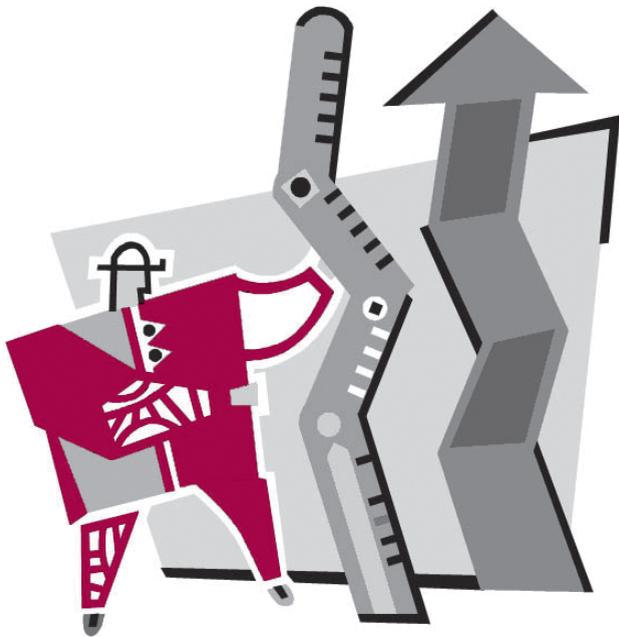


Education Matters

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TOUGH CHOICES ON TEACHER QUALITY

By Michael J. Petrilli

OK, school reformers, it's pop-quiz time. Take out your # 2 pencils and circle the answer with which you agree.

To boost teacher quality, policy makers should:

- a. Allow principals to hire the best teachers they can find, regardless of credentials; or
- b. Require new teachers to pass a rigorous test of subject matter knowledge or possess a major in their field.

Do you find yourself wanting to answer "Both, of course"? If so, join the club. And consider yourself part of the problem because, frankly, together we have made a mess of teacher quality policy.

It's not for lack of good intentions. Unlike the teachers unions, whose positions on this issue cannot be disentangled from their members' self-interest, reformers can claim purity of heart and selflessness of intentions. However, we are also of two minds.

We feel the tug of competing values, and too often we try to split the difference, to have it both ways. The values at war are deregulation versus academic rigor. Let's examine the case for each.

