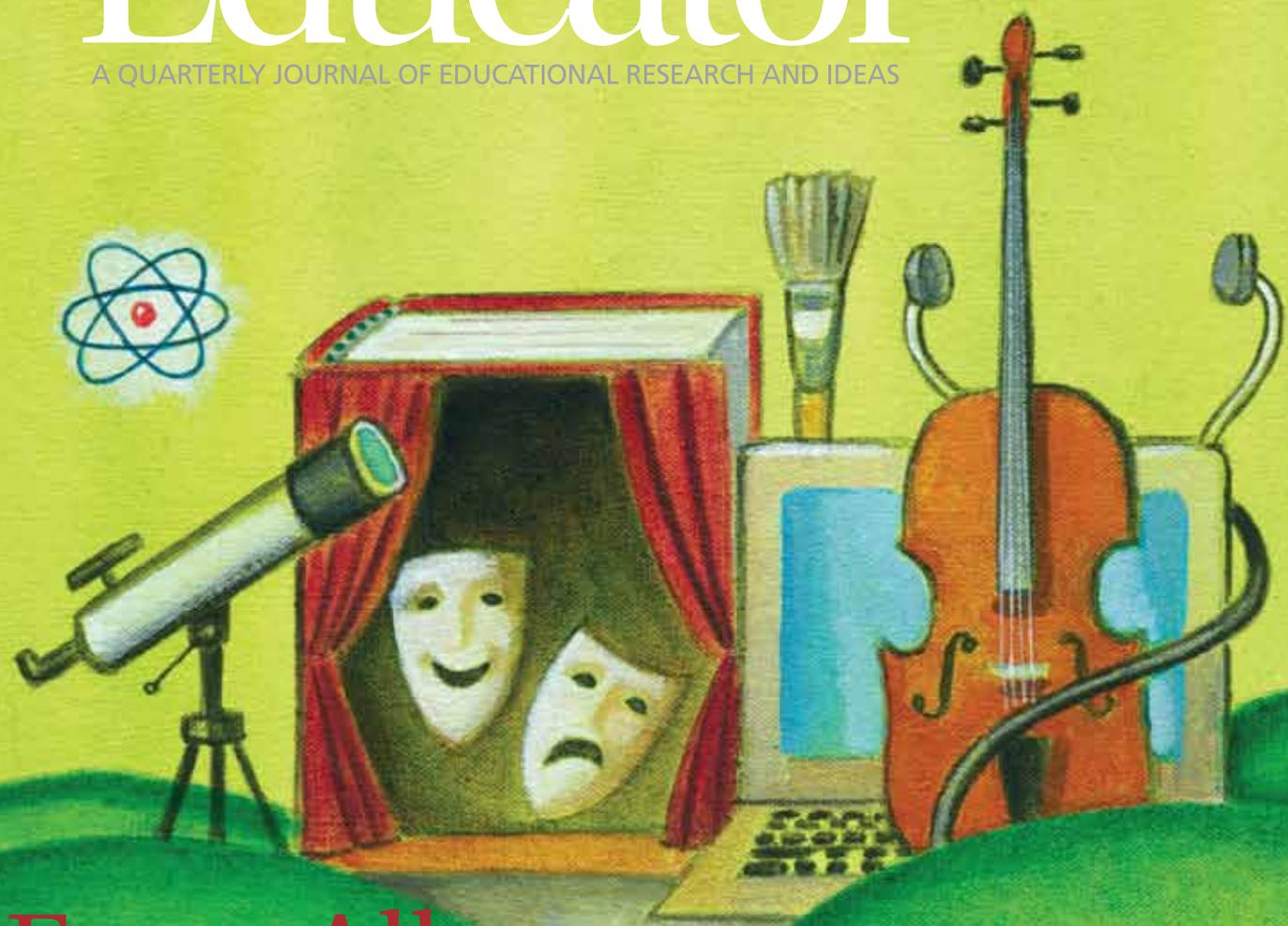




AMERICAN Educator

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IDEAS



From All Walks of Life

NEW HOPE FOR SCHOOL INTEGRATION

15
The Folly of
Education Fads

22
Union-Community
Connections

27
Howard Zinn's
A People's History

35
Are Sleepy Students
Learning?

We're Here to Help

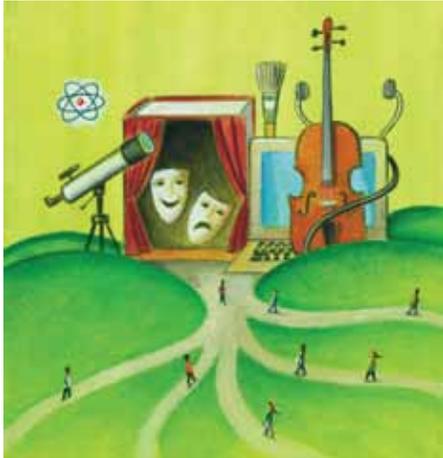
Great teachers never stop honing their craft—and *American Educator* is here to help. Almost all of the articles from the last 10-plus years are available for free on our website: www.aft.org/ae.

Be the first to know when a new *American Educator* is online. Sign up for an e-mail notification at www.aft.org/subscribe.

In addition to links to each issue, there's a Subject Index to help you easily find the information you need. Articles are grouped by topics such as curriculum, early childhood, English language learners, history, math, and vocabulary.

Looking for an article by Diane Ravitch, Daniel Willingham, or any of the hundreds of other prominent educators and researchers who have written for *American Educator*? Visit our Authors Index.





2 From All Walks of Life

New Hope for School Integration

BY RICHARD D. KAHLENBERG

Integrating our schools is a goal that many of us share. But some seem to have given up on the idea, as plans to boost racial diversity have come under attack, and as the fixation on test scores has narrowed some people's concept of a good education. There is, however, new hope: integration by socioeconomic status. It's a cost-effective, legally sound strategy that can promote racial diversity while narrowing the achievement gap.

8 High-Flying High-Poverty Schools

15 The Folly of the Big Idea

How a Liberal Arts Education Puts Fads in Perspective

BY DIANA SENECHAL

Today's worship of sweeping innovations is preventing more modest, thoughtful ideas from being heard. As those who wish to build on the past are assumed to be protecting the status quo, we risk forsaking the works of lasting beauty and practical significance that are part of the liberal arts tradition.

22 The Professional Educator

Union Members Are Community Members

BY DAVID GRAY

Unions serve their members' interests. But union members are also community members, and their interests go well beyond

increasing pay and benefits. A local union president has found that his members are best served by participating in a community-wide coalition. Providing eye-glasses to needy students, promoting healthy eating, and increasing voter registration are just a few of the important issues they have tackled together.

27 Undue Certainty

Where Howard Zinn's A People's History Falls Short

BY SAM WINEBURG

While most historians aim to examine the full historical record, Zinn picks and chooses from it. Writing persuasively, he hides the fact that many of his claims are unsubstantiated, presents his views as the truth, and leaves students with a distorted sense of historical reasoning.



35 Ask the Cognitive Scientist *Are Sleepy Students Learning?*

BY DANIEL T. WILLINGHAM

Although many teachers and parents worry that high school students don't sleep enough, research shows that the impact of sleep deprivation on learning is not as dramatic as typically thought. Even so, research does show that teenagers can learn to get more shuteye, and that doing so can improve their mood and behavior.



RANDI WEINGARTEN
President

LORRETTA JOHNSON
Secretary-Treasurer

FRANCINE LAWRENCE
Executive Vice President

© 2012 AMERICAN FEDERATION
OF TEACHERS, AFL-CIO.



Cover illustration:
PAUL ZWOLAK

LISA HANSEL
Editor

JENNIFER DUBIN
Assistant Editor

JENNIFER CHANG
Graphic Designer

JANE FELLER
Copyeditor

JENNIFER BERNEY
Production Coordinator

SEAN LISHANSKY
Editorial Assistant

AMERICAN EDUCATOR (ISSN 0148-432X, USPS 008-462) is published quarterly by the American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2079
Phone: 202-879-4400
www.aft.org

Letters to the editor may be sent to the address above or to amered@aft.org.

AMERICAN EDUCATOR cannot assume responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

Please allow a minimum of four weeks for copyright permission requests.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the viewpoints or policies of the AFT.

Although advertisements are screened as carefully as possible, acceptance of an advertisement does not imply AFT endorsement of the product or service.

AMERICAN EDUCATOR is mailed to all AFT teacher and higher education members as a benefit of membership. Subscriptions represent \$2.50 of annual dues. Non-AFT members may subscribe by mailing \$10 per year by check or money order to the address on the left.

MEMBERS: To change your address or subscription, notify your local union treasurer.

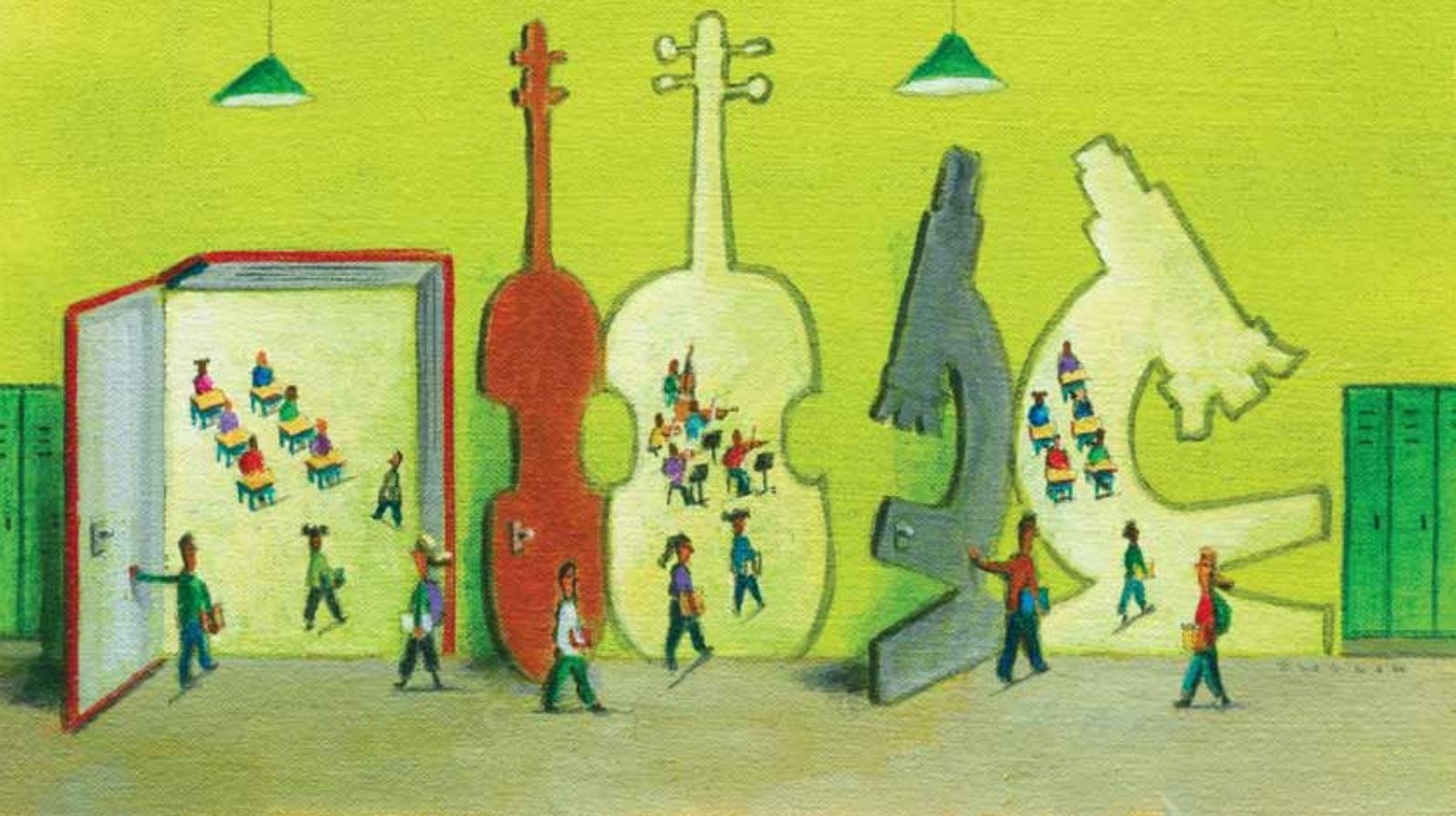
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to American Educator, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2079.

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices.

ADVERTISERS: Contact Karen Dorne Media Sales, 319 Harrison Ave., Westfield, NJ 07090
Phone: 908-233-6075
Fax: 908-233-6081

From All Walks of Life

New Hope for School Integration



BY RICHARD D. KAHLBERG

Sixteen years ago—back when Bill Clinton and Bob Dole were battling for the presidency and Michelle Rhee was still a graduate student—I began researching a book suggesting that we should find creative ways to educate more students in economically integrated school environments. It was a very old and profoundly American idea and, at the same time, novel and mostly unexplored in practice.

On the one hand, the idea of economically integrated schools runs deep in American history. In 1837, Horace Mann, who famously argued that public education should be “the great equal-

izer,” wrote that in order to serve that role, public schools had to be “common schools,” by which he meant institutions in which “the children of all classes, rich and poor, should partake as equally as possible in the privileges” of the enterprise.¹ The idea of socioeconomic integration received a big boost more than 100 years later with the publication of the 1966 Coleman Report. Coleman’s analysis—examining 600,000 students in 4,000 schools—found that the socioeconomic status of your classmates mattered a great deal to your academic performance. The report concluded that “the social composition of the student body is more highly related to achievement, independent of the student’s own social background, than is any school factor.”²

On the other hand, in 1996, when I began researching the topic of socioeconomic integration, almost no American school districts explicitly sought an economically integrated student body. Racial integration was a widely recognized goal, but racial desegregation was seen mostly as a legal remedy for the crime of de jure segregation and as a desirable social goal for society at large.

