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**In Response to David Berliner**

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I first became familiar with Dr. David Berliner’s work in the early 1970s, when I was a board member of the Far West Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development in San Francisco. I did not know at the time that I would come to regard him as one of the greatest researchers in education.

Dr. Berliner was a senior researcher at the laboratory. I was highly impressed then with the work that he and Dr. William Tikunoff were doing on the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study for the Educational Testing Service. This was one of the earliest studies to look at the distinctive features of successful teacher behavior, as compared to unsuccessful teacher behavior. Berliner and Tikunoff (1976) found 21 behaviors that separated the two groups of teachers. I believed then, as I believe now, that this approach, studying successful teacher behavioral processes or failure outcomes closely, would yield powerful results. This approach can be contrasted with the more typical research that begins from theory of some sort, ignoring the clear fact that some teaching is highly successful. Of course theory very is important, however so many theory first approaches have produced little of power in changing teaching. They have the disadvantage of perpetuating the idea that students are deficient in abilities. They tend to give undue weight to factors associated with poverty.

Recently, Sanders and Rivers (1999), using a similar approach, found that the effects of three good teachers in a row compared to three weak teachers in a row, in third, fourth and fifth grade mathematics was enormous. Nearly fifty percentile ranks separated the means of achievement test scores for students served by the two groups of teachers! It was good teachers, not programs, that produced these results. This is one of the strongest findings in education research.

David Berliner was correct in using this approach nearly 30 years ago, when many researchers were following weak approaches that yielded little in meaningful or useful results for valid instructional design. I have followed Dr. Berliner’s work over the years, and have found it invariably to be insightful, and more importantly, extremely useful. I have come to expect extraordinary work, high quality, valid results and original thinking.

I have also admired Dr. Berliner’s courage, never finding him to be shy about telling the truth as he sees it, and taking strong advocacy positions on behalf of children. His courage is also manifest by his honesty. For, example it took great courage, honesty and insight to write with Dr. Biddle: *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on the Public Schools* (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). I know of no competitor for that work, in terms of range, depth, and valid rendering of the condition of public education today. Berliner and Biddle challenge all aspects of current attacks on public education, looking critically at the lack of validity of documentation and the misuse of data. Then they conclude the book with a look at the "real crises" in public education that fraudulent mythmakers appear to be trying to hide, and from which attention has been diverted. In other words, Berliner and Biddle illuminate what Jonathan Kozol (1991) has called the "savage inequalities" in educational services provided to our children. They assert that it is inequities in the quality of education services and not inabilities in the children that determine success and failure.

This paper shows that Dr. Berliner is a strong believer in the value of public support for education, in the profession of education, in the power of schools, in the science of educational research, and in the academic discipline of educational psychology in particular. All of these areas are under assault, not just by researchers and policymakers who may have honest disagreements, but more ominously, by those who oppose public funding for education for the masses of America’s children. These people wish to be relieved of the burden of supporting "other people’s children." (Cochran-Smith, 2002; Delpit, 1988). Berliner wants to expose those who make unwarranted attacks on public education, and he wants to expose their motives as well.

Therefore, I knew that it would only be a matter of time before Dr. Berliner launched another broadside on what he believes to be politically inspired and self-serving attempts to destroy public education, using propaganda, falsification of research and evaluation to create policies which would support a not-so-hidden anti-child agenda. That agenda is rooted in greed and in the unwillingness of some wealthy people to face up to the Nation’s responsibility for providing adequate support for the masses of America’s children.

In this paper, Dr. Berliner extends his analysis of politics and professionalism, noting that the attack on public education is very sophisticated, going beyond the public schools per se to their broad supporting infrastructure, including teacher education, the supporting academic disciplinary foundations, the profession of education, and the public policies which support adequacy and equity in schooling. He sees clearly that we do not have the luxury of a singular focus on policy, professional, or on academic matters alone. These things are situated in a political/economic context. In that context, there is disagreement over goals, over philosophy of education, over the data used in educational debates and what they mean, and especially over who will pay for the education of the masses of our children.