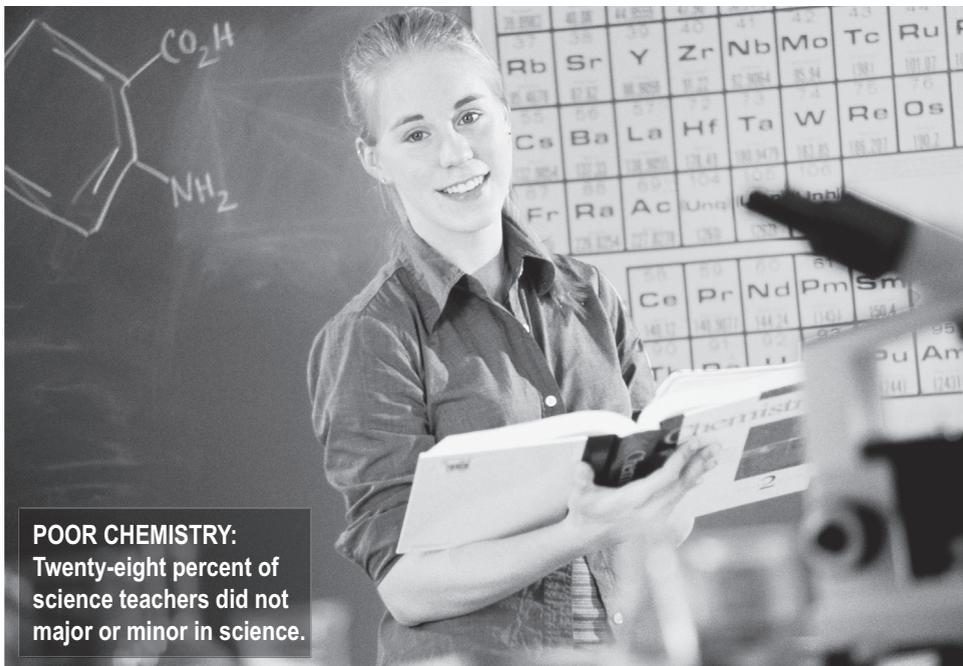
Deregulation

The argument for deregulation is strong. Much of the rhetoric of the standards-and-accountability movement (and its cousin, the charter school movement) is about results in return for flexibility—giving principals more power in return for stronger outcomes. Now that school leaders are in the hot seat, facing exposure and sanctions under the No Child Left Behind Act if they don't boost achievement, they have every incentive to hire great teachers who can help them succeed in making adequate yearly progress (AYP). This was not always the case; in the bad old days before accountability, principals might have been tempted to engage in nepotism, or been too lazy to search out the best and the brightest. After all, results didn't much matter. But no lon-

ger. Surely any principal worth his salary knows that teacher quality is the number-one determinant of student achievement, at least among factors within his control.

Besides, so much of what makes a teacher effective is hard to measure (at least until the value he or she adds to student achievement can be determined). One study by analyst Dan Goldhaber found that 97 percent of a teacher's effectiveness could not be predicted by easy-to-measure factors such as test scores or certification status. While teachers with majors in their field, high scores on Praxis, and Ivy League pedigrees might, in general, outperform teachers without those attributes, exceptions abound. A principal who can interview the teacher candidate, talk to his or her references, and even watch a mock lesson being taught will have far better information than any regulator or bureaucrat can provide with which to make a shrewd decision and maybe find a diamond in the rough.

Consider the experience of Teach for America (TFA). It recruits more teachers



POOR CHEMISTRY:
Twenty-eight percent of
science teachers did not
major or minor in science.

every year than all but the largest districts, and it seems to have cracked the code on identifying teachers who succeed in challenging classrooms. While the program is well-known for attracting Ivy League grads with lofty test scores, its unheralded genius is its extensive selection process (essays, interviews, practice lessons, etc.) that pinpoints subtle differences among candidates that seem to predict classroom success. TFA has been particularly effective in finding individuals with high expectations. For example, according to a survey released earlier this month, seven out of ten second-year TFA teachers disagreed with the statement, “Students who don’t have basic skills by junior high or middle school will never be able to catch up,” and almost the same proportion believe that their own expectations have a significant impact on their students’ achievement.

NCLB’s obliviousness to such subtle indicators of quality is what makes its “highly qualified teachers” provision so maddening to many principals. Imagine a school leader in Appalachia who employs a dynamic, inspiring math teacher who gets great results in the classroom and helps all her students reach proficiency. Should the state or federal government care if that teacher majored in chemistry instead of math? How should that principal feel when told that this fine math teacher must jump through a bunch of hoops to meet the “subject matter competency” requirement? It makes you want to

yell: “Cut the red tape! Peel back the bureaucrats! Trust the results!”

Academic Rigor

And yet, the case for academic rigor is also strong. Mounds of evidence show that school districts have not made academic credentials a top priority when hiring teachers. According to the latest federal Schools and Staffing Survey, 38 percent of all middle- and high-school math teachers did not major or minor in math (or even math education). One-third of English teachers are also teaching “out of field,” as are 28 percent of science teachers, and about one-quarter of social studies teachers. To think

“Thirty-eight percent of all middle- and high-school math teachers did not major or minor in math (or even math education). One-third of English teachers are also teaching ‘out of field,’ as are 28 percent of science teachers, and about one-quarter of social studies teachers.”

that the people who hire teachers will suddenly change their ways and put a premium on academic credentials because of the pressure to raise test scores is to enter the zone of wishful thinking. After all, K-12 educators and ed school professors have long

downplayed the importance of subject matter knowledge. One could even argue that the dominant cultural trait of the education system is anti-intellectualism. That’s not likely to change overnight without a strong push. Unless we can infuse the system with smart, well-educated teachers, it may never change.

