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Berliner and Biddle: Defending Public Education

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Introduction

A defender of public education is an individual who seeks to provide conclusive evidence that renders a realistic understanding of the adequacies and inadequacies of public education. This individual is a “watch dog” of political, bureaucratic, and media incorrectness. The authors of *The Manufactured Crisis*, David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle meet this description. Dr. Berliner is a noted author, Regents’ professor in the College of Education at Arizona, and past recipient of the Friends of Education Award from the National Education Association. Dr. Biddle is the editor of the journal *Social Psychology of Education*, and serves as professor of both Psychology and Sociology at the University of Missouri. Dr. Berliner and Dr. Biddle scientifically illustrate the social problems that confront our schools. Each author recommends reform strategies and demystifies the myths while revealing the truth. They are staunch critics of the critics of education; especially when it can be proven that fallacies are being reported to the public. Berliner and Biddle have a demonstrative approach that has brought them respect to the stakeholders of the educational community. This document will clarify and reflect upon their concerns with propaganda, assessment, accountability, industry and society as it relates to the public system of education. Ultimately, the ramifications and implications of these concerns on society will be examined fairly; as opposed to emphasizing blame on the educational system.

Berliner and Biddle have presented successful arguments to scientifically prove that common information and beliefs regarding the educational system of the United States are not the primary source of blame for all that is wrong in our society. Despite publications such as *A Nation at Risk* (1983), these two scholars provide ample evidence that the U.S. school system has many successful aspects and results with its participants, otherwise referred to as students. As noted authors, Young Pai, Susan Adler, and Linda Shadiow (2006) describe it:

The exaggerated notion about the educational system's capacity as an agent of social change may in turn result in blaming teachers and schools for practically every adversity in the society. The reformers simply failed to understand that the school is only one of a multitude of institutions in our society and that no amount of tinkering with any single institution could bring about fundamental social, economic, or moral changes. (p. 126)

Through Berliner and Biddle's research there exists a multitude of evidence that illustrates our over emphasis on blaming schools, teachers and administrators, when indeed there are several other factors that typically go unnoticed.

Politics, Critics and Journalism

Politics are the driving force behind the beliefs of people across the nation and the world. Unfortunately, the idea of promoting a particular political party, platform or politician has lead to serious mystification and distortion of the facts. By and in large, it is the political use of the media that influences public opinion on a grand scale. Throughout this document you will see a repeated link to the persuasions of the politicians and critics riding on the coat-tail of a profiteering, by negative news, media frenzy. It is a form of persuasive public lobbying to keep the privileged class in control by increasing their political importance through the need to reform; reform that has a win-win solution for everyone without meaningful justification for implementation; reform that does not typically include advise from the experts in education.

Assessment, Achievement and Aptitude

Americans have been incorrectly informed about student performance on standardized testing. Once again from *A Nation At Risk*, average achievement of high school students on most standardized test is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched. And then there is additional scare mongering by American leadership, William Bennett, Secretary of Education

during the Reagan administration reported that student achievement had declined significantly. He used a drop in SAT scores as his catalyst evidence. Unfortunately, as Berliner and Biddle (1995) point out, he failed to mention that there have been several cyclical drops throughout the history of the test, and the particular minor drop in scores was due to a change in high school curriculum that was toward a breadth, instead of depth, in curriculum. (p. 14) Nevertheless, the damage has been done. The American public has once again received a dose of propaganda from federal leadership. And it will be predictable that our politicians will use drops in standardized testing again, as more universities and colleges lower their requirements for enrollment, and implement developmental studies to close the gap; much of this as part of a need to meet the demands of industry.