Berliner makes major charges. By making these charges, he enlarges immediately his task. He must do battle in several arenas at the same time. He must deal with academics, professional matters, and political matters. Among the charges are the following:

1. Some very powerful critics of public education are not out to help students in public schools, as they pretend to be. Their work is not benign. They are out to destroy public education.

2. In carrying out this destruction agenda, the critics use incomplete and distorted data, not in the interest of science and problem solving, but rather in the interest of a self-serving political agenda.

Years ago, I looked at the common school tradition in the United States (Hilliard, 1984). At the time of the founding of the nation, there was no tradition of public education. Organized labor in the North (e.g. Massachusetts), ex-enslaved Africans in the South, and a few public and private advocates struggled to establish the principle that all of our children were owed a high quality education at public expense. As Cubberly (1920) showed, there were sharp divisions of opinion and sharp divisions of interests on this matter. He listed the contestants as follows:

For the public schools:

1. "Citizens of the Republic"  
2. Philanthropists and humanitarians  
3. Public men of large vision  
4. City residents  
5. The intelligent workingmen in the cities  
6. Non-taxpayers  
7. Calvinists  
8. "New England men"

Lukewarm or against public school:

9. Belonging to the old aristocratic class  
10. The conservatives of society  
11. Politicians of small vision  
12. Residents of rural districts  
13. The ignorant, narrow-minded, and penurious  
14. Taxpayers  
15. Lutherans, Reformed Church, Mennonites, and Quakers  
16. Southern men  
17. Proprietors of private schools  
18. The non-English speaking classes (Cubberly, p. 673)

At the root of these divisions was the matter of who would pay for the education of the poor and issues with taxing wealth to benefit the masses. Some have even suggested that there was an agenda to prevent mass education in order to have a dependent and compliant work force. That has been well documented in the case of the African population (King, 1971; Spivey, 1978; Watkins, 2001; Watkins, Lewis, & Chou, 2001; Weinburg, 1977)

Whatever the reality, those divisions of opinion were never resolved in America. Reading Cubberly today is like looking at the contemporary struggle that Berliner illuminates. Some wealthy people today still show no support of high quality education for the masses. At best, they support minimum competency training for the masses, no matter what their rhetoric. At one point, minimum competency in education was stated as a national goal!

"Reform" efforts such as vouchers and privatization have the effect of re-transferring wealth, resulting in tax reduction for the wealthy and support for private school tuition, mainly for the wealthy, rather than education improvement for all. Other reform efforts advocating standardized curricula offerings and high stakes standardized testing have the effect of putting a ceiling on most students' achievement, because the standardized tests cover narrow curriculum goals, leaving out such things as critical thinking and writing.

In *The Manufactured Crisis*, Berliner and Biddle (1995) saw these things. They chose to challenge the stated goals of such school reforms and to try to shift attention to the "real" issues. These real issues are too often avoided and hidden under the rhetoric of school reform. A real basic issue is that of the gap between the support for the education of children of the wealthy and for that of the children of the poor.

Berliner does not deal with another nefarious aspect of the mythmakers and the fraud perpetrators, the use of scholarship to defame and to demonize poor and minority students and their families, making them even more vulnerable to attacks on the public schools that serve them. Jenson's (1980) book *Bias in Mental Testing* and Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) best-seller, *The Bell Curve*, are but two examples of the vicious misuse of scholarship to support the removal of resources from schools for poor and minority populations. Richard Lynn and Tatu Vanhanen (2002) have recent globalized this IQ ideology in their book*, IQ and the Wealth of Nations;*now, third world nations are said to be poor because of their low IQs.