Furthermore, even if a principal understands that he should recruit knowledgeable teachers, he lives with imperfect information. He lacks access to candidates’ Praxis scores, much less their SAT results. Additionally, with trendy fads overwhelming the college curriculum, especially the obsession with “depth over breadth,” it’s hard to know whether even candidates with a major in their subject (say, history) actually know enough of the content that the state requires students to learn. Why not, at the least, require them to pass a test in that subject? Better yet, why not make their test scores (not just “pass” or “fail”) available to employers? The trifling inconvenience of making prospective teachers endure a test is a small price to pay for quality control. If recruiting knowledgeable teachers with a passion for their subjects helps tamp down the progressivism that dominates our schools (“all that matters is learning to learn”), so much the better. Raise the bar! Down with mediocrity! Let’s start valuing intellectual pursuit!

The Dilemma

Which brings us back to where we started. Can’t we have it both ways, giving principals more hiring flexibility (allowing them to engage uncertified teachers, for instance),

with the single caveat that all teachers be knowledgeable in their subjects? Have we ever tried that? Enter Section 9101(23) of the No Child Left Behind Act, which explicitly exempts charter schools from the law’s requirement that schools hire certi-

fied teachers (at least in states where the charter law provides this same flexibility). However, it does not exempt charters from the mandate that their teachers, too, demonstrate subject matter competence in the subjects that they teach. So we have a nice natural experiment. Consider Washington, D.C., for example, where charter principals have almost unlimited freedom in hiring decisions, except that their teachers must “demonstrate subject matter competence” by passing a test, majoring in their field, or meeting the “High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation” (HOSSE). This seems reasonable. But how’s it playing out? It’s a mess. The subject matter exams (Praxis II in the District of Columbia) aren’t offered very often, and for some subjects (arts, physics, and some foreign languages), they aren’t offered at all. Almost four years into NCLB implementation, the District of Columbia still doesn’t have a HOSSE process. The rules for what counts as a “ma-

job” (set by the District of Columbia Public Schools—the charters’ main competitor) are arbitrary: thirty-three semester hours, of which eighteen hours must be in 300-level and above courses.

Consider the headaches of this respected charter school: “We had one Teach for America corps member with a mechanical engineering degree who was not ‘highly qualified’ to teach math or physics because he did not have enough credit hours in either subject. We had a teacher who was fluent in German, had passed the government tests in German, but was not ‘highly qualified’ to teach German. We had a teacher who was a talented artist and architect and a business major who was not qualified to teach the arts and architecture class.” In other words, charter principals are dealing with a thicket of confusion, paperwork, and one-size-fits-all regulations—exactly what they sought to escape when they “went charter.” Their autonomy has been severely curtailed.

What’s the lesson? It’s simply not possible to have it both ways. We must either give principals full autonomy to make hiring decisions or require all teachers to demonstrate subject matter knowledge. Trust principals, or don’t. On which side of that divide are you? ■

Mike Petrilli is Vice President for National Programs and Policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. He comes to the Foundation from the U.S. Department of Education, where he served as Associate Assistant Deputy Secretary in the Office of Innovation and Improvement.



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Sink or Swim

How we fail to support new teachers and what we can do about it.

By Ellen Moir

Imagine putting new hires alone in an office, isolated from co-workers, giving them a difficult job to do, and then expecting that they perform at the same level as the experienced colleague next door. That is hardly a formula for success, but that is exactly what we do with many new teachers.

Our education system's shocking indifference to the fate of its newest members is an embarrassment.

As schools opened last fall, thousands of beginning teachers received little more than a student roster and a classroom key. Usually fresh out of college and in their first job, these novices are often subjected to a hazing ritual that involves placing them in the most difficult jobs in hardest-to-staff schools. They work long hours, planning lessons and learning complex curriculum requirements in isolation. They struggle to manage thirty students, each with individual needs and abilities.

Paying a High Price

It's a sink-or-swim experience. With little support, it's no wonder that about 40 percent of the new teachers leave the profession within four years.

We are paying a high price for not supporting our beginning teachers. School districts, especially urban ones, spend significant sums to recruit high-quality teachers. With each new school year, a staffing crisis looms. Failure to invest in the new teachers who are hired means that the next year the whole cycle starts again as burned-out and disillusioned new teachers flee the classroom for better salaries and working conditions. Teaching positions at our neediest schools continue to be a revolving door.