We did not hear that SAT scores, while stable among whites, improved by thirty-nine points among Native Americans, and fifty-five points among blacks. Yet another opportunity to find out what we are doing right dampened by the press and politicians. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) confirm this trend in improving aptitude by minorities from 1977 to 1986 in The Sandia Report. However, the Bush administration suppressed this information. Further, the NAEP data suggests a general pattern of continued stable achievement among students of all ethnic subgroups prior to *No Child Left Behind*. As Berliner and Biddle (1995) put it, “We have little sympathy, however, for critics who run down America’s schools for their putative failures when the ongoing accomplishments of those schools are manifest and the society they serve is deteriorating.” (p. 29)

Unfortunately, even NAEP (1991a), a government agency, is guilty of casting a dark cloud on an otherwise favorable result in the data regarding mathematics, “The mathematical skills of our nation’s children are generally insufficient to cope with either on-the-job demands

for problem solving or college expectations for mathematical literacy.” (p. 1) An unfortunate response from a government agency that implements an assessment that does not measure real-world skills in the mathematics segment of test, instead the test is a measure of mechanics and process only. Further, this 1990 report from NAEP failed to mention the growth in average scores over every previous administration of the same test.

And then there are those traditional beliefs regarding the aptitude of students. Unfounded beliefs that students today are not as intelligent, or student intelligence is hereditary therefore predetermined before schooling. Unfortunately supported by noted psychologists such as Lewis M. Terman (1916) states:

The common opinion that the child from a cultured home does better in tests solely by reason of his superior home advantages is an entirely gratuitous assumption. ... The children of successful and cultured parents test higher than children from wretched and ignorant homes for the simple reason that their heredity is better. (p. 115)

And with regard to falsely fixing stages of intellectual development, Benjamin Bloom (1964) claims:

[The data] make it clear that intelligence is a developing function and that the stability of measured intelligence increases with age. ... In terms of intelligence measured at age 17, about 50% of the development takes place between conception and age 4, about 30% between ages 4 and 8, and about 20% between ages 8 and 17. (p. 88)

As Berliner and Biddle (1995) point out, sometimes it is our own parents that claim they were much smarter in their youth than their own children today. (p. 41)

However, once again the evidence contradicts all the aforementioned myths. In the United States IQ tests typically show that children average 7.5 points higher than their parents.

Indeed students are smarter today due to the improvements in education and the access to information through technology. So the myth about our youth as being dumber than they used to be is simply unfounded. Today's leaders of our country are on average 15 IQ points below the newest generation to enter adulthood, according to testing by Wechsler and Stanford-Binet.

So, does schooling increase intelligence? High quality public education has been provided to large numbers of students throughout many countries, and this is why the average person today is smarter than the average person of the past. A study which supports this conclusion, by Torsten Husen and Albert Tuijnman, involves 671 Swedish males over a period of ten years, from childhood to adulthood. In their statistical approach they analyzed data from numerous periodic implementations of IQ tests. Husen and Tuijnman (1991) found clear evidence which for equivalent scholastic effort there was a proportional increase in intelligence. They emphasized:

Schools not only confer knowledge and instrumental qualifications but also train and develop students' intellectual capacity. The results [of this study suggest] ... that IQ as measured by group intelligence tests is not stable but changes significantly between 10 and 20 years of age. ... [Apparently] schooling co-varies with and produces positive changes in adult IQ." (p. 22)

Similar discovery was also determined by an American psychologist, Stephen Ceci. Ceci (1991) concluded that school influence is relevant and substantial. For each year that a child missed, six IQ points could be remiss from their respective total.

Another consideration regarding IQ, American students are often required if not expected to work and manage their money for greater independence. This is not an expectation in most developed countries. Too, certain consideration should be given for inherent characteristics of

each group; especially across global borders. Many cultures place emphasis on patriotism, institute fervor toward play and gamesmanship, maintain a different understanding of ethics, not to mention their segregation by class, gender and race. These social differences have a close connection to the exposure, breadth and depth of learning. This puts our students on a different playing field with foreign nations regardless of the mixed ethnicities of our nation.

Then there is the concern with differing assessment process between countries. As evidence, a quality control observer in South Korea noticed:

The math teacher ... calls the names of the 13-year-olds in the room who have been selected as part of the IAEP [International Assessment of Educational Progress] sample. As each name is called, the student stands at attention at his or her desk until the list is complete. Then, to the supportive and encouraging applause of their colleagues, the chosen ones leave to take the assessment test” (Bracey, 1992, p. 108).

Clearly, the value of this assessment has been compromised. Is there any way to know how many similar discrepancies exist in international testing?