Racial integration is a very important aim that I fully support, but if one’s goal is boosting academic achievement, the research from Coleman (and subsequent studies) found that what really

*Richard D. Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation, is the author or editor of several books, including *Rewarding Strivers: Helping Low-Income Students Succeed in College*; *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy*; and *All Together Now: Creating Middle-Class Schools through Public School Choice*. This article is adapted with permission from the introduction to *The Future of School Integration: Socioeconomic Diversity as an Education Reform Strategy*, ed. Richard D. Kahlenberg (New York: Century Foundation, 2012).*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL ZWOLAK

matters is economic integration. Indeed, UCLA professor Gary Orfield, a strong proponent of racial desegregation, notes that “educational research suggests that the basic damage inflicted by segregated education comes not from racial concentration but the concentration of children from poor families.”³ In Louisville, Kentucky, for example, a racial integration plan produced one school that was nicely integrated by race but was 99 percent low income—and struggled.⁴

The research is clear. Low-income students in middle-class schools (in which less than 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) are surrounded by: (1) peers who, on average, are more academically engaged and less likely to act out than those in high-poverty schools (in which at least 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch*); (2) a community of parents who are able to be more actively involved in school affairs and know how to hold school officials accountable; and (3) stronger teachers who have higher expectations for students.⁵

In 1996, I could only identify one school district in the entire country—La Crosse, Wisconsin—that consciously sought to promote socioeconomic integration of its schools. And when I visited the town, I found that La Crosse’s policy, that all elementary schools should aim to have between 15 and 45 percent of the student body eligible for free lunch, had been highly controversial. In 1999, after I published a few articles about socioeconomic integration in newspapers and magazines, I began getting calls from reporters in a second, much larger district, Wake County (Raleigh), North Carolina, which was discussing a plan to limit the proportion of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch to 40 percent at all schools. Slowly, policy was beginning to catch up to where the research had long been pointing: to the need to break up concentrations of school poverty.

In 2001, I published *All Together Now: Creating Middle-Class Schools through Public School Choice*, which laid out the research basis for socioeconomic integration and provided profiles of La Crosse and Wake County. In the years since then, I’ve written numerous essays and reports on the topic, including a 2007 profile of the growing number of school districts pursuing socioeconomic integration.⁶ Earlier this year, the Century Foundation, where I work, published a volume of essays that I edited: *The Future of School Integration: Socioeconomic Diversity as an Education Reform Strategy*. It highlights the research of a new generation of scholars on the topic and identifies more than 80 school districts, educating 4 million students, that pursue socioeconomic integration. During the past 16 years, I’ve written on other topics—including teachers’ unions, private school vouchers, No Child Left

Behind, inequality in higher education (affirmative action and legacy preferences), and labor organizing—but socioeconomic school integration has been an important and consistent thread in my work.

Over the years, I’ve been dismissed as politically naive, called racist for pointing to evidence that low-income students perform better in middle-class schools, and, worst of all, ignored by progressive Democratic administrations, which by my lights, should get fully behind a policy showing enormous promise for low-income students. In this essay, I sketch the considerable obstacles I’ve faced in promoting socioeconomic school integration—and explain what keeps me going.

Strong Resistance

In the past 16 years, I have encountered enormous resistance from conservatives, and even some liberals, to the idea of providing poor kids a chance to attend middle-class schools. Some

conservatives and tea party activists resurrect the specter of “forced busing” from the 1970s, even though today’s integration relies on public school choice, magnet schools, and incentives, rather than compulsion. Others, such as Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom, suggest that working one’s way up to buy a house in a good neighborhood with good schools for your children is the American way, even though equal educational opportunity for children, whether or not their parents can afford to live in a good neighborhood, is fundamental to the American Creed.⁷

Some liberals worry that the focus on socioeconomic integration will somehow shortchange the commitment of *Brown v. Board of Education* to integration by race. They don’t openly acknowledge that race and class are closely connected, and that socioeconomic integration offers significant legal advantages due to a 2007 US Supreme Court ruling curtailing the ability of districts to employ race.⁸ Some advocates of the poor worry that policies seeking to break up concentrations of poverty send the insulting signal that “poor kids can’t learn,” even though precisely the opposite is true: it is because poor kids can learn that it’s important to provide them with the right educational environment. At one meeting, my discussion of the evidence on the negative impact of concentrated poverty was labeled “borderline racist.”

Finally, most policymakers—on both the left and the right—shy away from socioeconomic school integration because they think it’s politically safer to try to make “separate but equal” institutions for rich and poor work, even though no one knows how to make high-poverty schools work at scale, and there are many established ways to make socioeconomic integration politically palatable.

As a result of the opposition from both conservative and liberal quarters, socioeconomic school integration is not part of the national policy discussion in Washington, DC. Instead, 95 percent of the education discussion takes economic segregation as an immutable fact of life and focuses on trying to “fix” high-poverty

Racial integration is a very important aim, but if one’s goal is boosting academic achievement, what really matters is economic integration.

*In this article, “high-poverty schools” are defined as those in which at least 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Some studies set different thresholds. For example, in *The Condition of Education 2012*, the US Department of Education defines high-poverty schools as those in which more than 75 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

schools (usually in ways that high-quality research does not support, but the ineffectiveness of most popular reform ideas is beyond the scope of this article).

So why, in the face of such bipartisan resistance, do I stick with it? And why do I think there is even some hope for progress on socioeconomic integration in the future? I am motivated by two central factors. The first is the serious body of research evidence—which has grown dramatically in the past decade—demonstrating that socioeconomic integration is one of the most important tools available for improving the academic achievement, and life chances, of students.

The second impetus for me is the courage, commitment, and intelligence of local superintendents, school board members, businesspeople, civil rights leaders, principals, parents, teachers, and students in dozens of local communities who are showing that it is possible to create politically viable and successful economic integration programs. And when I get especially discouraged, I am heartened by the personal stories I hear from individuals who suggest that having the chance to attend an economically integrated school made all the difference in their lives.

The Growing Research Evidence

When *All Together Now* was published in 2001, there was a very strong research base for socioeconomic integration; I cited dozens of studies—from the 1966 Coleman Report through a 1997 congressionally authorized longitudinal study of 40,000 students—finding that over and above individual students' socioeconomic status (SES), as the poverty level of the school goes up, the average achievement level goes down. In the last decade, the research has become even more convincing. A 2010 review of 59 studies on the relationship between a school's SES and outcomes in math found "consistent and unambiguous evidence" that higher school poverty concentrations are linked with less learning for students "irrespective of their age, race, or family's SES."⁹ To cite some examples:

- In 2005, an analysis of a large data set found that a school's SES had as much impact on the achievement growth of high school students in math, science, reading, and history as a student's individual economic status.¹⁰
- Analyzing data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), researchers recently concluded that the academic successes of nations like Finland and Canada appear to be related in part to their greater degrees of socioeconomic school integration.¹¹ Finland—often held out as a remarkable education success story—had the very lowest degree of socioeconomic segregation of 57 countries participating in PISA.¹²
- What may be the largest study analyzing school integration and achievement used math exams required under the No Child Left Behind Act and examined data from 22,000 schools enroll-

ing 18 million students. Published in 2006, the study found that minority students have greater gains in racially integrated schools, and that "a substantial portion of the 'racial composition' effect is really due to poverty and peer achievement."¹³

- In 2010, a reanalysis of Coleman's data using a more sophisticated statistical technique found that the social class of the school matters even more to student achievement than does the SES of the family.¹⁴
- In 2012, researchers found a strong statewide correlation between socioeconomic school segregation and the size of the achievement gap between low-income and higher-income students. Examining achievement gaps on the National Assessment of Educational Progress for math and reading in 2007 and 2009,¹⁵ they found that black and Latino students had smaller achievement gaps with white students when they were less

likely to be stuck in high-poverty school environments. Policymakers often point to different levels of performance of minority students in different states and suggest that teacher practices and school leadership may be possible explanations. In fact, variations in socioeconomic isolation, a factor not often mentioned, may play a significant role.

Rigorous Research Yields Strong Results

Some of the strongest evidence to date was published in 2010: a carefully controlled study examined students and families who were randomly assigned to public housing units in Montgomery County, Maryland, a diverse and high-achieving district outside Washington, DC. It found very large positive effects as a result of living in lower-poverty neighborhoods and attending lower-poverty elementary schools.¹⁶

This research took advantage of a rare opportunity to compare two education approaches. On the one hand, the Montgomery County school district has invested substantial extra resources (about \$2,000 per pupil) in its lowest-income schools (dubbed the "red zone") to employ a number of innovative educational approaches. On the other hand, the county also has a long-standing inclusionary housing policy that allows low-income students to live in middle- and upper-middle-class communities and attend fairly affluent schools (dubbed the "green zone").

Thus, Montgomery County offers an interesting experiment: Do low-income students perform better in higher-poverty schools that receive greater resources, or in more-affluent schools with fewer resources? Which matters more for low-income students: extended learning time, smaller class size, and intensive teacher development programs—all made available in Montgomery County's higher-poverty schools—or the types of advantages usually associated with schools in which the majority of students come from affluent families, such as positive peer role models, active parental communities, and strong teachers?

The results were unmistakable: low-income students attending

Finland—often held out as an education success story—had the lowest degree of socioeconomic segregation of 57 countries participating in PISA.

more-affluent elementary schools (and living in more-affluent neighborhoods) significantly outperformed low-income elementary students who attend higher-poverty schools with state-of-the-art educational interventions. By the end of elementary school, students living in public housing who attended the most-affluent schools cut their initial, sizable math achievement gap with nonpoor students in the district by half. For reading, the gap was cut by one-third.

What is particularly remarkable about the comparative success of students in public housing attending Montgomery County's more-affluent schools is they weren't besting students stuck in lousy schools but rather students in schools that saw improvement. Indeed, the school system's interventions in its less-affluent

red zone schools have been generally effective and widely lauded. The investment in red zone schools helped decrease the countywide achievement gap with whites in third-grade reading from 35 percentage points in 2003 to 19 points in 2008 for African Americans, and from 43 points to 17 points for Hispanics.¹⁷

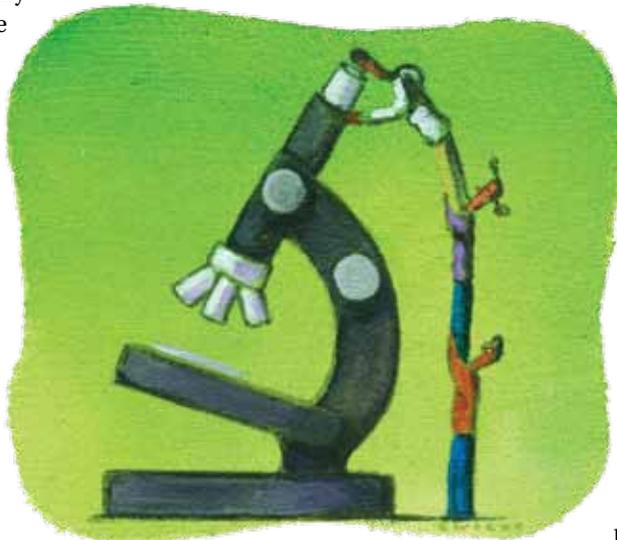
The success of this red zone/green zone intervention deserves acclaim. But it was Montgomery County's long-standing "inclusionary zoning" housing policy that has had a far more pronounced positive educational effect. Under a policy adopted in the early 1970s, developers of large subdivisions are required to set aside between 12 percent and 15 percent of units for low-income and working-class families. The housing authority purchases up to one-third of the inclusionary zoning homes to operate as public housing apartments that are scattered throughout the county. Families eligible for public housing enter a lottery and are randomly assigned to public housing apartments.

The study has national significance not only because it found a very large longitudinal effect from economic integration, but also because it helps answer a question about whether the superior performance of low-income students in more-affluent schools nationwide is simply an artifact of self-selection. The study controls for the fact that more motivated low-income families may scrimp and save to get their children into good schools by comparing students whose families were *assigned by lottery* into red zone and green zone schools. (And, unlike research based on charter school lotteries, the attrition rate in Montgomery County public housing is extremely low.)*

It found the achievement benefits extended to students in

*On the surface, this study would seem to contradict results from a federal housing income integration program known as Moving to Opportunity (MTO), which saw few academic gains for children. But MTO involved students who moved to schools that were mostly still high poverty, with an average free or reduced-price lunch population of 67.5 percent (compared with a control group attending schools with 73.9 percent of students receiving subsidized lunches). The Montgomery County experiment allowed low-income students to attend some very low-poverty schools, similar to the wildly successful Gautreaux program in Chicago.¹⁸

public housing attending schools with up to 30 percent low-income student populations. Does this suggest that 30 percent is a "tipping point," after which low-income students generally will cease to benefit from economically integrated schooling? Not likely. The vast majority of the schools in the sample had low-income populations of between 0 percent and 60 percent. Because other research has found that the negative effects of concentrated poverty are compounded in very high-poverty schools, it may well be that low-income students in, say, 30 to 50 percent low-income schools perform better than students in 60 to 100 percent low-income schools, but (partly because of the housing policy) Montgomery County does not have enough truly high-poverty schools to test the hypothesis.