What is important about these publications and ideas is that these are not the ideas of scholars who are regarded as cranks or marginal. These are mainstream ideas that come from scholars who are supported by the same network of critics that Berliner and Biddle (1995) have identified in *The Manufactured Crisis,* specifically in their chapter "Why Now?", which deals with the various groups and their motivations and agendas. Significantly, these IQ works that argue that children of the poor and minorities are intellectually flawed come from the same think tanks that support vouchers and privatization. How can the attackers of public education pass themselves off as supporters of "No Child Left Behind" and "No Excuse Schools," as the recent Heritage Foundation effort now touts, at the same time that they support their scholar Charles Murray’s bell curve arguments that say that "one fourth of America’s children are so impaired that they can never learn enough to work and pay back the cost of their schooling." In evaluating the quality and foundation of these IQ-based arguments, the recent National Academy of Sciences criticism and evaluation of IQ and its use in schools is instructive (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The panel recommended the abandonment of IQ testing in special education because of the lack of evidence for its validity, especially it's "instructional validity."

Berliner does not take his analysis to the global level. There is every reason to do so. The agenda that he exposes is not local only. We must note not only the IQ argument above and its parallel use in the United States and globally, we must also note the policy parallels between the domestic IQ and school policies and foreign aid to "third world countries." The World Bank coerces poor countries to reduce their proportion of expenditures on public education and other public services, in favor of loans for expenditures on infrastructures to support the exploitation of their natural resources by foreign multi-national corporations. These foreign businesses pay low taxes and provide no support back to the exploited nations, relying on a trickle-down theory. When this international experience is added to the discussion, we have a firm basis for raising the fundamental question: Whose interest is being served in the United States, domestically and abroad, by those who attempt to destroy public education?

Berliner is correct in taking up the challenge to defend the education profession and his own discipline of educational psychology. By extension, other foundation disciplines, (sociology, anthropology, linguistics, economics, etc.) must be also evaluated. Berliner saw the strategy of the destroyers of the profession and the destroyers of confidence in the academic disciplinary base for professional practices. Their actions are intended to pave the way for minimally prepared teachers at a low cost, therefore lower taxes. Berliner takes up the challenge to document the efficacy of professional development. The evidence that he presents for that efficacy is compelling. Then he defends the profession of the educational psychologist by reference to the solid work that has produced valid beneficial educational principles and practices. By inference, we can expect that other foundational disciplines will have valid and beneficial findings, as well. A strong profession is not only a benefit to children; it is a defense against the self-serving attacks on public education as an institution.

Berliner gives us a reprise in this article that flows *from The Manufactured Crisis* (Berliner & Biddle, 1975), identifying and knocking down the myths. In that work, his visits to schools and his observations showed very different schools than those described by the attackers of public education.

1. He saw good schools, except where there was poverty, with its service correlates. (poor health, unemployment, lack of safety, poorly prepared teachers)

2. He saw tired, but not evil teachers, many of whom worked in depressed conditions.

3. He saw schools that were poor due to structural forces, largely economic and by design, with educators being used as the scapegoats.

4. He charged President Bush and former Secretary of Education William Bennett with oversimplified views of education.

In this article, Berliner is his old brilliant self, confronting myth and fraud with valid data.

1. He shows how high stakes testing yields damage to children's learning, not improvement.

2. He explains how high stakes testing had a negative impact on school curriculum, narrowing the curriculum to the point that the very construct of a given curriculum area was being violated. The stated breadth of the curriculum areas was not tapped by the high stakes standardized tests.

3. He demonstrates that teachers who had been trained in professional programs outperformed those who had little or no training.

4. He finds serious weaknesses in the "No Child Left Behind" policies.

I do have one important criticism of this paper. Although it is not a major part of his argument, I must take strong issue with Berliner's citation of Success For All as representing educational excellence. While SFA has certainly grown ubiquitous in low-income, minority urban areas, I find no support for it as a program of excellence. There is even reason to challenge it as a program even of adequacy and minimum competency. On that ground, I am appalled by what I see as a scripted straight jacket for teachers and students. It turns teachers into robots who are not expected to use professional judgment. It is anti-professional, not culturally salient, and alien to communities, with minimum competency goals, even then often not achieved. It devalues the human relations part of teaching and learning.