Our failure to invest in teacher induction and retention is counterproductive and short-sighted. A recent report showed that



the cost of teacher turnover has reached \$5 billion a year. This figure does not even begin to account for the toll on schools and students whose teachers are constantly under stress and in flux. With the growing number of new teachers needed to replace baby-boomer retirees, we have to start doing a better job now.

Effective Mentoring

Many school districts have induction programs for new teachers, but too often these only deal with logistics, or assign a new teacher a "buddy" to provide emotional support for life in the trenches. What new teachers really need is the guidance of successful, experienced teachers trained to mentor. And both mentors and new teachers need time off from other duties to work together to improve teaching. Effective mentoring requires mentors to work with new teachers in their classrooms, and base their support on the realities of the challenges new teachers face. Since experienced teachers more quickly grasp the needs of a classroom, they can provide options for solving student and curriculum challenges. They can also help novices make better and faster decisions about lesson plans, teaching strategies, and assessment. By giving new teachers this instructional support from the start, new teachers focus less on day-to-day survival and more on instruction. They become more confident and more skilled.

New teacher support programs improve retention and teaching simultaneously.

Students benefit from the enthusiasm of new teachers and the experience of senior teachers. New teachers become more effective teachers faster. Parents appreciate that their children are getting a better education. With comprehensive mentoring and support, new teachers are more likely to stay on the job. Our program, the Santa Cruz New Teacher Project, one of California's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Programs, is working with 900 new K-12 teachers in thirty-one school districts in our region. Two studies have shown that after six years the retention rate for our new teachers is 88 percent!

Another benefit is that this new mentor role reinvigorates veteran teachers. The training they receive to be mentors and the ability to share their expertise gives them a mid-career boost. Their knowledge and skills contribute to the successful entry of a new generation of teachers—an important professional legacy. They return to the classroom as refreshed and even better teachers, or find other avenues to share their new expertise.

School districts benefit from higher quality teaching, better retention, and faster gains in student achievement. Money poured into recruitment isn't lost as new teachers improve more rapidly and return next year.

We know that quality teaching is the key to student achievement. Yet it is unrealistic to expect the novice to enter teaching with all the skills and knowledge of the ten-or twenty-year veteran. Quality mentoring is essential in classrooms with beginning teachers. ■

Ellen Moir is the Executive Director of the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, a national resource for new teacher induction programs. In 2003, she received the California Council on Teacher Education Distinguished Educator Award.



For more information on the model programs being developed by the New Teacher Center, visit www.newteachercenter.org.

Blind Hogs and Behaviorist Laws

The *New York Times* stumbles onto an important reason for supporting No Child Left Behind

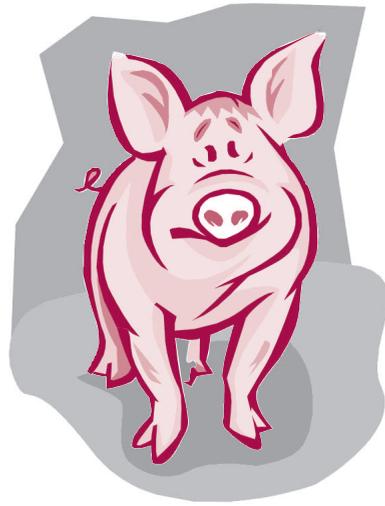
By Chester Finn, Jr.

The late Russell Long (D-LA), longtime chairman of the Senate Finance Committee once said “Even a blind hog finds an acorn once in a while.” And so it is with the customarily education-blind *New York Times* editorial page, which unearthed a back-to-school acorn of wisdom last fall.

Perhaps inspired by the flat-world musings of *Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, the editors noted that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has done well at forcing states, districts, and educators “to focus at last on educational inequality, the nation’s most corrosive social problem.” But, they continued, “it has been less successful at getting educators and politicians to see the education problem in a global context, and to understand that this country is rapidly losing ground to the nations we compete with for high-skilled jobs that require a strong basis in math and science....The United States can still prosper in a world where its labor costs are higher than the competition’s, but it cannot do that if the cheaper workers abroad are also better educated.”