One interesting question raised by the study is to what extent students benefited from living in more-advantaged neighborhoods, compared with attending more-advantaged schools. It finds that roughly two-thirds of the benefit comes from the school, and one-third from the neighborhood. This suggests there may be considerable value in programs that integrate at the school level alone, though greater benefits clearly accrue from integration at both the neighborhood and school levels.

Effect on Middle-Class Students

The Montgomery County study did not look specifically at the effect on the achievement of middle-class students in

integrated schools, but a large number of studies have. This research consistently finds that integration is not a zero-sum game: low-income students can benefit from economically integrated schools, and middle-class achievement does not decline so long as a strong core of middle-class children is present.¹⁹ The research on racial integration found similar results: test scores of black students increased and white students' scores did not decline.²⁰

Research suggests²¹ low-income students can benefit in economically mixed schools, and middle-class students are not hurt, for two central reasons. First, the numerical majority sets the tone in a school: the negative effects of concentrated poverty tend to kick in only where a clear majority of students are low income. Second, middle-class children are less affected by school influences (for good or ill) than low-income children. This "differential sensitivity" to school environment, one of the central findings of the 1966 Coleman Report, has been dubbed "Coleman's Law." The reason, Coleman explained, is straightforward: aspirations and achievement are more firmly rooted for those with strong family backgrounds; those with weaker family backgrounds, who spend less time under adult supervision, are more open to the influence of peers—a finding consistently reached by researchers.

Research on Costs and Benefits

Opponents of integration at the school level often raise questions about the costs of such programs. Because our residential

areas are segregated, school integration (as opposed to housing integration) involves expenses associated with bus transportation. Critics of integration often ask, shouldn't money spent on bus transportation be more fruitfully employed on classroom education itself? It is a nice political slogan, but as the Montgomery County research demonstrates, integration can produce far better achievement gains than pouring extra funds into high-poverty schools. And, the total public and private return on investment in socioeconomic integration appears to greatly exceed the costs.

When compared with other countries, school spending in the United States does not appear cost-effective, yet little attention has been paid to the question of whether our relatively high rates of economic school segregation play a role in this problem. Recently, one researcher completed what I believe is the only rigorous cost-benefit analysis of economic school integration.²²

Because most economic segregation occurs between districts rather than within them, the study estimates the costs and benefits of a model in which two-way, interdistrict, public school choice programs are enacted. And because of the political obstacles to integration under old-style compulsory busing plans, it examines the costs of two types of incentives for middle-class families to participate voluntarily in integration: the creation of magnet schools (which adopt special themes or pedagogical approaches) to attract middle-class students to disadvantaged areas by choice, and financial incentives to entice more-affluent schools to accept low-income transfer students voluntarily.

Rather than examining the effects of complete socioeconomic integration (which is probably unachievable), the study looks at the effect of reducing socioeconomic segregation by one-half nationally—a level of integration enjoyed in many individual communities already. In order to cut economic segregation in half, roughly one-fourth of low-income students would need to transfer to more-affluent schools while roughly one-fourth of more-affluent students would need to transfer to newly created magnet schools located in more-disadvantaged neighborhoods.

The study estimates the costs of creating magnet programs with special themes and pedagogical approaches (including transportation costs, special teacher training, and additional equipment) at roughly 10 percent greater than the costs of regular public school education. Likewise, it estimates the cost of creating financial incentives to “magnetize” low-income students in order to make transfers attractive to middle-class schools at a 10 percent premium overall. (This funding premium is far more generous than several existing metropolitan interdistrict integration programs in places such as Boston and Hartford, Connecticut.) Averaged out over all pupils, the per-pupil net present value of total costs over seven years

of integrated schooling is estimated to be \$6,340.

In measuring the benefits, the study examines the effects on high school graduation rates (as opposed, say, to academic achievement) because there is a broad consensus among researchers about the economic benefits of graduating. The net lifetime public benefit of having a student graduate high school is estimated at \$209,200 (in constant dollars), coming in the form of increased tax revenue due to greater earnings, as well as decreased health care spending, criminal justice system costs, and spending on welfare.

Averaged out over all students, the public benefit per student is more than \$20,000, and the combined public and private benefits amount to about \$33,000 per student, far exceeding the cost of \$6,340 per student. Put differently, the public return on investment in socioeconomic integration exceeds costs by a factor of

3.3 and the total return (public and private) exceeds costs by a factor of 5.2. These returns exceed almost all other investments in education, including private school vouchers, reduced class size, and improvements in teacher quality. The only educational intervention known to have a greater return on investment is very high-quality early childhood education.

While these returns are quite good, they probably undervalue the full benefits of socioeconomic integration for a number of reasons. The study uses a conservative estimate of the impact of socioeconomic integration on

high school graduation rates; individual districts such as St. Louis and Hartford have seen larger rises in graduation than the 10-percentage-point increase it relies upon. It employs conservative estimates of the economic benefits of high school graduation. It estimates only the benefits that magnet schools bring because of socioeconomic integration, excluding potential ancillary benefits from providing a closer fit between student interests and curriculum. It does not count the civic benefits to our democracy of having more highly educated citizens, nor the benefits to the children of high school graduates in the form of improved life chances. And it does not count the benefits to the workplace of having employees who know how to get along with workers of different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds.

In sum, rather than representing a diversion of funds to “busing” or transportation, spending that reduces socioeconomic school segregation appears to be among the wisest possible investments in all of education.

Districts' Experiences

In addition to the growing research, the other thing I've found heartening over the years is the growth in socioeconomic integration at the local level. While socioeconomic school integration has made few inroads on the federal level, one of the greater advantages of our decentralized system of schooling is that individual states and districts can experiment with research-based



ideas, whether or not they are in fashion with Washington movers and shakers.

The Growth of Local Socioeconomic Integration Plans

In 1999, I gave a talk on socioeconomic school segregation, citing the wide body of research on its effects, and *Washington Post* reporter David Broder asked me where socioeconomic integration was being pursued. At that time, I could only point to La Crosse, a district with fewer than 8,000 students. Today, however, there are 80 districts using socioeconomic status as a factor in student assignment, educating some 4 million students. The districts are large (Chicago) and small (Burlington, Vermont); northeastern (Amherst, Massachusetts), southern (Jefferson County, Kentucky), western (San Diego), and midwestern (Omaha, Nebraska). Districts measure socioeconomic status by looking at a student's eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, or by examining census data, including such factors as parental education, single-parent household status, and income.

Four forces appear to be driving the socioeconomic integration movement. First, as a matter of law, integrating by socioeconomic status offers substantial advantages over integrating by race.²³ After the Supreme Court struck down racial integration plans in Seattle and Louisville, many districts seeking to preserve racial diversity turned to socioeconomic plans to achieve diversity without using race per se, given the overlap between race and class in our society.

Second, districts, under increasing pressure to raise the achievement of low-income and minority students, are beginning to heed the growing evidence suggesting that one of the most effective ways to do so is to give low-income and working-class students a chance to attend predominantly middle-class schools. Although the media shower tremendous attention on high-poverty public schools and charter schools that have positive results, district leaders know that it is extremely difficult to make high-poverty schools work on a systemwide, long-term basis.

Third, in an era of tight budgets, some school districts appear to be attracted to socioeconomic integration as a more cost-effective means of raising student achievement than pouring additional dollars into high-poverty schools. In North Carolina, for example, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has sought to raise achievement through an innovative pre-K program and extra expenditures in high-poverty schools; by contrast, Wake County has sought to raise achievement through socioeconomic integration. Both had measures of success, but according to a recent study, Wake County's integration approach was more cost-effective.²⁴

Fourth, the problem of concentrated poverty is growing, and the districts grappling with the issue are no longer just those in urban areas. According to the US Department of Education, 50 percent of elementary school students now attend schools in

which the majority of students are low income; between 2000 and 2010, the proportion of majority low-income schools grew by almost 60 percent (from about 29 percent to about 45 percent, with the numbers being estimates because 7 to 15 percent of schools did not provide data).²⁵ A 2010 report, *The Suburbanization of Poverty*, found that in the nation's largest metropolitan areas, more poor people live in large suburbs than in their primary cities, meaning poor pockets are now more prevalent in the suburbs than in the past.²⁶

Socioeconomic integration is being applied very broadly—in suburban areas that once had little poverty and even in urban areas that are overwhelmingly poor. In 2008, I received a call from educators in Chicago who were interested in constructing a socioeconomic plan. How does one do so in a district that is 85 percent low income? The answer: try to integrate a subset of magnet and

selective enrollment schools where a critical mass of middle-class students are interested in attending. I worked with the district for more than a year to develop a plan that divided residential census tracts into four socioeconomic tiers and sought to ensure that desirable schools had economic diversity. The plan was adopted in November 2009 and is still in existence. When I told a colleague about my work with Chicago, the third-largest school district in the country, he responded, "We're not in La Crosse anymore, Toto."

The Politics of Socioeconomic Integration

Despite the growth of socioeconomic school integration plans at the local level, the consensus in Washington, DC, is that integration is politically toxic. Andrew Rotherham, writing in *Time* magazine in October 2010, for example, acknowledged the educational achievement benefits of socioeconomic school integration but questioned the political feasibility.²⁷ The column nicely captures the paradox of integration: there is a consensus on the part of educational researchers that allowing low-income students to attend middle-class schools raises academic achievement and also an unfortunate Washington political consensus that there is not much we can do to encourage the practice. But might that enduring political belief be outdated?

Rotherham wrote: "Parents who are paying the high property taxes that often accompany high-performing public schools are zealously protective of access to that amenity."

Of course, this argument violates the education reform movement's mantra: "it's about the kids, not the adults." Moreover, we've learned a great deal about how to integrate schools since compulsory busing in Boston circa 1976. Programs now rely not on mandates but on incentives to encourage voluntary integration: special magnet programs to lure middle-class students into schools in low-income areas, and financial incentives for schools in suburban districts to accept low-income transfer students. In

(Continued on page 10)

The only educational intervention known to have a greater return on investment than socioeconomic integration is very high-quality early childhood education.

High-Flying High-Poverty Schools

In discussing socioeconomic integration before audiences, I am frequently asked: What about high-poverty schools that do work? Don't they suggest that economic segregation isn't much of a problem after all?

High-poverty public schools that beat the odds paint a heartening story that often attracts considerable media attention. In 2000, the conservative Heritage Foundation published a report, titled *No Excuses*, meant to show that high-poverty schools can work well. The forward of the report proudly declared that the author "found not one or two ... [but] twenty-one high-performing, high-poverty schools." Unfortunately, these 21 schools were dwarfed by the 7,000 high-poverty schools identified by the US Department of Education as low performing.¹

Subsequently, the liberal Education Trust purported to find 3,592 high-poverty schools with test scores in the top one-third of their states.² The study was useful to the extent that it exposed as myth the idea that poor children cannot learn, but a follow-up study by an independent researcher found that Education Trust included in its total many flukes—schools that performed well in just one grade, or on just one test (math or reading), or in just one year.³ When schools had to perform well in more than one grade, more than one subject, and more than one year, the number of high performers was reduced from 15.6 percent of high-poverty schools to just 1.1 percent.

But wait, what about new charters like the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP)? KIPP, a chain of 125 schools educating more than 35,000 students in 20 states and the District of Columbia, is often cited as evidence that high-poverty public schools ought to be able to produce very positive results. The school program emphasizes "tough love": a longer school day and school year, more homework, and the explicit teaching of middle-class habits and norms. In his book on KIPP, the *Washington Post's* Jay Mathews says that test scores in KIPP have risen faster for more low-income students than anywhere else.⁴

Some point to KIPP as a segregation success story. Noting the high rates of achievement in KIPP schools, which have concentrated poverty, some conclude that poverty and economic segregation don't matter that much after all. At their most hyperbolic, charter enthusiasts like Davis Guggenheim, director of *Waiting for*

"Superman," point to KIPP and conclude, "we've cracked the code."⁵ One charter school advocate pointedly asked me in private conversation if I found the success of KIPP "threatening" to my argument that economic segregation needs to be addressed.

In fact, KIPP was initially puzzling to me because, on the surface, it appeared to contradict all the research I'd read on the effects of concentrated poverty. So I began to dig deeper. What I found after some

The KIPP model, which relies heavily on self-selection and attrition, reinforces the idea that the peer environment may matter a great deal.

exploration was that KIPP's success hardly means that segregation doesn't matter; indeed, the KIPP model (which relies heavily on self-selection and attrition) reinforces the idea that the peer environment may matter a great deal. While KIPP's results are very impressive, they hardly suggest that regular public schools can ignore concentrations of poverty.

