaching methods had been absorbed into the professional bloodstream. To argue against them was to encounter not merely incomprehension or repudiation but a moral rage. There was an unshakable faith that these theories were in the best interests of children and therefore that those who denied them were not merely in error but intent on doing children harm. There was consequently an absolute denial of the harm these theories were themselves doing to children. Where there was clear and demonstrable evidence of such harm, it was either ignored or denied or blamed on every surrounding social factor that could be thought of—parents, television, poverty, unemployment—on anything but the way children were being taught.⁴²

In the universities, the dominance of these ideas was near-total Those very few educationists who held out against the orthodoxy were stigmatized, ostracized and generally made miserable.⁴³

How could it have been otherwise? There was no challenge to these views in the culture of education. The articles the teachers read in the educational and mainstream press, the books they were directed towards in their training courses and the shared premises of their colleagues all created a closed world of thinking that was muddle-headed to the point of menace.⁴⁴

My hope is that through a heightened awareness of how and why fads have originated, and through the steady application of an educational-accountability policy based on value-added analysis, Texas can avoid a clash with a muddle-headed menace and bring its teacher training into alignment with public policy.

¹ J. Stone, "Aligning Teacher Training with Public Policy," *The State Education Standard*, 1(1), pp.34-38, (2000).

² For an engaging account of the rise and fall of a school embodying all that is currently considered "best practice," see D. Frantz and C. Collins, *Celebration USA* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1999). Celebration is the model community developed by Walt Disney World. Also see Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels, and Arthur Hyde, *Best Practice* (Portsmouth, NH: Heineman Publishers, 1998). The Preface and Chapter 1, especially pages 3-7 are particularly instructive about the meaning of the term.

³ State Board of Education, *Updated Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 2001-2006* (Austin, TX: Author, 2000), 7.

⁴ *Ibid*, 7.

⁵ J. Johnson and J. Immerwahr, *First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools* (New York: Public Agenda) 1994.

⁶ E. D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Hirsch further documents the importance of knowledge to subsequent learning in his *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* (New York: Doubleday, 1996).

⁷ J. Johnson and J. Immerwahr, *First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools*

⁸ J. Stone, "Aligning Teacher Training with Public Policy."

⁹ State Board for Educator Certification, *Learner-Centered Schools for Texas, A Vision of Texas Educators* (Austin, TX: Author, 1997), Available at www.sbec.state.tx.us.

¹⁰ G. Farkas, J. Johnson, and A. Duffett, *Different Drummers: How Teachers of Teachers View Public Education* (New York, NY: Public Agenda, 1997).

¹¹ See J. E. Johnson and K. M. Johnson, "Clarifying the Developmental Perspective in Response to Carta, Schwartz, Atwater, and McConnell," *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 12(4), (1992), 439-457. The authors' write about a committee meeting they attended at one of the formative gatherings of the National Association for Early Childhood Education. They describe how the pedagogical term "developmentally appropriate instruction" was adopted as a concept that might be used for public relations purposes. Also see J. Stone, "Developmentalism: An Obscure but Pervasive Restriction on Educational Improvement," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 4, no. 8 (1996). Available at www.education-consumers.com.

¹² L. Darling-Hammond, "Perestroika and Professionalism: The Case for Restructuring Teacher Preparation" in L. Darling-Hammond, G. Griffin, and A. Wise, *Excellence in Teacher Education: Helping Teachers Develop Learner-Centered Schools*, ed. R. McClure (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1992), 9.

¹³ R. Snow and J. Swanson, "Instructional Psychology: Aptitude, Adaptation, and Assessment," *Annual Review of Psychology* 43 (1992), 583-626.

¹⁴ For an extended discussion of learning styles research the types of studies underpinning a variety of educational fads see J. Stone & A. Clements, "Research and Innovation: Let the Buyer Beware" in R. A. Spillane and P. Regnier, eds., *The Superintendent of the Future: Strategy & Action for Achieving Academic Excellence* (Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishers, 1998).