That sentence should be written on the blackboard a thousand times by everyone balking at the demands of NCLB and other standards-based reform strategies. For such reforms seek to secure America’s future in two ways. One is by narrowing our domestic achievement gaps. The other is by boosting our overall level of academic prowess, at least up to the level that states have defined as “proficiency.” Those who decry NCLB have their eyes on today or maybe yesterday, not on tomorrow.

Skeptics say the dual goals are in conflict. Closing the achievement gap, they argue, means dumbing down standards and reining in high achievers, whereas a regimen that



propels young Americans to world-class norms in demanding fields such as math and science would leave some of their classmates behind.

That paradox is true in part. We cannot be completely equal and truly excellent at the same time. But we could be more of both than we are today. Imagine what a different country this would be if 70 percent of all our kids were “proficient” in key subjects rather than the 30-odd percent that are today. (I’m using the National Assessment of Educational Progress’ gauge of proficiency, not the squishier versions adopted by most states.)

Higher Achievement

Picture a society in which 90 percent of all young people graduate from high school on time (instead of today’s 70 percent) with diplomas that signify readiness for college and modern jobs. To get anywhere near those outcomes, however, we must make major changes in how we organize, pay for, and deliver K-12 education. This is in addition to the accountability mechanisms we impose upon the system and its various components—including the people who work in it.

If we don’t change our ways, we won’t get different results. (Recall the old definition of insanity.) That’s what NCLB, at bottom, is about: pressing states, districts, schools, and educators (not to mention kids) to change their ways, alter their behaviors, do things differently than they’re accustomed to. It’s the strongest behaviorist statute I can remember in the field of education; Uncle Sam at his pushiest.

This explains why others are pushing back. People don’t like to change their be-

haviors and institutions resist altering their established practices.

Through such a lens one should view the machinations of the NEA, of Connecticut’s attorney general and state superintendent, of Utah’s legislature, and sundry other instances of NCLB backlash. Prodded by Washington to do things differently, they’re balking. They don’t want to change. But that’s hard to admit. So they’re finding a million other rationales (“local control,” “unfunded mandate,” “unconstitutional”) to justify their resistance. They’re demanding waivers, exemptions, and “flexibility” so they don’t have to change, at least not much. And to a lamentable degree the U.S. Department of Education is yielding of late, just as the Clinton Department of Education did when states balked at implementing both “Goals 2000” and the 1994 amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

No, NCLB isn’t perfect. I have as long a list as anyone of its malfunctions, unintended consequences, and needed amendments. And yes, a handful of states (not including Utah or Connecticut, by the way) had pretty decent systems of pre-NCLB standards-based reform that were showing gains; it’s hard to fault them for not wanting to retool just because Uncle Sam has a slightly different approach.

Still, the country’s K-12 education arrangements, taken as a whole, need to change in a big way. Otherwise, we’ll neither close our domestic gaps nor catch our international rivals. Change means altering behavior, which usually means being compelled, dragooned, bribed, or outsmarted into doing things differently despite not wanting to.

Boosters of NCLB in particular and standards-based reform in general would be wise to rest their case on two grounds, as the blind-hog *Times* did: the moral and political imperative of narrowing the achievement gap at home and the economic and geopolitical need for a population that can out-compete the countries now striving to whip us. ■

Chester E. Finn, Jr. is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in Washington, D.C. and a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education.



Ask the Secretary

Spellings answers teachers' questions via website

Teachers, do you have a question that you'd like to ask Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings? The U.S. Department of Education has established "Teachers Ask the Secretary," a new feature of the Department's website.

It's being billed as an "easy-to-use page that will help teachers learn answers on a wide range of subjects...and we will share best practices and success stories under the No Child Left Behind Act." In a cursory glance at the site, the topics range from teacher shortages to special ed to the recent devastation along the Gulf Coast. For those charter school teachers out there, this is a resource for you too. Secre-

tary Spellings can dutifully address the issues that you face everyday, issues such as charter unionizing, qualified vs. certified, pay for performance, and the recent efforts of reformers nationwide to assist Katrina's victims. No question is too big or too small.

This easy-to-use page will help teachers find answers on a wide range of subjects: teacher quality, professional development, state academic standards, and more. The Department will share best practices and success stories under the



Secretary Spellings talks with Greg Murphy, a teacher at Overland Trail Middle School in Overland Park, Kansas.