Further, we must withhold judgment from the information that comes through bias reporting and one minute political sound bites and take a closer look at the scientific evidence regarding our students and their global competitive ability. Case in point, from authors Murphy and Schiller (1992), “The poor performance of American schools is now so well known that it makes the front page of the daily newspaper and is a source of public humiliation.” (p. 1) Quite the contrary, the superlative evidence presented by Berliner and Biddle, as well as other scholars, should eradicate most of the desecrating comments on education. Berliner and Biddle (1995) confirm this belief with their clever Student Achievement Law, “Regardless of what anyone claims about student and school characteristics, opportunity to learn is the single most powerful

predictor of student achievement.” (p. 55) The opportunity to learn is inherent to our democratic process. In fact it is more than an opportunity. In all states schooling is comprehensive and mandatory.

Regardless, the opportunity to learn has more to do with socio-economic status than any other factor in our society, as we shall soon discover in the *Coleman Report*. Therefore squaring the blame on the nation’s public school system for lack of achievement is far from reasonable.

Spending and Accountability

The critics are quick to get the attention of the American public, especially as taxpayers, by publishing reports of failed school performance despite the ample availability of funds. According to John Sununu, chief of staff in the Bush administration in 1989, “We spend twice as much [on education] as the Japanese and almost 40 percent more than all the other major industrialized countries of the world.” They go on to describe expenditures in education that have been wasted or misappropriated. However, in the report, *Shortchanging Education* (Rasell & Mishel, 1990), it is Switzerland that spends the most money, while the United States ranks ninth among the top sixteen countries. As a percent of per capita income the United States ranks fourteenth out of sixteen countries. Berliner and Biddle explain that George Bush Sr. and his education advisors describe “excessive” expenditures for our nation’s educational system (p. 70). Which begs the question, why would our political leaders want to be misleading on this issue? Berliner and Biddle believe that these are deliberate disinformation campaigns.

On the issue of claiming that money has no impact on school achievement. It is necessary to consider the context of the problem for individual states, districts and campuses. *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, also referred to as the *Coleman Report* (Coleman, et al., 1966), depicts an average curve of expenditure per pupil to academic achievement, similar to a parabolic parent

graph, that clearly defines a before peak range of expenditure that will lead to academic improvement. Ironically, it went unnoticed that even the *Coleman Report* described to the public, in error, that money does not make a difference. But credit where credit is due, and in support of arguments presented, the *Coleman Report* was correct regarding the impact of home environment on achievement. Simply stated, the socio-economic status of the parents dictate to the largest extent, how a child will perform in school.

Finally, with regard to myths on spending, the public has come to believe that the expense of education has risen dramatically with little to show for it. Benno Schmidt, former President of Yale University stated:

We have roughly doubled per-pupil spending (after inflation) in public schools since 1965...yet dropout rates remain distressingly high. ... Overall, high school students today are posting lower SAT scores than a generation ago. The nation's investment in educational improvement has produced very little return." (Rothstein, 1993, p. 24)

Critics have seized the moment when it comes to wasting money on education; particularly as it pertains to salaries and the cost of bureaucracy.

In the true context of the issue, several changes in the last forty years have lead to the increases in expenditures; namely Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and in 1975 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) enacted by Congress. The cost for a special education student is approximately two and half times that of a regular education student.

(Robinson & Brandon, 1992, p. 9)

Couple the aforementioned with building renovations for safety, the popular use of extended school day and day-care; not to mention special services and activities related to the

push for parental and community involvement. And suddenly, there exists a set of genuine reasons for increases in spending for education.

The Workforce

Industry has its place in the struggle to create myths and scapegoat the public school system.

Examine this excerpt from a Motorola booklet distributed by CEO Gary Tooker:

A crisis exists today in American kindergarten-through-12th grade (K-12) education, and the situation is getting worse. . . . The American work force is rapidly losing its world class status. If America becomes a third-ranked nation, behind Japan and Europe, as some people forecast, every individual in this country will lose. The obsolescence of the American system is a major factor in that potential decline (n.d.).

Unfortunately, the Motorola CEO failed to mention that numerous dropouts return to obtain a GED, and the United States ranks third in the world for its high school graduation completion rate. And in fact, many foreign companies continue to establish new commerce and manufacturing within U.S. borders.