To begin with, KIPP does not educate the typical low-income student, but rather a subset fortunate enough to have striving parents. KIPP parents not only must know about KIPP schools and take the initiative to apply, they also are required to sign a contract that is unlike those found in most public schools. According to Mathews, KIPP parents and guardians sign a commitment to "check our child's homework every night ... and try to read with him/her every night." It is unclear whether KIPP can enforce this contract, but its mere presence may serve to screen out families unwilling or unable to make the commitment.⁶ Some evidence also suggests that KIPP educates a disproportionate share of girls.⁷

More importantly, KIPP schools have very high rates of attrition and rarely replace those who leave middle school with new seventh- and eighth-graders. In a rigorous 2008 study of five KIPP schools in the San Francisco Bay Area, researchers found that

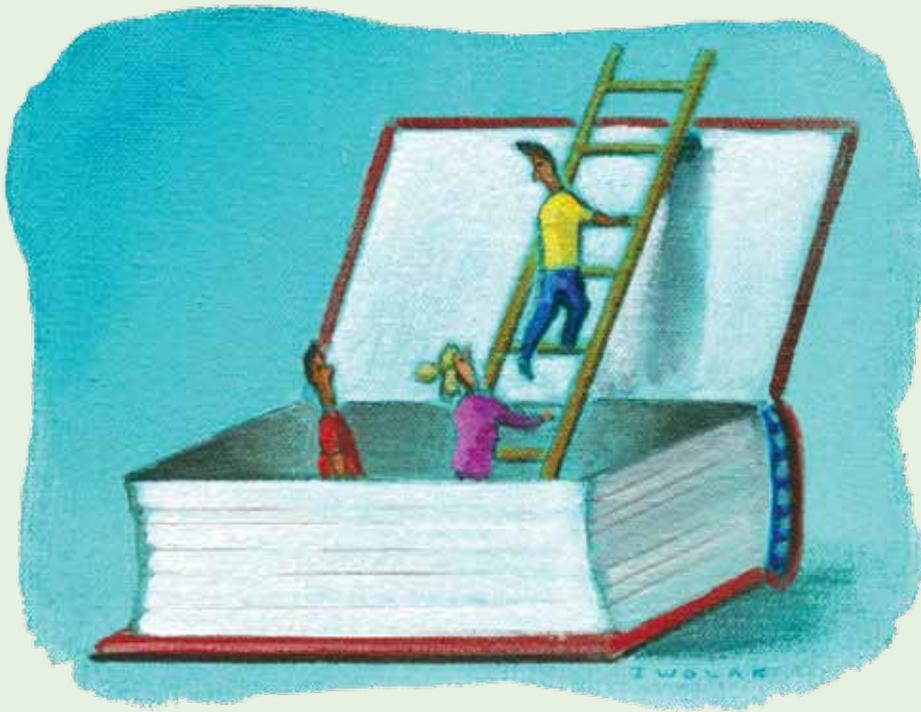
an astounding 60 percent of KIPP students left over the course of middle school. Moreover, the researchers found evidence that the 60 percent of students who did not persist through the tough KIPP regimen (a longer school day and week, and heavy doses of homework) tended to be the weaker students.⁸

KIPP supporters respond that a 2010 study of 22 KIPP schools found that the attrition rates were comparable to nearby high-poverty public schools that also have

lots of kids leave.⁹ Poor people tend to move frequently, so high attrition rates are to be expected at KIPP schools, it is argued. But researchers have found that 40 percent of African American male students leave KIPP schools between grades 6 and 8.¹⁰

Moreover, a key difference between KIPP and traditional high-poverty public schools is that in KIPP schools, when students leave, few new students enter in the seventh and eighth grades. An analysis found that while KIPP does accept many new students in sixth grade (a natural time of transition to middle school, and a time when KIPP is looking to fill seats from fifth-graders who are held back in larger numbers), the spigot is severely constricted for new entrants in seventh and eighth grades. While in comparison district schools, classes grew in seventh and eighth grades, at KIPP they shrunk. Comparison schools saw newcomers outnumber leavers, so replacement was 145 percent in seventh grade and 146 percent in eighth grade. By contrast, in KIPP schools, only 78 percent of leaving students were replaced in seventh grade, and just 60 percent in eighth grade.¹¹

The study of San Francisco-area KIPP schools illustrates how the combination of attrition and low replacement rates combine to make KIPP cohorts of students smaller and smaller over time. It found a net



enrollment of 312 students in fifth grade, then an uptick of students who enter during the sixth grade (the customary time to enter middle school), bringing net enrollment to 319. But then the total number of KIPP students in seventh and eighth grades fell precipitously: 238 in seventh grade and 173 in eighth grade. The KIPP Bay Area schools cannot be dismissed as outliers on the KIPP attrition question: a 2008 review of several studies found high attrition rates at a number of other KIPP schools.¹²

Having few new entering students is an enormous advantage, not only because low-scoring transfer students are kept out, but also because in the later grades, KIPP students are surrounded by other self-selected peers who have successfully survived what is universally acknowledged to be a very rigorous and demanding program. In terms of peer values and norms, then, KIPP schools more closely resemble economically mixed schools than traditional high-poverty schools.

How important to KIPP's success are the positive peer influences that come from self-selection, high attrition, and low levels of replacement? While we cannot know for certain, it is telling that on the one occasion when KIPP took over a regular high-poverty public school—and came close to having to serve a regular, rather than self-selected, student population, with new students entering when they moved into the area—KIPP failed and got out of the business.

Jay Mathews, a strong supporter of KIPP, wrote in 2009: "KIPP's one attempt to turnaround an existing public school, in

Denver, was a failure. KIPP said at the time they could not find a school leader up to the challenge, which is another way of admitting such a job may be beyond mere mortals."¹³

Another important difference between KIPP and regular high-poverty public schools is the teachers. The dedication of KIPP teachers is legendary—they work at school from 7:15 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and then go home to plan for the next day, as they take phone calls to help students with homework—but a KIPP-style existence is hard to sustain.¹⁴ Indeed, the study of five San Francisco-area KIPP schools found that nearly half (49 percent) of teachers who taught in the 2006–2007 school year had left before the beginning of the 2007–2008 school year. This compares with a 20 percent turnover rate in high-poverty schools generally.¹⁵ Moreover, as KIPP's reputation grew, it could select among prospective teachers who wished to be part of an exciting program and be surrounded by high-performing colleagues, an applicant pool not typical of high-poverty public schools.

KIPP schools are not funded at levels typical of high-poverty public schools either. KIPP has won the backing of some of the richest individuals in the country; they have helped fund the program at levels more likely to be found in middle-class schools than high-poverty public schools.¹⁶ With at least \$50–\$60 million in funding from the founders of Gap Inc., KIPP says it spends \$1,100–\$1,500 more per pupil than do regular public schools.¹⁷ In 2011, researchers who examined IRS documents

concluded that KIPP schools had revenue of \$18,491 per pupil, about \$6,500 more than what local school districts received in revenues.¹⁸

In terms of KIPP's long-term success, the jury is still out. KIPP's predominantly low-income students do very well compared with other low-income students nationally, which is an important accomplishment, but the effects of poverty remain, as two-thirds of the KIPP students who graduated from eighth grade 10 or more years ago haven't earned a bachelor's degree—a level of failure one of KIPP's founders, Mike Feinberg, called unacceptable given the group's goal of 75 percent college completion.¹⁹

Finally, while many educators stand in awe of the impressive efforts of KIPP to make high-poverty schools work, the fact is that the vast majority of high-poverty charters fail. While, in theory, charter schools, as schools of choice, could be more socioeconomically integrated than traditional public schools, in fact, they are more segregated. In the 2007–2008 school year, 54 percent of charter school students were in high-poverty schools, compared with 39 percent of public school students. Meanwhile, 28 percent of charter school students were in extremely high-poverty schools (more than 75 percent low income), compared with 16 percent of regular public school students.²⁰ The high-poverty model has not been met with success at a national level. The most comprehensive study of charter schools completed to date found that only 17 percent of charter schools outperformed comparable traditional public schools in math, while 46 percent performed the same, and 37 percent performed worse.²¹

—R.D.K.

Endnotes

1. Samuel Casey Carter, *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools* (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 2000), 2; and Kenneth Cooper, "School Defies Its Demographics," *Washington Post*, June 7, 2000, A3 (on 7,000 low-performing, high-poverty schools).
2. Craig Jerald, *Dispelling the Myth Revisited: Preliminary Findings from a Nationwide Analysis of "High-Flying" Schools* (Washington, DC: Education Trust, 2001). See also Douglas N. Harris, *Ending the Blame Game on Educational Inequity: A Study of "High Flying" Schools and NCLB* (Tempe, AZ: Education Policy Research Unit, Arizona State University, March 2006), 5.
3. Harris, *Ending the Blame Game on Educational Inequity*, 20.
4. Jay Mathews, *Work Hard. Be Nice.: How Two Inspired Teachers Created the Most Promising Schools in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2009), 2.
5. Dom Giordano, "Education's 'Inconvenient Truth'?" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 21, 2010.
6. Mathews, *Work Hard*, 89. Some research also finds that KIPP students begin school at more advanced levels than is typical of neighborhood peers; Martin Carnoy, Rebecca

(Continued on page 40)

(Continued from page 7)

Cambridge, Massachusetts, for example, all schools have been designated magnet schools, each with something distinctive to offer. Parents rank their preferences among schools, and the district honors choices in a way that ensures all schools are within plus or minus 10 percentage points of the system's average eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch.

The most sophisticated plans poll parents ahead of time, asking them what sort of themes or pedagogical approaches would attract them to attend a school farther away. In Hartford, for example, I visited a wonderful Montessori school, located in a tough neighborhood with boarded-up houses nearby, that has a long waiting list of white, middle-class suburban families because the school at the end of the bus ride is attractive to them.

In addition, the “neighborhood school” does not have the same resonance it had three decades ago. Although Americans are divided on private school vouchers, they overwhelmingly support giving greater choice and options to students within the public school system.²⁸ The share of families choosing a non-neighborhood public school increased by 45 percent between 1993 and 2007.²⁹ Choice almost always requires transportation, but the old ideal of the child who walks or bikes to school is pretty much a thing of the past anyway, as only 13 percent do so today, compared with nearly half in 1969.³⁰

Finally, a growing share of Americans now recognize that diversity is a good thing for all students. Many families now believe—as do virtually all leading colleges and universities—that racial, ethnic, and income diversity enriches the classroom discussion and that students cannot learn how to live in a multicultural society in a segregated white school.

Nevertheless, the politics of integration can be tough.

I've traveled to Wake County on numerous occasions over the last decade. It's a flash point for the socioeconomic integration movement, demonstrating both the political challenges and how they can be overcome.³¹ The Wake County district, which encompasses the city of Raleigh and the surrounding suburban areas, has received a great deal of media attention in recent years for the political controversy surrounding its socioeconomic integration plan. The 18th-largest school district nationally, Wake is the largest district in North Carolina, with more than 140,000 students. The 800-square-mile district was created in 1976 by the merger of the Raleigh and suburban Wake school districts. The district's student population is 49 percent white, 25 percent African American, 15 percent Latino, and 6 percent Asian, with 33 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.³²

In the early 1980s, Wake County adopted a voluntary racial integration plan with the goal that all schools should be between 15 and 45 percent black. In order to achieve integration largely through choice, almost all of the Raleigh schools were turned into magnets. In 2000, given legal concerns about the use of race, and a sense

among school researchers that poverty concentrations were of great educational concern, Wake County shifted to a socioeconomic diversity plan, with a goal that no school should have a student population that is more than 40 percent low income.

For many years, academic achievement rose, the program drew wide support, and pro-integration candidates continued to be elected to the school board. But over time, Wake County became, in a sense, the victim of its own success. In part because the schools were highly regarded, Wake County's business climate thrived, new families moved to the area, and large numbers of students were added each year. In order to accommodate skyrocketing growth, increasing numbers of students were reassigned to fill new schools, generating anger among parents. Moreover, increasing numbers

of families relocated from other areas of the country, and the newcomers did not fully understand the county's history of integration and its importance as an educational strategy.

At the same time, the booming economy attracted a large influx of Latino families, many of them low income. A relatively small presence in 2000, Latinos made up nearly one in six students by 2010, creating a new challenge to maintaining the 40 percent low-income cap in any given school. Parental anger at the school district peaked when exploding

growth led some families to have their children mandatorily assigned to schools with a staggered year-round calendar (rather than a traditional schedule with summers off) in order to make better use of building capacity.

In October 2009, with an influx of funding from conservative interests, including the tea party and the Koch brothers, opponents of the socioeconomic integration plan gained a 5-4 majority on the school board and vowed to establish a system of neighborhood schools.³³ The majority did succeed in officially eliminating the 40 percent low-income cap for schools, but it ran into major community resistance in efforts to establish a system of de facto segregated neighborhood schools.

Resistance to resegregation came from an interesting coalition of civil rights groups and teachers on the one hand, and white magnet school parents and business leaders on the other. Furthermore, critical centrist voters became disillusioned with the conservative school board majority following a series of events, which I'll briefly review.

Let's begin with the resignation of superintendent Del Burns, a deeply principled man I've come to know well. Burns said that he could not, in good conscience, play a part in resegregating Wake County schools. Then, when the school board moved to immediately reassign a small number of low-income and minority students, the NAACP filed a complaint with the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. An accreditation agency also began reviewing Wake County's status.

Civil rights groups, including the NAACP, organized protests at board meetings, which drew national attention, including a front

Many families now believe—as do virtually all leading colleges and universities—that racial, ethnic, and income diversity enriches the classroom.

page *Washington Post* story highlighting the turmoil. Television comedian Stephen Colbert ridiculed Wake County's board, suggesting, "What's the use of living in a gated community if my kids go to school and get poor all over them?" By 2011, a survey of local residents found that 51 percent viewed the school board unfavorably, compared with just 29 percent who viewed it favorably.

The Chamber of Commerce, which supported integration as a way of strengthening schools and preparing employees to work with a diverse set of colleagues, commissioned a plan, released in February 2011, to use public school choice to accommodate growth and also produce diversity. The plan tweaked the earlier socioeconomic goal to employ diversity measured by academic achievement, a very close cousin of socioeconomic status. It was clear that business leaders did not appreciate national publicity suggesting that a world-class community was planning to consciously resegregate its schools.