I must comment in a little more detail about Success For All, because in my opinion and experience, it is an important example of a genre of commercial education "programs," and their related popular theories, that mystify teaching and its problems, offering their profit making solutions with outcomes that are not worth the enormous expenditures. Just as Berliner takes the right wing to task, all who claim to be able to save the students by Educational Management Organizations (EMOs), from the left or from the right, may be contributing to the destruction of the public schools.

There are many educators, like me, who have seen many examples of highly successful teaching with poor and minority cultural groups; examples that never depended on minimum competency standardized programs. These experiences began for me in my own family. My grandfather, father, stepmother, aunts, and one uncle were all highly successful teachers, in highly successful schools, in Texas, even during the segregation era. They lacked their fair share of resources, but they were not puzzled about how to teach their students. It is not easy to impress teachers like these with "programs," designed by "saviors," whose results are less than dramatic, and whose designers seem to suggest that effective teaching is possible only in "research-based" or "evidence-based" programs. This is just plain silly. Whole nations, with far fewer resources that we have in the United States, have brought their students to levels of excellence, without the seductive language of or activity of "research-based programs" or "evidence-based programs." The very real need for education research and evaluation for improved teaching and learning is not in question here. I support that research strongly. But I challenge the entrepreneurs who wrap themselves in the socially desirable language of "research-based" and "evidence-based" programs as a cover for invalid, even harmful practices, that consume virtually all of the available resources for school improvement, with fortunes being made on the backs of poor and minority children.

The same catch phrases, "research-based" and "evidence-based" are now becoming popular in public policy as well (e.g., Slavin, 2002). This is certainly desirable in some ways. The devil is in the details of their application. These terms, when applied loosely, may cover a multitude of sins.

1. "Research" or evaluation are rarely matters of professional consensus. Arguments over findings and methods persist for years.

2. "Research-based" programs may be based on significant findings from many research studies, but still have trivial meaning for teaching and learning, especially when packaged and executed in scripted routines.

3. "Research-based" programs may be made up of separate pieces, each of which has been validated in separate studies. For example, small class size, peer tutoring and other elements, while individually valid when well executed, when cobbled together as a "program," may not yield high achievement. No program teaches anything. Teachers teach, and their work must reflect a high quality execution, or the program fails. The emphasis unfortunately in many programs is on "teacher proof" materials and routines, growing out of a lack of faith in teachers as professionals.

4. The "research-based" requirement lends support to the idea that successful teaching and learning are matters that are dependent on shopping for the right "programs." This will destroy the professional role of the teacher, and worse may preempt the valuable work of the teacher who should address a wider range of educational objectives that standardized test scores can measure.

Of course we must be guided by research, as Dr. Berliner’s work shows. However, we must resist efforts to industrialize schools and teachers with lock step, standardized, cookie-cutter programs that depress school and teacher potential.

In contrast, many educators have seen some obvious, well-documented, though ignored, sources of the problems with schools that serve poor and minority children, problems certainly serious enough to account for the low achievement of the children. Just one example of problem sources from work by Charlotte Danielson (2002) should suffice.

Twenty-three percent of all high school teachers never even minored in their main teaching field. For math teachers, the number rises to over 30 percent, and both figures are higher in schools that serve economically disadvantaged students. In schools with mostly nonwhite students, only 54 percent of math and science teachers are certified in their field, and only 42 percent hold a bachelor’s degree in that field. The comparative numbers for teachers in predominantly white schools are, respectively, 86 percent and 69 percent. In addition, many schools assign teachers to teach a section or two in fields for which they have no background at all. The scarcity of well-qualified teachers might have something to do with teacher salaries, which are far lower than those of other professions that require a significant level of preparation, such as accountants, registered nurses, and social workers.

*How do commercial standardized programs like Success for All address problems like these?* We cannot continue to give such programs a free pass. This is not a management problem. This is not a methods problem. This is not a student ability problem. This is not a parent participation problem. This is a resource problem, one that will require substantial resources to correct.