One can not disagree that America may become a third-ranked nation, but it should not be as a result of labor and education. After all, the federal government has established a visa work permit policy which permits legal immigration to fill the void of skilled labor that is difficult to attain. And to that end, it is corporate America that abuses visa permits to obtain foreign workers for lower wages and salaries. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence to suggest that corporate America is not sure what is needed now and in the future when it comes to knowledge and skills.

This misinformation among industry leaders makes it easier to lay blame on poor quarterly profit reporting and minimize the loss of loyalty in justifying relocation outside the

United States. And, this aggressive and simple approach to fable story telling works well for any enterprise, regardless of size or complexity. In Berliner and Biddle (1995) three untruths are expounded upon, American schools are generally incompetent, American schools do not produce workers with good technical skills, and American workers are not productive, and the schools are at fault. Let us review each of these allegations respectively.

As it pertains to incompetence, industry captains have been complaining for more than a century about the inadequate school system. However for that same period of time business growth has been markedly substantial and profitable. Berliner & Biddle (1995) cite a 1990 report by the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce suggesting that only 15 percent of employers admit difficulty trying to find workers that fit their job requirements. And the commission found eighty 80 percent of companies were content with the education level of their new employees. (p. 88)

Considering the accusation that American schools fail to train students for needed technical skills. It is true, that schools have lagged the job market for skills needed in new technologies and professions. However feedback from industry and data collected by federal and state level organizations does not provide the insight needed to determine future occupational requirements. *The Sandia Report* (Carson et al., 1991, p. 131), ask the Michigan Department of Education and the Rochester, New York, School District two questions regarding employment. What is the five most important attributes for employment? What is the five least important attributes for employment? For the most important attributes the responses did not make mention of a request for greater technical or scientific skills. For the least important attributes, ironically, mathematics, computer science and foreign language had insignificant value. Given this insightful information what reaction would be appropriate from our public schools?

And, evidence suggests that companies prefer an in-house approach to training that is specific to their needs. The initial costs outweigh the benefits with regard to safety, production, compliance and production. Further, business is more concerned with ensuring a value system among their employees. They prefer an employee that is punctual, motivated, reliable and respectful.

As a side note, but in contribution to evidence presented by Berliner & Biddle (1995), *The Sandia Report* contradicted claims regarding education made by the administration of George Bush Sr. For this reason, the report was suppressed until he left the office of president. (p. 354)

Finally, we confront the myth regarding nonproductive worker as a result of their education. In previous statements, the discussion of diminishing extrinsic rewards, incentives and compensation should also convey a partial reason for the rise in disinterested worker attitudes. It is the American labor force that has always set the standard in work ethic and production. Despite an ongoing decline in economic prosperity over the last ten years, generations of Americans from public school systems have contributed to provide the highest percentage of productivity than any other nation of the world. U.S. workers have consistently surpassed, by as much as 20 percent, a productivity level that exceeds its three closest competitors, Japan, Germany, and France. (McKinsey Global Institute, 1992, Table 1-11)

Teachers, Textbooks, and Moral Values

Another popular target of the critics is the attack on teachers, textbooks and the lack of values. These are more often the issues that arise in the community setting. Often promoted by the media, countless unfounded accusations make their way to the public ear. It is all too often the scandalous and immoral stories that peak our interest and distort our beliefs.

In the realm of constant criticism are teachers. Not only scrutinized for their lack of qualifications, but their inability to instruct. Defining them as unskilled and incompetent; when in fact they have been filtered into an elite group by several stringent state requirements; such as minimal level of education, criminal background checks, and qualification testing for pedagogy and content. Regardless, unfounded attacks are rendered from some of the most unexpected places and people. Case in point, Rita Kramer, reciting the sins of a professional education industry, 1991, “The worst of the ed schools are certification mills where the minimally qualified instruct the barely literate in a parody of learning” (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 102). A statement that is a far from kind way to further humiliate the teachers of what was once a respected and honorable profession.