¹⁵ Appraisals of learner-centered research are typically focused on specific forms of instruction. For example, see P. George, "Arguing Integrated Curriculum," *Middle School Journal* 28 (September 1996): 12-19 for an assessment of the research underpinning "integrated curriculum." For a brief, critical assessment of "constructivism" and "whole-language" research, see T. Good and J. Brophy, *Looking in Classrooms* (8th ed.) (1999). Regarding constructivist teaching, Good and Brophy conclude: "...although there are exceptions (primarily some of the studies cited in this chapter), most research on constructivist teaching has been confined to statements of rationale coupled with classroom examples of the principles implemented in practice, without including systematic

assessment of outcomes or comparison to other approaches. For an example of the type of study to which Good and Brophy refer, see T. Jennings, "Developmental Psychology and the Preparation of Teachers Who Affirm Diversity: Strategies Promoting Critical Social Consciousness in Teacher Preparation Programs," *Journal of Teacher Education* 46, no. 4 (1995).

¹⁶ State Board for Educator Certification, *Learner-Centered Schools for Texas, A Vision of Texas Educators*

¹⁷ State Board for Educator Certification, *Preparation Manual for The Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas (ExCET)*, (Austin, TX: Author, undated), appendix. Available at www.sbec.state.tx.us.

¹⁸ J. Chall, *The Academic Achievement Challenge*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000), 176.

¹⁹ Hirsch's *The Schools We Need* offers a broader philosophic analysis of the conflicting approaches in "Critique of a Thoughtworld."

²⁰ Association of American Publishers, *Survey Finds Strong Parental Support for Testing; Parents Cite Importance of Educational Assessment* (Washington, DC: Author, July 19, 2000) Available at www.publishers.org.

²¹ M. Neill & N. J. Medina, "Standardized Testing: Harmful to Educational Health," *Phi Delta Kappan* (May 1989): 688-697.

²² See D. Carnine, *Why Education Experts Resist Effective Practices* (April 2000). Available at the Fordham Foundation website: www.edexcellence.net

²³ D. Ravitch, *Left Behind: A Century of Failed School Reforms*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

²⁴ N. Lemann, "The Reading Wars," *The Atlantic Monthly* (November 1997): 128-134. Also see K. K.

Manizo, "Reading Panel Urges Phonics for All in K-6," *Education Week* (April 19, 2000).

²⁵ A. Hartocollis, "Math Teachers Back Return of Education in Basic Skills," *The New York Times* (April 13, 2000).

²⁶ D. A. Meyers, "Why Open Education Died," *Journal of Research and Development in Education* (Fall 1974) 60-67.

²⁷ B. Lerner, "Self-esteem and Excellence: The Choice and the Paradox," *The American Educator* (Summer 1996): 9-13, 41-42.

²⁸ Carnine, *Why Education Experts Resist Effective Practices*

²⁹ For an extended discussion of the types of research underpinning various educational fads see J. Stone & A. Clements, "Research and Innovation: Let the Buyer Beware"

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ M. A. Scheirer & R. E. Kraut, "Increasing Educational Achievement via Self Concept Change," *Review of Educational Research*, 49, no. 1 (1979), 131-150.

³² G. Alessi, "Diagnosis Diagnosed: A Systemic Reaction," *Professional School Psychology*, 3, no. 2 (1988), 145-151.

³³ See K. Elsbury, "Partitions divide parents, Open-space classrooms at center of debate," *Houston Chronicle* (November 21, 2000).

³⁴ See Hirsch, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* for an extended discussion of the degree to which the education community is captivated by learner-centered pedagogical doctrine. According to Hirsch, "Within the education community, there is currently no *thinkable* alternative." (italics in the original, p. 69); "... the heretical suggestion that the creed itself might be faulty cannot be uttered. To question progressive doctrine would be to put in doubt the identity of the education profession itself." (p. 69)

³⁵ J. Traub, "The Curriculum Crusades," *Salon.com* (May 31, 2000). Available at www.salon.com.

³⁶ Hirsch, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*. 8-11.

³⁷ J. Stone, "The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education: Whose Standards?" in M. Kanstoroom and C. Finn, Jr., eds., *Better Teachers, Better Schools* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1999).

³⁸ J. Stone, "Value-Added Assessment: An Accountability Revolution" in M. Kanstoroom and C. Finn, Jr., eds., *Better Teachers, Better Schools* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1999).

³⁹ M. Phillips, *All Must Have Prizes* (Little, Brown & Company, 1996).

⁴⁰ Ibid, 130.

⁴¹ Ibid, 130.

⁴² Ibid, 130.

⁴³ Ibid, 130

⁴⁴ Ibid, 131.