No Child Left Behind Act and listen to your concerns. The page will be updated regularly to highlight as many topics as possible. It's available at www.ed.gov/teachers. ■

Source—CER Newswire, a publication of The Center for Education Reform.

ROBIN HOOD IN REVERSE



A RIDDLE: Who has been talking a good game for forty years about equalizing resources for poor kids, while creating obscure rules that do the exact opposite?

ANSWER: Uncle Sam. Title I, the mother of all federal education programs, requires that high-poverty schools receive roughly comparable resources before adding funds from Washington. That's only fair—these dollars are meant to be extra, to compensate for the difficulties faced by poor children, to "supplement, not supplant" state and local education revenues, not to let local districts out of their funding responsibilities.

However, as Marguerite Roza and Paul Hill point out in their Washington Post editorial (and their excellent study, *Strengthening Title I to Help High-Poverty Schools*, found at www.crpe.org/workingpapers.shtml), there's a glaring loophole: districts don't have to account for the vast differences in payroll between schools.

Since virtually all districts budget for schools as if everyone were paid an average salary, rather than actuals, and since most urban districts face a talent drain from poor schools to more affluent ones (since teachers have seniority "bumping rights" built into union contracts—and no

financial incentive to stay at tougher schools), this is no small oversight. In Houston, for example, high-poverty schools get \$472 less in state and local funds than the district average.

There's an easy solution: close the loophole. Listen for the howls of protest from the teachers unions, which to date have been more concerned with protecting the bumping rights of their veteran members than living up to their lofty rhetoric about equity.

Source—Education Gadfly (www.edexcellence.net).

Free Books



The Literacy Empowerment Foundation (LEF), a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, invites your school or other literacy project to apply for FREE books for Read

Across America Day. During the past year, LEF has distributed over 3,000,000 books to schools all across the country for Read Across America Day and other literacy projects. Resources are allocated on a first-come first-served basis.

For more information go to www.LEFbooks.org.

Social Studies Lesson Plans



American Heritage Education Foundation's K-12 lesson plans are based on factual, objective history, and are correlated to the National Council of Social

Studies and Core Knowledge guidelines.

The lesson plans are being widely used through the United States with national distribution increasing steadily. The plans are available at no cost to schools, teachers, students, etc. upon request. They are in either CD or loose-leaf binders.

The only request is to let the Foundation know by letter response on school letterhead of a school (or teacher's) positive or negative experience. American Heritage says this feedback is an invaluable help toward improving the lesson plans over time—and positive feedback helps demonstrate to other teachers of the value of the plans.

For more information, visit www.americanheritage.org

Quote of the Month

“My whole experience in math the last few years has been a struggle against the program. Whatever I’ve achieved, I’ve achieved in spite of it. Kids do not do better learning math themselves. There’s a reason we go to school, which is that there’s someone smarter than us with something to teach us.”

High school student Jim Munch, relating to his battle against his school's constructivist math program.



SERVING MORE:
Charter schools serve more minorities than do public schools.

Hopes, Fears, and Reality

New charter school study disarms opponents

A new study stating that charter schools serve a larger percentage of minority and low-income students than conventional public schools may help charter opponents finally come to grips with that fact.

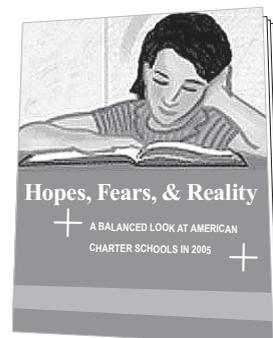
Hopes, Fears, and Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools in 2005, is a study done by the University of Washington's National Charter School Research Project (available at www.crpe.org). It shows that charter schools serve 58.5 percent minority students, while noncharters serve just 45 percent. “One of the driving forces behind charter schools has been parent demand for new options among groups that seemed to be less well-served by traditional schools,” said Robin Lake, the author of the study.

The study also found that charter schools are three times as likely as conventional public schools to be located in a big city. These statistics confirm what many reports have shown. In 2003, a Center for Education Reform (CER) survey found that 56 percent of charter schools were Title 1 schools, serving between 40 and 100

percent low-income students. In 2004, the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics released the results from the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress pilot study, and found that 50 percent of charter schools were located in inner cities versus 29 percent of other public schools. Those results also showed that 31 percent of charter school students were black versus 17 percent across conventional public schools.