I would wish that Dr. Berliner would follow Stanley Pogrow in a close examination of the claims of SFA. The Robert Slavin and Stanley Pogrow debates over the efficacy of Success For All have been carried in several issues of the Phi Delta Kappan over the past three years or so. In no way can I see that the wide use of SFA is justified, certainly since most of the positive evaluation data on it comes from SFA or its associates. Horror of horrors, I am even informed that a grant was given recently to the National Council Teacher Education to teach the faculties at Historically Black Colleges and Universities how to teach SFA to their teacher education students. I am as frightened of SFA hegemony in all aspects of the education operation (teacher education, research, policy, contracted services, etc.) as I am of the right wing mythmakers.

Berliner’s point is correct, even though SFA is not an example of it. "Research based" work can be powerful (see, for example, Feuerstein, 1979, and Lasley, Bainbridge, & Barnett, 2002). However, I fear that many current attempts to cobble together standardized, cookie cutter, "programs" out of the decontextualized pieces from various research studies, and fashion them into a valid and powerful instructional approach are likely to fail. Success For All calls for teachers to be managers and supervisors, not professionals. To be told how to arrange the furniture, when to hold up signs with icons for "time to think", that compliance monitors cannot be challenged, and to lose emphasis on the central matter of bonded relationships, is to offer a sorry caricature of valid teaching.

Thousands of educators know how to overcome the devastating effects of poverty and take students to levels of excellence. The "research base" is thin, however, because of an artifact of what is regarded as legitimate research. Case studies and ethnographies of single great schools or small powerful programs with few schools are not in favor. Programs that have large sample sizes and are "taken to scale," are those seen as legitimate. This has the effect of establishing low achievement and minimum competency, as a norm, since few of these large-scale SFA-type programs have shown truly excellent outcomes. It is apparently assumed that the results obtained by SFA-type efforts are good enough for the poor and minorities.

If SFA is "success," then poor and minority children are doomed. They have to settle for minimum competency, standardized, alien managed educational programs. *This is a new educational segregation, since these services are almost exclusively offered to minority and poor students, not to the wealthy public or private schools*. This scary action brings to my mind the early Lake Mohonk Conferences on the Negro Question and the subsequent Capon Springs, West Virginia conferences on the same topics. (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001) In a frightening parallel to today, wealthy white policy makers, industrialists, politicians, missionaries, and philanthropists met at these conferences, in their think tanks, and came up with a curriculum for Africans called "industrial education." This was done without consensus from the African community. It was based upon an ideology that included a low estimate of African potential. I believe that the pattern is repeating with Success For All, and with its recent companion The Edison Project. They are alien-designed programs for poor and minority ethnic groups which, like the Mohonk and Capon Springs think-tank meetings, will result in actions and policies that will marginalize poor and minority ethnic group children, while enriching the entrepreneurs. In all too many arenas, we see politicians like the Governor of Pennsylvania, attempting to coerce the schools of Philadelphia, largely poor and largely African, to contract with the Edison Project, a project that, to my knowledge has no record of producing high achievement for such children. The children are pawns in a game where their own advocates have little influence. What can this governor's view of these children’s potential be?

Of course, we must be guided by research, as David Berliner’s works show. However, we must resist efforts to industrialize school and teaching with lock-step, standardized, cookie-cutter, externally managed and monitored programs that can only depress student, teacher, and school leader potential.

Dr. Berliner argues that educational psychology is a profession, that professional teachers perform better than those without training, that professionals have obligations to be activists in support of teaching and learning, and ultimately, that falsehood must be confronted. All these arguments qualify him as a truly great psychologist and educator. This particular article appears very late in the game, though Berliner has been on time with earlier criticisms. It is late because so few other educators who should see the myth, fraud and danger have sounded the alarm. Professional disagreement will always be present, as it should. However, the aggressive abuse and misuse of knowledge for greed and domination must be exposed for what it is, and cannot be allowed to camouflage itself by telling us that such interests are the same as the interests of the masses of our children, their families, and their communities. We should be extremely grateful to have the professional talents and the human commitment of a scholar’s scholar, David Berliner, to lead the way to sanity and to excellence in education.

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