According to Berliner and Biddle (1995), our schools and teachers are so often referred to as inferior when it comes to Japan. Yet, few people understand that teachers in Japan rank equal in salary to engineers in their country; while teachers in the United States earn roughly two-thirds of that of an engineer in this country. (p. 103)

Teachers and their unions, in America, spend a significant amount of time each year struggling to maintain the benefits and compensation they receive. It is often considered to be a victory when their effort results in a pay increase merely to cover the cost of inflation. Certainly, this problem distracts from the profession in and out of the classroom.

With regard to degree qualification, approximately 50 percent of teachers hold a master’s or doctoral degree. To add to the diversity of knowledge, a significant percentage of teachers have completed degrees in disciplines other than education. Add to this numerous filtering mechanisms, minimum GPA requirements, assessments of moral character, and certification requirements, and it becomes obvious that education contains an elite qualified portion of the

professional population. By the way, it should be understood that teachers make up the largest profession in the country.

Textbooks and morality, which should include all media productions, have been examined for a lack of ethical values, or for diminishing honorable values. The question of narrowing morality, in and of itself, is more art than science. And in most cases, this is where religion collides with quality material resources for instruction. To prove this point, look at the words of Republican William E. Dannemeyer, as he speaks to the U.S. House of Representatives, 1991:

Up until 1962, the values [of the Judeo-Christian ethic] were unquestioned as a positive influence in public education. Kids were taught to recognize the moral and historical value of their inalienable rights. The precepts embodied in the Ten Commandments were the mortar that held our laws together, gave them weight, and that fueled individual self-government ... [but this is no longer true.] We have allowed moral values and a creator to be kicked out of public schools, and because most kids attend public school, we are paying a high price. (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p.109)

Despite a missing correlation between paying a high price and the absence of values, the public has been subjected to this type of rhetoric for generations. Regardless, do the critics actually take into consideration how much time students spend reading and absorbing approved instructional materials versus watching and listening to television, radio, and other media devices?

To counter the comments of a threatened morality, Berliner and Biddle extract a statement from authors Sharp and Wood, regarding censorship, “Many examples of honesty, courage, compassion, persistence, bravery, and other positive values were [found]. ... Literature chosen for these textbooks is replete with characters who embody ... moral values, ... and the

books provide models that children can understand and accept.” (Sharp & Wood, 1992, p. 151) Again the evidence is strong that moral values have not vanished from our texts. In fact, as these newer instructional materials inject insight and relevance to our way of life, students make lasting inferences to moral and ethical concepts as they prepare to become adults.

Parents, Citizens and Schools

Our parents and citizens are discontented with our schools. However, we must keep in mind that this is a measure of confidence, and confidence can be swayed by leadership and the media. For example, government author for the Bush administration, Denis P. Doyle, “There is ... nearly universal agreement that our schools are in desperate trouble and must be restructured; which is to say redesigned from the ground up.” (Doyle, 1991, p. 5) Harsh as this political statement may be, in context it should pertain to the way parents and the public perceive schools. In other words, parents and the public perceive the nation’s school system to be in turmoil. However, their respective local schools, for which they participate and maintain enrollment for their children, are seen as successful overall.

Also, measures of confidence among the public tend to move evenly up or down with several influential entities in our culture, such as medical treatment, religion, government, and banking just to name a few. Said another way, as public opinion changes it moves in unison and across all areas of concern in our society in the same direction; favorable or unfavorable.

Implications: In Pursuit of Pragmatism

Sadly, it is the political elite that have permitted an economy and society based on servitude and security, rather than science and technology. Our increases of employment have come in the way of jobs for fast-food restaurants, janitors, security guards, clerks, and so on. One has to wonder if these are the occupations our children should aspire to. If so, why all the

negative talk about education, unless your looking for a scapegoat for the increasing gap between rich and poor, and a desire by the elitist class to drive wages down. Could it be wiser to direct the dissatisfaction of our progress at the nation toward the educational system rather than those in political and economic control?

In regard to inheriting intelligence or genetic intelligence, there is no evidence that suggest this is possible. And though this myth was entrenched in the mindset of Americans up until the 1970s, it still raises its ignorant head among scholars and scientists today. However, we can credit Bloom's belief that intelligence is fixed at an early age to the justification for early intervention programs such as Head Start, and the national thinking toward the "war on poverty." In and of itself, relinquishing this myth is further evidence that we are evolving and easily persuaded by our thoughts and reasoning; especially when it comes to how we learn.