In the fall 2011 school board elections, Democrats swept into office, ousting the Republican school board chair who had led the effort for neighborhood schools. As of this writing, the Wake County situation is still in flux, but it appears that the school district is likely to embrace a third way. Eschewing both a continuation of integration by mandatory assignment and proposals to resegregate through neighborhood

schools, policymakers appear ready to pursue the hybrid: integration by socioeconomic status with some element of school choice.

Jefferson County (Louisville) provides an interesting contrast with Wake County. A coalition of civil rights groups, teachers, and the business community organized early to support integration and, thus far, avoid a conservative school board takeover.

Like Wake County schools, the Jefferson County schools (which educate 100,000 students, 36 percent of whom are black, 51 percent white, and 60 percent low income) were created by a merger of city and suburban schools in the mid-1970s. After a period of court-ordered mandatory busing for racial desegregation, Jefferson County schools adopted a plan, in the mid-1990s, using magnet schools to create racial integration, with the goal that all schools should be between 15 and 50 percent black. In 2002, white parents sued, charging that the use of race in student assignment violated the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, and in 2007, the US Supreme Court agreed.

Jefferson County leaders did not give up on integration, however, and in 2008, the county adopted a new plan that emphasizes SES, along with race, in student assignment. Instead of looking at each student's race or SES, the county's plan looks at the geographic areas in which students live and labels them as either Area A (having below-average income and education levels, and above-average minority population) or Area B (the converse). In the plan, students choose the schools they want to attend, and

county officials honor choices with an eye to having Area A students constitute between 15 and 50 percent of the student body.

In the 2010 school board elections, supporters of diversity feared they might face the same upheaval that Wake County felt in its 2009 elections, but in fact, a pro-integration school board majority remained in power. How was Jefferson County able to avoid most of the political turmoil associated with the Wake County plan? It appears that teachers and the business community, cognizant of what had happened in Wake County, aggressively supported pro-diversity candidates with strong financial contributions. By emphasizing the choice mechanism, Jefferson County also avoided the large-scale redistricting that so angered

many Wake County parents. According to a recent district survey, 80 percent of parents in Jefferson County favor retaining a diversity component in the student assignment plan.

Looking broadly at the experiences in Wake County and Jefferson County, three lessons emerge about how to make socioeconomic integration politically sustainable. First, public school choice is a far more popular way to promote integration than compulsory assignment. Choice gives parents a feeling of "ownership," and magnet school offerings provide students with special themes or pedagogical approaches to match their particular interests. As illustrated in Wake County, choice can also provide a much better way to accommodate rapid

growth in student populations because schools can be filled through election rather than reassignment.

Choice and incentives can also make interdistrict integration more politically palatable. Strong financial incentives could encourage middle-class schools to accept more low-income transfers. Just as the right kind of magnet themes or pedagogical approaches have successfully drawn affluent students into schools in tougher neighborhoods, programs that "magnetize" low-income students can overcome opposition to interdistrict choice.

Second, constant communication on the part of school officials and community groups regarding the rationale for integration policies is critical, particularly in communities such as Wake County, which have seen large increases in new families. To be effective, civil rights groups should build strong alliances with other groups that support integration, including the business community, teachers, and magnet school parents. Teachers, who know firsthand that they can do a better job in economically integrated schools than in those with overwhelming concentrations of poverty, have been at the forefront of battles to integrate schools by economic status in such communities as La Crosse, Louisville, and Wake County.

Third, national leadership matters. Support from US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and even the comedian Stephen Colbert, may have helped make a difference in turning the Wake



County public against a school board seeking to resegment the public schools.

Logistical Obstacles

In addition to raising overblown political worries, Washington pundits often raise logistical concerns about connecting low-income students with middle-class schools. In his *Time* magazine piece, for example, Rotherham claimed that there is too much distance between low-income students and middle-class schools to make school integration feasible, citing a 2008 study suggesting that, at most, 20 percent of students could transfer from struggling urban schools to better-performing suburban ones within a 20-minute driving distance.³⁴ But long-standing experience suggests that low-income students in cities such as Boston, Hartford, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis are willing to endure longer bus rides if what's at the end of the ride is a superior education. Indeed, some of these programs have lengthy waiting lists of students, whose families sign up when the children are born.³⁵

And new research concludes that class segregation is not an “immutable reality,” as some suggest. What appears to be the first national estimate of the viability of socioeconomic school integration finds that “dramatic reductions in the number of high-poverty schools across the United States are within reach.”³⁶ (In this study, high-poverty schools are defined as those in which at least 50 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.)

The study draws upon the National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core of Data from 2007–2008 in 46 states, and it focuses on students in public elementary schools because subsidized lunch eligibility data at that level are thought to be more reliable than in middle and high schools, where students may avoid the program because they feel stigmatized when receiving free or reduced-price meals. It concludes that the potential for reducing the number of low-income schools through intradistrict solutions is relatively modest* in most states—but the potential of interdistrict programs is significant.

To examine the potential impact of interdistrict integration plans, the authors examine six sample states: Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, and Virginia. In modeling the effects, they assume, rather conservatively, that transfers would only be made to contiguous school districts. (In fact, many existing interdistrict integration plans, such as the Boston METCO program, involve students traveling farther distances to noncontiguous suburban districts.)

They conclude that the benefits of interdistrict programs range widely, from reducing the number of high-poverty schools by 7

percent in Florida to 52 percent in Nebraska. Virginia could see a 36 percent reduction, Colorado and Massachusetts could each see a 34 percent reduction, and Missouri a 17 percent reduction. Taking intra- and interdistrict strategies together could result in substantial reductions of high-poverty schools in five of these six states. While Florida would see a relatively modest 13 percent reduction, two states would see a reduction of more than one-third (37 percent each in Missouri and Massachusetts), and three states would see a reduction of more than one-half (52 percent in Colorado, 58 percent in Nebraska, and 60 percent in Virginia).

In sum, the authors conclude, a great deal could be done to reduce the proportion of high-poverty public elementary schools in the United States, especially if we pursued interdistrict socioeconomic integration strategies.



Tracking Issues and Student Success

Finally, Washington critics raise questions about whether tracking within schools will undercut integration's positive benefits. Rotherham, for example, argues that even though low-income students generally do better in more affluent schools, these schools are not “consistently effective at educating low-income students.” Pointing to gaps in achievement between different demographic groups within affluent schools, he notes, “students can be segregated within schools as well as from them.” This is a very legitimate concern, and steps need to be

taken to ensure that integrated school

buildings are not resegmented by classroom. But it's important to note that the study of Montgomery County found that low-income students assigned to low-poverty schools generally were tracked into lower reading and math groups and *still* performed substantially higher in math than low-income students assigned to higher-poverty schools with lots of extra educational programs.

Indeed, part of what keeps districts like Wake, Cambridge, and La Crosse going is the successful results for students. One professor known for doing in-depth studies of urban schools wrote that Wake County “reduced the gap between rich and poor, black and white, more than any other large urban educational system in America.”³⁷ Indeed, research shows that over the years, Wake County's low-income, minority, and white students have generally outperformed comparable students in other large North Carolina districts that do not break up concentrations of poverty. La Crosse has also had favorable results. And in Cambridge, the graduation rates of low-income and minority students exceed those of comparable students in Boston and statewide in Massachusetts, as the figure on page 13 indicates.

Fighting the Battles in Washington, DC

Although socioeconomic integration is being pursued in an increasing number of districts, it has failed to make inroads in federal policy, so I've tried to connect the concept to key ideas

*Overall, states could reduce the number of high-poverty schools by 15 percent with intradistrict strategies, benefiting 1.5 million students.

that are being promoted by the Obama administration, such as school turnarounds and charter schools.

Magnets as School Turnarounds

One of the signature initiatives of Education Secretary Arne Duncan is the ambitious effort to turn around America's lowest-performing schools. Duncan noted that for years districts allowed failing schools to slide and has called, instead, for "far-reaching reforms" that fundamentally change the culture in the country's worst 5,000 schools.³⁸ Ironically, Duncan's approach, which focused almost entirely on changing the faculty and school governance, was itself too timid.

Duncan has written that in Chicago, "we moved the adults out of the building, kept the children there, and brought in new adults."³⁹ But the exclusive focus on changing the principal and teachers is questionable, given that teachers and administrators in impoverished schools generally lack adequate support and resources. It also misses two-thirds of the larger school community—which includes students and parents as well. This partial turnaround approach in Chicago was met with "mixed" results.⁴⁰ The Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago noted in a 2009 report that "most students in the Chicago Public Schools continue to fail."⁴¹

At bottom, the central flaw with Duncan's move-the-adults strategy is that it unnecessarily treats socioeconomic segregation as acceptable, thereby condemning children to very difficult learning environments. In high-poverty schools, a child is surrounded by classmates who are less likely to have big dreams and, accordingly, are less academically engaged and more likely to act out and cut class. Classmates in high-poverty schools are more likely to move during the school year, creating disruption in the classroom, and less likely to have large vocabularies, which in turn limits the ability of peers on the playground and in the classroom to learn new words.

Parents are also an important part of a school community. Students benefit when parents regularly volunteer in the classroom and know how to hold school officials accountable when things go wrong. Low-income parents, who may be working several jobs, may not own a car, and may have had bad experiences themselves as students, are four times less likely to be members of a PTA and only half as likely to volunteer.⁴²

The student and parent makeup of a school, in turn, profoundly affects the type of teachers who can be recruited. Polls consistently find that teachers care more about "work environment" than they do

about salary. They care about school safety, whether they will have to spend large portions of their time on classroom management, and whether parents will make sure kids do their homework. That is why it is so difficult to attract and keep great teachers in high-poverty schools, even when bonuses are offered.

In 2009, I wrote a report arguing that the most promising "turn-around" model is one that recognizes these realities and seeks to turn high-poverty schools into magnet schools that change not only the faculty (if needed) but also the student and parent mix in the school.⁴³ Failing schools can be shuttered and reopened with new themes and pedagogical approaches that attract new teachers and a mix of middle-class and low-income students. Meanwhile, some low-income students from the old school can be given the opportunity to fill the spots vacated by higher-income children who had been attending more-affluent schools.

The Obama administration has never endorsed this idea, sticking to the vain hope that firing teachers and bringing in nonunion charters will solve our problems. However, the idea did catch the attention of staff for Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee chairman Tom Harkin, who asked me to brief them on the policy. In October 2011, the bipartisan HELP Committee's proposal for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act included magnet schools as a turnaround school option.⁴⁴

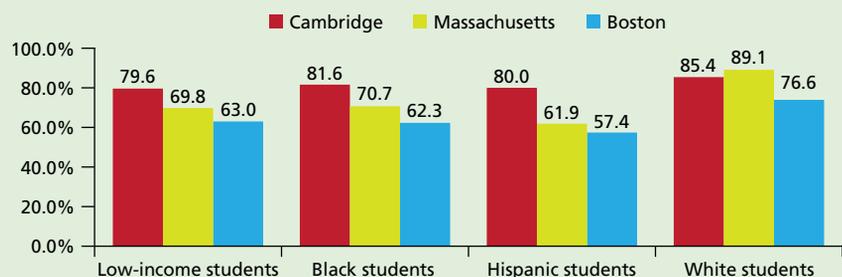
In high-poverty schools, a child is surrounded by classmates who are more likely to act out, more likely to move during the school year, and less likely to have large vocabularies.

Integrated Charter Schools

Likewise, my colleagues and I at the Century Foundation have tried to interject the principle of socioeconomic integration into the charter school debate. As schools of choice, charters have the potential to be more economically integrated than regular public schools, but they are in fact more segregated, as funders and policymakers have prioritized high-poverty "no excuses" charter schools like KIPP. (See "High-Flying High-Poverty Schools" on page 8.)

Still, I'm heartened that an emerging subset of charter schools

Cambridge Compares Favorably with Massachusetts and Boston on Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates



SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION, COHORT 2011 FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE REPORT, [HTTP://PROFILES.DOE.MASS.EDU/STATE_REPORT/GRADRATES.ASPX](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/gradrates.aspx). 2012 DATA WERE NOT AVAILABLE AS OF PRESS TIME.

are consciously seeking a socioeconomic mix by locating in economically integrated neighborhoods, drawing students from multiple school districts, or employing weighted student lotteries.⁴⁵

The pursuit of socioeconomic integration policies remains a seesaw for me. As I was writing this piece, UC Berkeley professor David Kirp wrote a very strong lead article in the *New York Times* Sunday Review section, citing impressive evidence about the positive benefits of racially integrated schools. He noted that even the grandchildren of those who escaped segregated schools performed better, but then, stuck in the old race-based paradigm, concluded, “the hostile majority on the Supreme Court and the absence of a vocal pro-integration constituency make integration’s revival a near impossibility.”⁴⁶ Omitted was any reference to the legally viable socioeconomic integration movement or the teachers, business leaders, and civil rights groups that have helped enact these policies across the country.