Peter Murphy, the director of policy for the New York Charter Schools Association, points out, “The study affirms what we've known from the start; that charter schools are serving a disproportionately higher number of low-income students and students of color. Yet the sad part of it is that the opponents of charter schools are trying to propagate the opposite.” ■

CER Newswire is published by the Center for Education Reform, the nation's leading authority on school reform. For more information on CER and education reform, visit www.edreform.com.



Multiple Alternatives

Will Fitzhugh reminds us of a few neglected “intelligences” needing attention by students



It has been said that if one is to criticize the novel curricular suggestions and philosophical positions of others, there is a duty to offer alternatives. In the case of Multiple Intelligences, what seems to be called for is Multiple Alternatives.

The Theory of Multiple Intelligences requires attention to the Mathematical, Bodily/Kinesthetic, Visual/Spatial, Interpersonal, Verbal/Linguistic, Musical/Rhythmic, and Intrapersonal Intelligences of today's youth.

It should be remembered in this context, that Professor Gardner of the Harvard School of Education called these qualities Multiple Intelligences because, as he has said, if he had called them Talents, he would have attracted much less attention.

While a truly sophisticated debate about the endless varieties of classroom innovation might not be out of place at what has become of our schools of education, it is my view that in the classroom a very different set of talents deserves cultivation.

Therefore, I offer the following suggestions of Alternative Multiple Intelligences whose development should be most likely to contribute to the education of the majority of our students.

Perhaps the most important is Paying Attention Intelligence. Without paying attention, it is truly astounding how much

instruction even the average student is capable of ignoring on any given day, and as the word suggests, ignoring is the primrose path to ignorance.

Memorization Intelligence is seen as old fashioned, except when it applies to the names of music groups, sports or movie stars, and clothing or soft drink brands. Nevertheless, if students don't remember anything, that is pretty much the same as their not knowing anything. If a student is asked for the dates of the United States Civil War or the name of the first female Secretary of Labor, and she says, "I don't remember," that is the functional equivalent, for all practical purposes, of admitting, "I don't know."

Of course there is a storm of debate among professional educators, or rather between professional educators and the rest of the country, over the importance of knowledge as such, with the educators coming down on the side of correct sentiment fueled by general ignorance and propaganda, but let us put that aside for the moment.

If one can accept, at least provisionally, that some knowledge may be useful for some purpose as an outcome of education, then Recognition Intelligence and Recall Intelligence, so useful on tests of knowledge, become central as well.

When it comes to writing, I would argue,

in the face of the united opposition from the National Council of Teachers of American English, that Punctuation Intelligence and Spelling Intelligence are also essential.

Another often neglected but vital talent for students is Hard Work Intelligence or Diligence Intelligence. We have so often in recent decades taught students that creativity is far more important than work, and that if they are not the smartest student in the class, they should give up trying to do their academic work and fall back on their innate creativity and capacity for having fun instead. A return to an emphasis on Hard Work Intelligence, where it has been tried, has led to some astonishing academic results. Jaime Escalante's success in teaching calculus at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles is not the only example.

It might be noted in passing that it seems very likely that if Mr. Escalante had spent more time on Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence, Intrapersonal Intelligence, and other Gardner Intelligences, his students would have not done quite as well on the AP Calculus Test. But then, he was not a Social Studies Teacher.

There are many other neglected Intelligences not supported by Professor Gardner, such as Courtesy Intelligence, Time Management Intelligence, Turning in Homework Intelligence, Papers in on Time Intelligence, Seeking Extra Help Intelligence, Taking Personal Responsibility Intelligence, Asking Questions Intelligence, and the list goes on. In these cases, at least, it seems tradition still knows best. ■

Will Fitzhugh is a Harvard graduate who taught for ten years at the high school in Concord, Massachusetts. He founded The Concord Review in 1987, the National Writing Board in 1998, and the National History Club in 2002. He lives in Sudbury, Massachusetts. For more information, go to www.tcr.org.