The evidence is substantial, scientific and widely determined by international scholars and agencies. Students benefit from school, that benefit has improved as methods of instruction and learning improve, and each generation has a markedly improved intelligence. Therefore a society that implements strategies to increase intelligence by relinquishing poverty should also seek to provide quality education. Inferior schools and environments of poverty promote unfavorable circumstances for generations. Ultimately, we might expect the national average IQ to plateau and eventually decrease if the number of economically poor, at-risk population continues to increase.

In contrast we should understand how the more affluent in society contend to develop academically successful offspring. Given their wealth, they have access to private mentoring, instructional games, toys and devices, instructional technologies, printed references and excellent health care. Add to this, excellent schools, often private, and a significant level of parent

involvement, as working to earn money is not to sustain survival. And through this inequitable education, when compared to the non-affluent four-fifths of our population, students inherit more intelligence points over their childhood and pre-adult years.

If the trend of rationing high quality education continues, then America can expect to see a reduction in innovation in the arts, business and science. The impact economically will be vast, as crime will increase, national defense and our position in the global market will likely weaken. The wealthy will become so isolated and insecure that they and several industry components may elect to relocate outside the United States.

Before moving on to other critically important issues presented by Berliner and Biddle, it is necessary to review the myths that confront our youths with regard to intelligence and the international student. On several occasions there is no denying the claim that American students are inferior to Asians, Europeans, or any one of a number of other ethnic groups. However, when you look closely at the lifestyle, resources and customs it becomes clear that comparisons of this nature should be taken with inquiry and pause for pertinent evidence.

Turning again to the expense and accountability of education, it is important to understand the motivation for this form of disinformation from our government. It is almost as though it has become a tradition among political leaders and the federal level of government. It is crude and misleading to blanket the entire educational system with the idea that more money does not improve our schools. As schools vie for specialized teachers, the latest technology and instructional resources, it should seem reasonable to conclude that more money, money beyond the payroll, maintenance and operations, will be needed to enhance student success.

For expenditures, the reality is, most of our taxes at the state and local level go toward other government enterprises and responsibilities. Even at the federal level current allocation is

approximately 16% of the total discretionary spending on education for 2007 according to the Office of Management and Budgeting.

Of course, most tax-payers expect a measured efficiency for their tax-dollars. Nevertheless, they should seek to understand how their respective states rank other programs and institutions before committing negative judgment on budgeting strategies. In most cases, it is the local district or campus that should be monitored for negligent and fraudulent spending. Case in point, Wilmer-Hutchins Independent School District, Texas, recently experienced federal investigations which lead to a no contest plea from the superintendent, Dr. Charles Mathews, for fund misappropriation. Point being, that individuals lobbying school board members and the media for monitoring at the local level is much easier and more effective than criticizing legislators for their allocation methods and strategies. Too, at the federal and state level they only experience the money in statistical form, as opposed to the actual local physical distribution that occurs at district and campus level.

In review of employment and industry concerns, American workers are not known for cheap labor, so could it be that the knowledge and skilled labor of our people as a nation have some value and technical expertise. There should not be a problem with our work ethic. Americans take fewer days for vacation, per year, than any other industrial nation. The most recent data collected by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), shows that employed Americans worked an average of 1,824 hours annually, compared with 1,816 in Australia, 1,789 in Japan, 1,751 in Canada, 1,669 in England, 1,585 in Sweden, 1,443 in Germany, 1,441 in France, and 1,363 in Norway (2004).

And if industrial leaders fear state regulations, tax abatements, and labor unions, they only need look to one of the other states; given our variance in labor and environmental laws.

With respect to evidence on the issue of important employment attributes, it is justifiable to criticize Berliner & Biddle on two findings. First, the Sandia Report did not mention future job requirements. Secondly, the two survey locations, Michigan and New York, are sparse at best, and bias with regard to the type of labor markets they maintain. In other words, it would be meaningful to see surveys on this topic from a more diverse population and a greater variance on location.