At the same time, there are signs of progress. At a May 2012 conference of civil rights activists, school officials, and policymakers commemorating the 58th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, participants continually cited Wake County’s courageous and effective socioeconomic integration plan. And every once and a while, an unlikely ally emerges. After Kirp’s piece ran, I participated in a *New York Times* “Room for Debate” forum, urging socioeconomic integration, and I was startled to see Michelle Rhee, too, endorse socioeconomic integration, citing plans in La Crosse and Cambridge. She wrote: “Research shows socioeconomic integration clearly benefits low-income kids. It benefits wealthier students as well; people educated in diverse schools say as adults they work better with people who are demographically different from them.”⁴⁷

I’ve been highly critical of Rhee’s attack on teachers’ unions in venues like *Slate* and the *Washington Post*.⁴⁸ I don’t expect her to give up her fixation on unions, but I do hope to help convince others of a fundamental but too-often-ignored truth: the major problem with American schools is not teachers or their unions, but poverty and economic segregation. That’s what the research suggests. It’s what 80 school districts have come to realize. And, until federal officials catch up, it’s what I will continue to push them to acknowledge. □

Endnotes

1. Horace Mann, “First Annual Report (1837),” in *The Republic and the School: Horace Mann on the Education of Free Men*, ed. Lawrence Cremin (New York: Teachers College Press, 1957), 23–24, 31–32.
2. James S. Coleman et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, DC: US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, 1966), 22.
3. Gary Orfield, *Must We Bus? Segregated Schools and National Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1978), 69. See also Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, *Why Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality* (Cambridge, MA: Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, January 2005), 8–9.
4. Holly Holland, “Schools Worried by Clusters of Poverty,” *Louisville Courier Journal*,

December 11, 1993.

5. Richard D. Kahlenberg, “Turnaround Schools and Charter Schools That Work: Moving Beyond Separate but Equal,” in *The Future of School Integration: Socioeconomic Diversity as an Education Reform Strategy*, ed. Richard D. Kahlenberg (New York: Century Foundation, 2012), 283–308.
6. Richard D. Kahlenberg, *Rescuing Brown v. Board of Education: Profiles of Twelve School Districts Pursuing Socioeconomic School Integration* (New York: Century Foundation, 2007).
7. Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 231.
8. Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1, 551 U.S. 701 (2007).
9. Roslyn Arlin Mickelson and Martha Bottia, “Integrated Education and Mathematics Outcomes: A Synthesis of Social Science Research,” *North Carolina Law Review* 88, no. 3 (2010): 993–1089, 1043.
10. Russell W. Rumberger and Gregory J. Palardy, “Does Segregation Still Matter? The Impact of Student Composition on Academic Achievement in High School,” *Teachers College Record* 107, no. 9 (2005): 1999–2045.
11. Laura B. Perry and Andrew McConney, “Does the SES of the School Matter? An Examination of Socioeconomic Status and Student Achievement Using PISA 2003,” *Teachers College Record* 112, no. 4 (2010): 1137–1162.
12. J. Douglas Willms, “School Composition and Contextual Effects on Student Outcomes,” *Teachers College Record* 112, no. 4 (2010): 1008–1038.
13. Douglas N. Harris, *Lost Learning, Forgotten Promises: A National Analysis of School Racial Segregation, Student Achievement, and “Controlled Choice” Plans* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, November 24, 2006), 14, 18, 22.
14. Geoffrey Borman and Maritza Dowling, “Schools and Inequality: A Multilevel Analysis of Coleman’s Equality of Educational Opportunity Data,” *Teachers College Record* 112, no. 5 (2010): 1201–1246.
15. Ann Mantil, Anne G. Perkins, and Stephanie Aberger, “The Challenge of High-Poverty Schools: How Feasible Is Socioeconomic School Integration?” in *The Future of School Integration*, ed. Kahlenberg, 155–222.
16. Heather Schwartz, *Housing Policy Is School Policy: Economically Integrative Housing Promotes Academic Success in Montgomery County, Maryland* (New York: Century Foundation, 2010).
17. Stacey M. Childress, Denis P. Doyle, and David A. Thomas, *Leading for Equity: The Pursuit of Excellence in Montgomery County Public Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2009), 3.
18. See Lisa Sanbonmatsu, Jeffrey R. Kling, Greg J. Duncan, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, *Neighborhoods and Academic Achievement: Results from the Moving to Opportunity Experiment*, NBER Working Paper 11909 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, January 2006), 18, and 45, Table 2; and Alexander Polikoff, *Waiting for Gautreaux: A Story of Segregation, Housing, and the Black Ghetto* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006).
19. Richard D. Kahlenberg, *All Together Now: Creating Middle-Class Schools through Public School Choice* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 37–42.
20. Robert Crain and Rita Mahard, *Desegregation and Black Achievement* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1977), 2. See also David Armor, *Forced Justice: School Desegregation and the Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
21. Kahlenberg, *All Together Now*, 37–42.
22. Marco Basile, “The Cost-Effectiveness of Socioeconomic School Integration,” in *The Future of School Integration*, ed. Kahlenberg, 127–151.
23. *Parents Involved in Community Schools*, 551 U.S. 701.
24. See Ulrich Boser, *Return on Educational Investment: A District-by-District Evaluation of U.S. Educational Productivity* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, January 2011).
25. Susan Aud, William Hussar, Frank Johnson, Grace Kena, Erin Roth, Eileen Manning, Xiaolei Wang, and Jijun Zhang, *The Condition of Education 2012* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), Tables A-12-1 and A-13-1, 170–172.
26. Elizabeth Kneebone and Emily Garr, *The Suburbanization of Poverty: Trends in Metropolitan America, 2000 to 2008* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, January 2010).
27. Andrew Rotherham, “Does Income-Based School Integration Work?” *Time*, October 28, 2010.
28. See, for example, Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, “The 39th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 89, no. 1 (September 2007): 42; and Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, “The 38th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 88, no. 1 (September 2006): 43.
29. Michael Planty, William Hussar, Thomas Snyder, Grace Kena, Angelina KewalRamani, Jana Kemp, Kevin Bianco, and Rachel Dinks, *The Condition of Education 2009* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009), 78, Indicator 32.
30. Jennifer Ludden, “What’s Lost When Kids Don’t Ride Bikes to School,” National Public Radio, May 2, 2012.

(Continued on page 40)

The Folly of the Big Idea

How a Liberal Arts Education Puts Fads in Perspective



BY DIANA SENECHAL

America was made by and for big ideas. Insofar as big ideas have shaped it, it is ever on the verge of hyperbole and dream. “America is a land of wonders,” wrote Alexis de Tocqueville, “in which everything is in constant motion, and every movement seems an improvement. The idea of novelty is there indissolubly connected with the idea of amelioration. No natural boundary seems to be set to the efforts

Diana Senechal teaches philosophy and Russian at Columbia Secondary School for Math, Science & Engineering in New York City. She is the 2011 recipient of the Hiatt Prize in the Humanities and the author of Republic of Noise: The Loss of Solitude in Schools and Culture. Her translations of the Lithuanian poetry of Tomas Venclova have been published in two books, Winter Dialogue and The Junction, as well as numerous literary journals. Her education writing has appeared in Education Week, The New Republic, Educational Leadership, American Educational History Journal, The Core Knowledge Blog, Joanne Jacobs, GothamSchools, and the Washington Post’s The Answer Sheet.

of man; and what is not yet done is only what he has not yet attempted to do.”¹ Our history abounds with vast spaces, ambitions, and concepts: the Declaration of Independence, the American West, Great Awakenings, Manifest Destiny, the silver screen, self-made millionaires, big business, superpower status, dreams of liberty, space exploration, Google, and more.

Of course, America isn’t only big; the supersize comes with a counterpart. The small town, the ordinary person, the town hall meeting, the Girl Scout helping others every day—all of this figures in the American psyche as well. We may even distrust big ideas at times. According to the satirist P. J. O’Rourke, “distaste for grandiose notions is embedded in our language”—for instance, in expressions like “What’s the big idea?”² What’s missing from much of our discourse is the discipline of building from basic axioms to larger principles and creations (and breaking the principles down into their elements). Just as it takes patience to learn to play an instrument or lead an athletic team to victory, so it takes diligence to develop an idea or structure that can last.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GIANNI DE CONINO

It is such structure that allows a document like the Declaration of Independence to endure in our daily life and understanding. The declaration contains much more than a grand idea; drawing on centuries of philosophy, and resounding from phrase to phrase, it progresses from axioms to facts to conclusions. It suggests through its language and logic that one must know and grapple with the past in order to transform the present. It thus stands in contrast to many of the big ideas of today.

Today's big ideas come with an air of celebrity and accessibility; they glitter with glamour but demand little of us. While they have many manifestations, we see them epitomized in TEDTalks. TED (which stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design), a nonprofit that offers two annual conferences of short lectures on innovative ideas, mixes extreme elitism with extreme accessibility. Tickets to the annual Long Beach event cost \$7,500 and

It seems too unglamorous to interpret ideas carefully and apply them where they belong. Yet this is the more rewarding practice.

upward, and are available by invitation or application only, yet the talks themselves may be viewed on the Internet by all, free of charge, and require minimal background knowledge. In a *New Yorker* article on TED, Nathan Heller writes, "By most measures, TED shapes its style against the mores of academia. Educational lectures are set at a podium; TED prizes theatrical movement. Academic work relies on communities of shared premises and interpretive habit; TED tries to communicate without those givens. Scholarship holds objectivity as a virtue; TED aims for the heart." Writing for *Salon*, Alex Pareene makes similar points with more of a sting: "What's most important is a sort of genial feel-good sense that everything will be OK, thanks in large part to the brilliance and beneficence of TED conference attendees. (Well, that and a bit of Vegas magician-with-PowerPoint stagecraft.)"³

The typical TEDTalk gives the impression that one need only feel and believe it to be part of it, like Peter Pan, whose wonderful thoughts allow him to fly. The TED viewer imagines himself an insider, capable of understanding the concepts because they excite him in the moment. Think big, dream big, he imagines, and he will *be* big too. Why, the lectures seem so simple, so relatable, they couldn't *not* be for him. Listen to Sir Ken Robinson and, aha, it's all clear! Our schools are locked in an industrial model, which stifles creativity and talent. Convert them to an agricultural model, and the possibilities will multiply. Listen to Salman Khan, and you learn that he plans to use his extensive instructional video library to "humanize" education on a "global scale." Listen to Susan Cain,

and you might come to believe that we are "poised on the brink of dramatic change" regarding introversion, quiet, and solitude. If we heed Cain's call to "open up" our "suitcases" and show what's inside them, we may all be able to grace the world with our gifts.⁴ In each case, the TEDTalk casts a complex problem in grand, uplifting, and unchallenging terms. While many individual TEDTalks have merit, the conference as a whole has become the biggest forum for today's biggest fad: bigness itself.

The fad resembles the historical phenomenon of "high modernism" as described by James C. Scott in *Seeing Like a State*: "a particularly sweeping vision of how the benefits of technical and scientific progress might be applied—usually through the state—in every field of human activity." According to Scott, while we have become distrustful of high modernism, it persists in various forms to this day.⁵ One could apply Scott's description to phenomena that do not originate in the state: for instance, grand ideas propagated by entrepreneurs and philanthropists.

Something like high modernism persists with a vengeance in education reform. Many reformers insist that reform must be sweeping and replicable in order to count as reform at all. That expectation creates a conundrum. In order to be sweeping, a reform must standardize its language and methods; in doing so, it loses touch with the particulars of subject matter, school, and classroom. Granted, sometimes there is a need for sweeping systemic change of one kind or another. But when an idea *must* sound big in order to gain traction, when policymakers and reformers equate the thoughtful, modest initiative with the dreaded "status quo," the ideas themselves get shortchanged.⁶

Take, for instance, the New York City Department of Education's "Children First" initiative, launched in 2003, which mandated the Balanced Literacy, Everyday Mathematics, and Impact Mathematics curricula throughout the school system (except for some 200 high-performing schools). Teachers, parents, and education commentators criticized these curricula for their amorphousness and lack of content, but to no avail. A year or so later, teachers received word through their administrators that they were all required to follow the "workshop model," a generalized version of the Readers' and Writers' Workshops of Balanced Literacy.⁷ Principals conducting observations expected teachers to follow the model; teacher preparation programs reinforced it. A few years later, the Department of Education began loosening the mandate but did not acknowledge openly that it had made a mistake, or several. The mistake lay not only in the choice of curricula (or quasi-curricula) but in the insistence on a single model for teaching. A teacher needs the latitude to plan lessons that suit the topic. A workshop model may be suitable for some topics but not for all.

Another example can be found in recent special education reform. Many school districts around the country have adopted Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework developed in a joint project of the Center for Applied Special Technology and the US Department of Education. UDL enables teachers to design curricula for diverse learners in advance, instead of on the fly. According to UDL, current curricula are not only deficient but "disabled"; UDL claims to address these disabilities by providing multiple means of "representation, expression, and engagement." For instance, a teacher using an equal sign in mathematics class should consider in advance the possibility that some students



don't know what it means and should therefore provide "alternative representations."⁸ While the intent of UDL is laudable, it errs in its wholesale disparagement of current curricula (some of which might be quite good) and in its insistence on multiple representations. (If students are having difficulty with the equal sign, they should learn to work with the equal sign itself, not with a substitute.) Nonetheless, UDL enjoys federal support—perhaps because it proposes drastic change and claims to improve outcomes for *all* students.

One could cite many more examples of big ideas in education—value-added assessment, differentiated instruction, discovery learning, small schools, online learning, and so forth—and find a similar pattern. Small schools have advantages (and disadvantages), but the size of a school is not in itself a predictor of its quality. Differentiated instruction has many meanings and manifestations and is not always appropriate for a lesson or course. Nonetheless, education reform sweeps up such concepts with enthusiasm, applies them broadly, and continues to champion them even when they start to founder. It seems too complicated, too unglamorous, to interpret ideas carefully and apply them where they belong. Yet this is the more rewarding practice.