Additionally, benefits and retirement, once common to employment in the private sector have diminished rapidly. Along with this there exists an extreme disproportionate income between employees and upper management, making the task of motivating students for the workplace increasingly difficult. Also, the American worker experiences shorter employment cycles, endless retraining, and lower compensation, especially with regard to wages. And, the hope for prosperity with gainful employment is far from promising. Is it any wonder that loyalty and motivation have become scarce commodities among the middle and lower classes?

In considering the productivity of Americans, ample evidence suggests that education has served industry and commerce well. And, in understanding recent wage decreases, especially among professionals, it should be known that our own educational system has created a competitive job market. Although lower-wages can be undesirable, it contributes to investment by both domestic and foreign entrepreneurs. This permits a cycle of economic prosperity that is not excessive on the upside, nor catastrophic on the downside.

So what evidence exists to support the pessimists and critics of our schools? Will industry, at least as an institute of banking, manufacturing, service, etcetera, take responsibility for its own mistakes; principally in leadership and management? Can we blame education for the rise in energy costs? Can we assault our teachers for the demise of the mortgage lending sector?

Should we continue to fault our students for the errors of bureaucracy? Not just industry, but people in general should realize that education strives to put a conscience of society and its needs in the foreground. There is more to adopting knowledge for employment and advancement. The philosophy of education has, and hopefully should continue to be, instill respect for others, maintain a measure of compliance, and encourage citizenship.

In review of moral values, we should remember to put teacher reputations in perspective. As Berliner and Biddle (1995) point out, “education takes place in a public arena and therefore its personnel problems are more often visible.” (p. 108) However, would we have as much negative press if politicians were subject to the same scrutiny? We do not see politicians submitting themselves for forced fingerprinting and criminal background checks. Nor is it apparent that they are willing to post their high school and college transcripts.

The blame for changing morality can not be blamed on teachers and textbooks. Student exposure to violence, sex, profanity and vulgarity is readily available and consumed on a massive scale. How can teachers hope to compete without stretching the boundaries of instructional materials? Add to this, staunch directives from administrators to make the curriculum rigorous and relevant to the way students think and understand our world. Well our world already suffocates these students with information on drugs and alcohol, teen pregnancy and prostitution, gang violence, and runaway minors. Now exacerbate and proliferate this information into images and sound through art, music, and entertainment. Understandably, the mind of a typical student in a typical class is optimally bored.

Of course this does not mean that students should be exposed to pornography and other adult themes. But they should become acquainted with what the status quo refers to as art, music and literature that is diverse and thought provoking. There should be little if any impedance from

special groups that limit students from invoking ideas; especially when those ideas are needed for innovation. Fearful as it may be, let us make sure that our students are not censored from thinking. A certain amount of risk that comes from accepting diverse concepts may lead to the kind of problem solving that prevents our extinction, or at least cultural extinction.

Censorship has its place for age appropriate viewing, listening and interaction. Technology allows us to filter and block that which is obviously not age appropriate. Nevertheless, it would be detrimental to place our students in a box with no windows to the world. Extending their boundaries of knowledge and increasing their exposure to examples of experience will contribute to lifelong appropriate decision making essential to leadership and self direction.

With regard to public opinion of our schools, especially as it pertains to parents, our global perception has been negatively altered by a conservative leadership at the executive level. Myth and propaganda of this sort only serves to give control to a political faction, defined by a political platform, as they obtain support and positioning through fear mongering. The disservice to our country for spreading untruths brings unneeded stress, complexity and cost through wasted time and effort. Specifically, time and effort that represents money spent on unnecessary training, negotiation and problem resolution at all levels of government and society.

Conclusion

Myths result in poor ideas for education reform. The critics, politicians and the media have gone to great, almost influential, extremes to mislead the public about every aspect of our school system. Truthfully, the public schools of this nation have met, and continue to meet, the expectations of our communities; which is probably why our forefathers saw the importance of local control in education.

Problems do exist, but the system of education provides adequate opportunities for conjecture, comments and grievance at the most appropriate levels of government and education. Americans should take a greater participatory role in the process of education by lobbying their representatives, attending school board meetings, joining site-based decision making teams, volunteering for campus activities and scrutinizing negative press. Imagine the improved response, with regard to popularity and funding, our school system would have if we could see a balanced view of our progress in actuating learning in our educational system.

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