How did the "big idea" mindset take over education reform? Its recent ascent is due, at least in part, to the weakening of the middle class and the gradual loss of a liberal principle of education. By the latter I mean a principle that honors the liberal arts: the study of a range of subjects not only for their uses, but for their beauty, their fascination, and their role in cultivating the mind.

Over the past few decades, the middle class has been losing many of the attributes that once defined it (if it even exists at this point). In September 2012, the US Census Bureau reported that 48.5 million people in the United States, or 15.9 percent of the population, lived below the official poverty line in 2011; according

to scholars, the middle quintile of the population, the "middle class," owned only about 4 percent of US wealth. Income disparities have widened to an extreme; while CEO compensation increased more than 725 percent between 1978 and 2011, worker pay increased only 5.7 percent. In addition, workers contend with job uncertainty. In 2009, there were 28,286 mass layoff events; while the mass layoff numbers have decreased since then, they remain considerably higher than they were in the 1990s. Moreover, whoever loses a job carries not only the burden of unemployment but also its stigma; employers routinely overlook applicants who are not employed.⁹ As workers devote energy to getting and keeping jobs, they lose not only the material aspects of middle-class existence, but some of its intellectual aspects as well. (The working class and middle class have never been identical—but as the latter shrinks, so does the overlap between the two.)

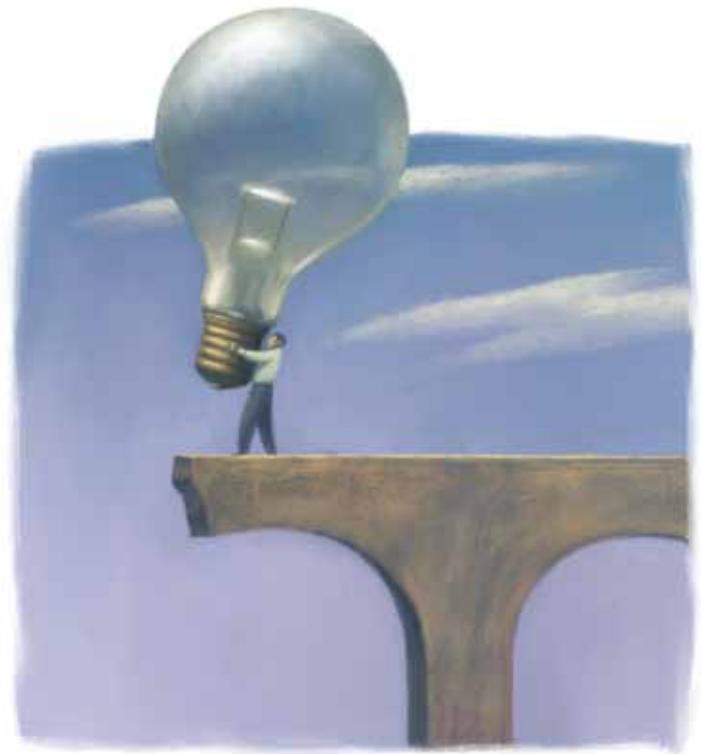
One thinks creatively not as a result of trying to think creatively, but as a result of close study of a subject—or, in the K–12 years, a range of subjects.

A middle-class existence used to offer free time, among many other things. Members of the middle class had room and time for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (or could have it if they chose it). They went to college not only to find a job but to take interesting courses, form bonds with peers and professors, and participate in the college's cultural life. If they did poorly in a course or two, that wasn't the end of things; after all, one was expected to go through some trial and error in college. After college, they could find jobs that were challenging but not grueling, jobs that allowed them some time for their own pursuits. Some devoted themselves to their jobs and to advancement within their careers, but at least they had the *option* of claiming some time for themselves and for service to the community. This meant that they were at liberty to take on projects that might come to fruition slowly or not at all. Granted, such freedom (in college and afterward) carried the risk of confusion and extended adolescence, but for many it made room for intellectual play, meaningful pursuits, and patience.

Such conditions, in turn, allowed colleges and universities to emphasize the life of the mind.¹⁰ A few decades ago, despite shrinking humanities departments and growing economic anxiety, students were encouraged to take time to select a major; to explore different subjects and interests; to take challenging courses, even at the risk of lower grades; to pursue what interested them, not what would lead to the most lucrative jobs; and to take part in the cultural life of the college and the surrounding community. In his remarkable book *College: What It Was, Is, and*

Should Be, Andrew Delbanco of Columbia University recalls how Judith Shapiro, former provost of Bryn Mawr and then president of Barnard, explained the meaning of college to a group of young people: “You want the inside of your head to be an interesting place to spend the rest of your life.”¹¹

My own memories of college, though not all rosy by a long stretch, abound with illustrations of this principle. Students would crowd into a lecture hall to listen to lectures on art history, even if they weren’t taking the course for credit. They would major in English even though people warned them (erroneously) that you couldn’t do much with an English major. They would spend evenings discussing philosophical questions, even if they had a test the next day. They would perform community service because they believed in it and learned from it, not because it would look good on their resumes. (Of course many were thinking of their resumes, but it was possible not to do so obsessively.) Such intel-



Honoring the liberal arts means having faculty meetings about historical documents, works of literature, or math problems (not just how to teach them).

lectual liberty had pitfalls; many college students blundered without adequate guidance, or threw themselves into an extracurricular activity at the expense of their studies. Yet the very spirit of intellectual quest allowed students to transcend these troubles; a student who veered into excess could redirect herself and come out wiser. Wisdom, or the striving toward it, was part of the point of college.

The spirit of intellectual quest has not vanished, but it is shrouded in pragmatic language. Students are expected to set career goals as early as middle school and to shape their studies around these goals. ACT, which develops career-planning tools and assessments for students and employees, has conducted research on “major-interest congruence” (that is, the congruence between a student’s major and his interests) and its relation to GPA and perseverance. The assumption is that student interest serves as a conduit to *success* (as measured by grades and graduation rates).¹² What happens to the slow struggle with difficult and compelling material? When students believe that they are supposed to succeed and only succeed, they look for the short route.

There are several seemingly short routes to success, if success means test scores and money. One is to set precise goals and take the safest route toward them—for instance, by avoiding the most challenging courses. Another is to make use of connections. Still another is to hit upon a lucrative big idea. The latter has gained appeal in the last few decades. People like Mark Zuckerberg, Malcolm Gladwell, and Steve Jobs tantalize the popular imagination,

as they *seem* to have leapt to fame with little more than a concept. Such a prototype of success is by no means new, but it grows more seductive as people need it more.

Schools, tests, and textbooks help promote the fantasy; everywhere we hear the buzzword of “success” (meaning high test scores, eventually a high salary, and possibly fame). Granted, schools emphasize the role of hard work in success, but they present success as a grand, noticeable achievement, usually the result of “thinking big.” Quieter forms of success rarely enter the picture. Policymakers and education critics call for more “innovation” and “creativity” in the schools, as though one could skip over traditional subject matter and get on with the breakthroughs. At the same time, they present this “innovation” primarily as preparation for the workplace, not for an imaginative life. Students receive a mixed message: they hear, on the one hand, that they should take risks and think creatively; on the other, that they should follow directions exactly and choose their career paths early on. The “big idea” fantasy offers young people relief from this conundrum; if they think big enough, many imagine, they won’t have to finish school or become anyone’s employee.¹³

But the best kind of study consists neither of following directions exactly nor of rushing toward innovation. It has to do with building one’s knowledge and understanding of a field, until insights start to come through. One need not wait years for insights, but they will deepen over time. One thinks creatively not as a result of trying to think creatively, but rather as a result of close study of a subject—or, in the K–12 years, a range of subjects. We find meaning in our learning as we start to relate the details to the larger parts, and the larger parts to the whole.

This slow progression remains important even at the highest levels of scholarship. Some of the most valuable ideas and creations do not come quickly, nor are they recognized immediately. They may not have vast ramifications; they may be of note mainly to those interested in the particular subject. This is no shame. To have the strength to work in relative obscurity, without quick and

dramatic rewards, is to have a room of one's own, in Virginia Woolf's sense of the phrase: a place for untrammelled thought. When we scramble for quick results, we give up our quiet rooms.

Honoring the Liberal Arts

How can we tone down the "big idea" culture and make room for subtler, more interesting ideas? We could start by honoring the liberal arts in schools, colleges of education, and beyond. By "liberal arts" I mean, in addition to common definitions, those studies that hold intrinsic interest and beauty *as well as* practical applications. By "honoring the liberal arts" I mean not only implementing a liberal arts curriculum but also living it. This means having faculty meetings about historical documents, works of literature, or math problems (and not just how to teach them). It means bringing these topics into teacher preparation, so that prospective teachers will start thinking about them before they enter the classroom. It means looking at education not only in terms of its specific objectives but also in terms of its subtleties and surprises. It means scrutinizing reforms for their compatibility with these endeavors. If a reform is destructive of liberal arts curriculum and culture, then it should be adjusted, reconsidered, or discarded.

We have luminous examples of such practice. There is the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, which offers courses in the humanities to teachers, principals, and superintendents. There is the Yale–New Haven Teachers Institute, where New Haven public school teachers work collegially with Yale scholars: the teachers study a subject in a seminar taught by a professor and then write curriculum units that incorporate what they have learned. There is the Bard Master of Arts in Teaching Program, which requires advanced study both in the elected discipline and in education courses (in about equal proportions). These and other programs could serve as guides.¹⁴

Honoring the liberal arts may sound like a big idea in itself, but it requires modesty, as its meaning comes clear only in the details. It may take decades to bring to full fruition, but the rewards will be apparent along the way. It is not an all-encompassing idea, nor can it be implemented in a uniform fashion. There will be variations from school to school and from student to student. Still, if we devote ourselves to the principles, we will enrich our practice and discourse.

Imagine, for instance, a classroom where students are reading Robert Frost's poem "Birches."¹⁵ The teacher reads it out loud and then takes them through it, posing questions and encouraging discussion as they go along. The poem takes them slowly from one place to another: from bent birches in the woods and the thought of a boy swinging them, to the trees after an ice storm:

Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.

It would be difficult not to pause over those lines; the phrase "As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel" could, in itself, change a student's sense of language. The poem then returns to the imagined boy (and what the narrator "was going to say when Truth broke in/With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm"), a boy whose play consists of swinging the birches, "Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,/Whose only play was what he found

himself,/Summer or winter, and could play alone," and how he "subdued" every one of his father's trees. There is good fortune in this boy's solitude; because the baseball games are far away, he finds his own way of playing.

This game of swinging birches held many lessons for the boy and holds a few for us:

He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.

But this boy, as we may have suspected, is not entirely imaginary:

When was the last time a policy-maker suggested that students read "Birches"? I am willing to wager that it has never happened—and there lies the problem.

"So was I once myself a swinger of birches./ And so I dream of going back to be." The game of the birches starts to reveal itself as a game of excess and return, of gentle flirtation with the limits of life on Earth, and of understated wit and sadness: "Earth's the right place for love:/I don't know where it's likely to go better." I won't reveal the ending—but this enough suggests that you can read "Birches" and find yourself subtly recreated, swinging birches along with the boy and the older Frost, and years afterward still seeing the "trunks arching in the woods."

Someone might ask: "What will students be able to do as a result of this lesson? Shouldn't every lesson leave students able to do something that they couldn't do before?" Well, no, not every lesson has to teach students how to do something, and this lesson will teach them to do quite a bit. First of all, as they listen to the poem, they will hear how it plays with iambic pentameter, neither strictly following it nor pushing it away. They will hear lines bend from left to right just as the birches do. They may also pay attention to the three similes of the poem, all of them striking: the trunks trailing their leaves on the ground "Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair/ Before them over their heads to dry in the sun"; the boy climbing carefully to the top "With the same pains you use to fill a cup/Up to the brim, and even above the brim"; and life being "too much like a pathless wood/Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs/Broken across it, and one eye is weeping/From a twig's having lashed across it open." (There is a quasi-simile, too, early on: "You'd think the inner dome of

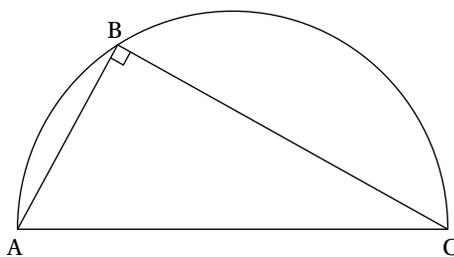
heaven had fallen.”) One could spend a great deal of time, likewise, discussing the metaphor of the swinging—which is only partly metaphor, after all, since the actual swinging plays a role here as well. Still, the point would be not to identify the similes and metaphors (a typical lesson objective) but to admire and ponder them, to live in them for a little while, and to notice their stirrings.

In other words, students studying such a poem would come away with specific knowledge of meter and figurative language, but their knowledge of the poem itself would be their greatest gain. To come to know the tone and wit of this poem, its melancholy and playful rumination, is to have a mentor, a memory, and a way of walking alone. It would be difficult to match these gifts.

When was the last time an education pundit or policymaker, a proponent of “creativity” and “innovation,” suggested that students read “Birches”? I am willing to wager that it has never happened—and there lies the problem. This is the stuff that makes a difference in a school day and a life—but it slips from notice, since it isn’t in line with big policy, at least not in an obvious way. Yet there is majesty in this poem. A student reading “Birches” learns about the quiet plunge from sky to earth, about play and yearning and love, about words and rhythms that offer us time and birches. “One could do worse than be a swinger of birches”—yes, indeed. (I gave away the last line, after all, but it’s the poem as a whole that gives this line its meaning.) A liberal arts curriculum could be filled with works of this caliber, works that shape the way you see and hear the world.

A mathematics problem, too, might help to characterize a liberal arts curriculum. I chose a simple geometry problem, because it is intriguing, beautiful, and surprising.* I came upon it when reading Canto XIII of Dante’s *Paradiso*. Here, St. Thomas tells Dante that King Solomon asked for wisdom, not for answers to vain questions, such as whether, within a semicircle, one can inscribe a triangle with no right angle. (The implication is that this is impossible.)¹⁶

The theorem asserts that any triangle inscribed within a semicircle must have a right angle at the vertex opposite the semicircle’s diameter. (In precise terms, the triangle is “inscribed within a semicircle” in the sense that one of its sides coincides with the diameter of the semicircle and the vertex opposite this side lies on the semicircle.) In the figure below, points A, B, and C define the triangle and AC is the diameter of the semicircle.

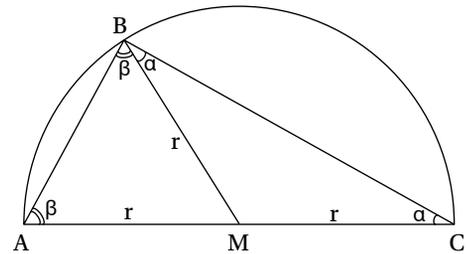


There is no limit to the number of distinct triangles one can create in this manner.¹⁷

The proof takes few steps and requires only basic knowledge

*This theorem, generalized to a circle, is attributed to the ancient Greek philosopher Thales (ca. 624 BC–ca. 546 BC). According to Diogenes Laertius, Thales sacrificed an ox in honor of his discovery. (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 1.1.24.)

of geometry. Consider the semicircle and triangle in the figure below. M is the midpoint between A and C, and is therefore the center of the semicircle because AC is the diameter; r is the radius of the semicircle. Thus segments MA, MB, and MC are all of length r . That means that triangles AMB and BMC are both isosceles ($MA=MB$ and $MB=MC$), and their base angles are therefore equal. Let us say that $\angle BAM$ is β degrees (where β is a positive number); then $\angle ABM$ is also β degrees. Likewise, let us say that $\angle BCM$ is α degrees; then $\angle CBM$ is also α degrees.



Now, look at the triangle ABC, the triangle originally under consideration. We already know that $\angle BAM$ is β degrees and $\angle BCM$ is α degrees. We know, also, that $\angle ABC$ is $(\alpha + \beta)$ degrees, since it is the sum of $\angle ABM$ and $\angle CBM$, which are β and α , respectively. Because the measures of the angles of any triangle add up to 180 degrees, we have $\alpha + (\beta + \alpha) + \beta = 180$ degrees. Therefore, $2(\alpha + \beta) = 180$ degrees; therefore, $(\alpha + \beta) = 90$ degrees. Thus, you can see that $\angle ABC$ will *always* measure 90 degrees when triangle ABC is inscribed in a semicircle in the sense defined above.

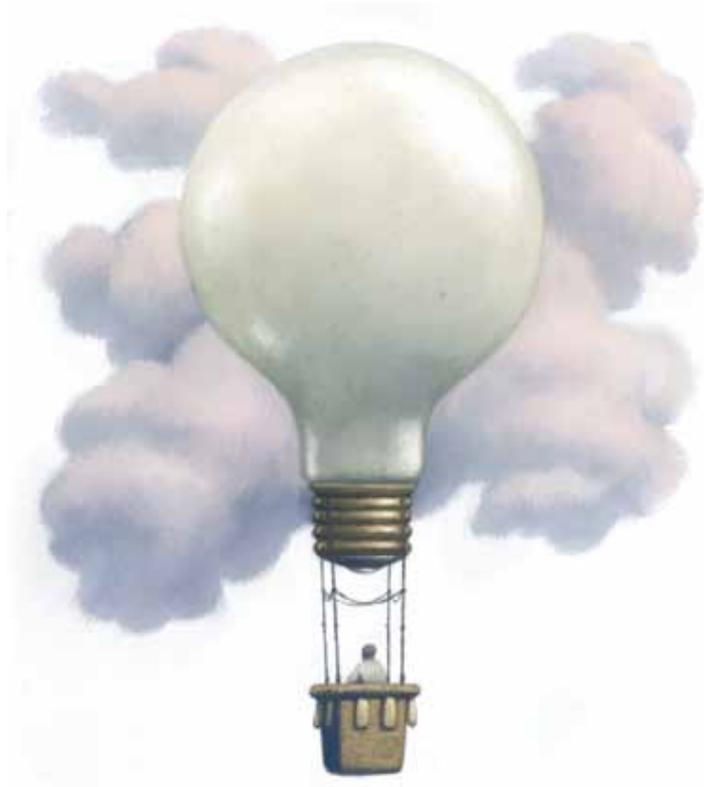
If we continue to ponder the theorem and its proof, we start to see many extensions and implications (related here in brief, not in detail). We see, for instance, that when a right triangle is inscribed within a semicircle (in the sense above), the distance from the midpoint of the hypotenuse to the opposite vertex is half the hypotenuse’s length. There’s more to it: we could prove that every right triangle can be so inscribed.

The proof has still more implications. For instance, we could use it to define a circle once a diameter is given: consider all right triangles whose hypotenuse coincides with the diameter, then the collection of all the vertices opposite the hypotenuse is a circle with the given diameter. Thus, in addition to our usual definition of a circle, the set of points at equal distance from a given point on a two-dimensional plane, we would have two definitions to explore. In mathematics, if you have two distinct definitions of something, it is common to ask: Does either definition imply the other? In this case, the answer is yes, which we could determine with a little bit of effort.

Later on, when students learn about sine and cosine, they may return to the triangle inscribed in a semicircle (in the sense above) and see that they can now look at any chord (a line segment with endpoints on the circumference) on a given circle from different perspectives.[†] This is just one example of a mathematical problem that can suggest fruitful problems at different levels of study.

This problem or series of problems has numerous corollaries,

[†]If the circle has radius r , then the length of any chord AB drawn from a point A on the circle can be expressed directly in terms of r and the angle β that AB makes with the diameter through A, namely, $2r \cos \beta$. One can also explore the opposite relationship using the length of the chord to determine the angle.



analog, and applications. One can use it to find the center of a circle, to construct the tangent to a circle from a given point outside the circle, and much more. At the same time, its sheer elegance—which comes from its simplicity and details—will likely make an impression on students. Students who work with such problems start to perceive possibilities beyond the apparent, and thus enter further into mathematics, which requires the ability to see unexpected connections in seemingly unrelated settings, to be “maker[s] of patterns of ideas,” to quote the mathematician G. H. Hardy.¹⁸ This geometry problem is not entirely removed from the swinging of birches.

These two examples—Robert Frost’s “Birches” and the geometry problem—show how exciting and instructive a liberal arts education can be—and how the details lead to the greater meanings. No matter what “objective” is written on the board, lessons on such topics will go far beyond the objective. Students will learn skills—and many of them—but will also carry interesting things in their minds, discuss them with others, and think about them when alone. If we defend and strengthen this kind of education, if we bring subject matter into education discussions themselves, then our priorities will be clearer. We will be able to temper and tune (or reject) the reforms that come our way.

For instance, we can put standardized tests in their place. Educators have tried in vain to convey to policymakers how limited the standardized tests are. If there were a common understanding of the nature of a liberal arts education, if policymakers and pundits understood the discrepancy between the tests and the actual subject matter, they’d be less likely to treat standardized test scores as precise measures of teaching quality, school quality, or student achievement.

All the same, we can readily acknowledge that standardized tests tell us *something*. If students do especially poorly or espe-

cially well, it makes sense to look into the reasons. We can make better use of tests if we don’t exaggerate their importance; we should take whatever important information they offer, leave the rest, and continue to teach poetry and geometry. The same holds true for numerous other reforms and ideas—online instruction, the “workshop model,” personalized instruction, and even school choice. Each has its place, but none should interfere with our treasured work.

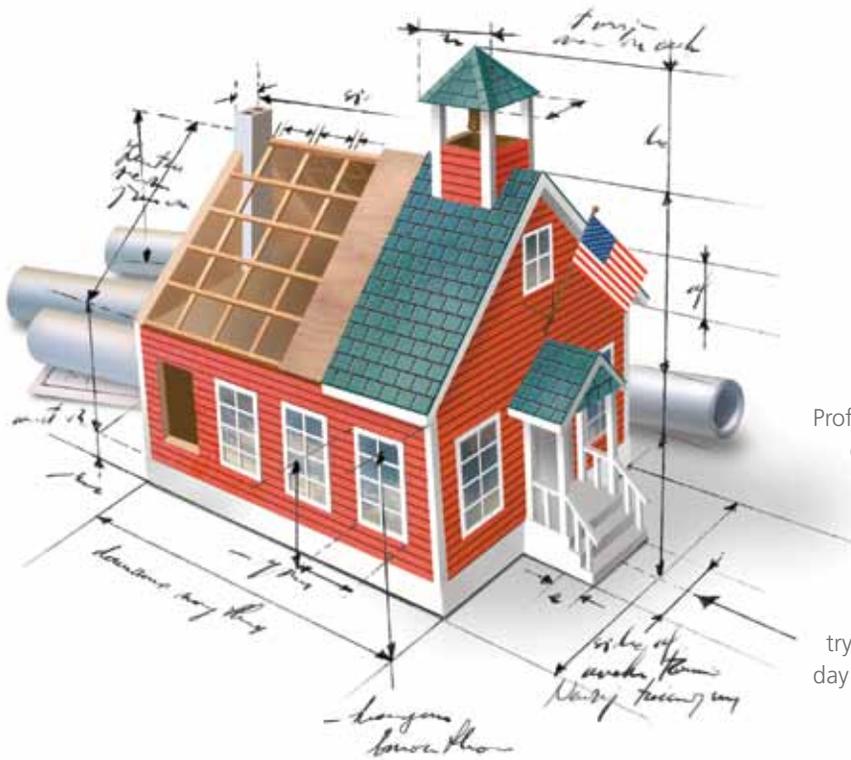
Those concerned about raising standards can take heart: a liberal arts education is far from fluffy. It gives students more knowledge and more opportunities for creative thinking than any of the known alternatives. Students read and discuss concrete works of literature; memorize poetry and come to know its rhythms and shapes; examine the fine points and implications of mathematical proofs; study the facts, questions, and ideas of history; learn rules and principles of grammar and rhetoric; write in many formats and styles, about many topics; take part in the arts

If policymakers understood the discrepancy between tests and subject matter, they’d be less likely to treat scores as precise measures of teaching quality or student achievement.

and study works of art; and develop a sense of virtue and character. Such education requires intensive practice and perseverance, and the rewards are often inherent in the work. The very practice of struggling with problems, of building one’s understanding, of devoting one’s attention to something worthy and beautiful, makes for an interesting and even happy life (and interesting careers to boot). Over time, this practice could lead to an enrichment of the public imagination: a renewed tolerance, even appreciation, of the slow, murmuring labor of the mind. To make room for such education, policymakers will need to overcome their insistence on quick, concrete results. It will benefit them to do so. We live in an era that places a premium on “outcomes”—but sadly, the more we focus on outcomes, the less likely we are to attain them. To attain anything of value in education, you need a strong sense of what is valuable; you must see beyond the immediate goal. A student of a musical instrument must learn to play scales well, but she is not learning scales *in order* to play scales. She is learning them so that she can play those pieces that amaze and move her—and perhaps compose pieces of her own. It is precisely for the sake of these pieces that she will persevere, if she has the will and the proper instruction. If we devote ourselves to things of beauty, we will enjoy good outcomes along the way; if we devote ourselves narrowly to outcomes, we will lose our sense of beauty.

(Continued on page 40)

Union Members Are Community Members



Professional educators—in the classroom, library, counseling center, or anywhere in between—share one overarching goal: ensuring all students receive the rich, well-rounded education they need to be productive, engaged citizens. In this regular feature, we explore the work of professional educators—their accomplishments and their challenges—so that the lessons they have learned can benefit students across the country. After all, listening to the professionals who do this work every day is a blueprint for success.

BY DAVID GRAY

Twenty-five years. That's how long I've had the privilege of serving as the president of the Oklahoma City Federation of Classified Employees, Local 4574 of the AFT. Our members are parents, and they're paraprofessionals, bus drivers, skilled craftspeople, mechanics, clerical workers, food service workers, groundskeepers, and scanners/security staff. They keep the schools running well and looking good.

David Gray has been the president of the Oklahoma City Federation of Classified Employees since 1988 and has been a vice president of the American Federation of Teachers since 1992. He is a member of the AFT Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel Program and Policy Council, the chair of the AFT Annuity Trust, and the chair of the AFT Constitutional Amendments and Convention Committee. He is the chair of the Oklahoma State AFL-CIO Human Rights Committee, a board member of the American Federation of Teachers Oklahoma, and a former vice president of the Oklahoma County chapter of the A. Philip Randolph Institute.

After my first year as the local president, I decided I would be a student of labor, and I consider myself a student of labor now. I take on each and every day, and every experience, as a learning experience. One thing I've learned is that my union members care about the quality of their schools and the well-being of their community. And they want their union to care too.

Fortunately, it did not take me all 25 years to figure that out. But it did take almost a decade to figure out what to do about it. So even though I've been president since 1988, I'm going to focus on what I've been doing since 1997: serving my members by serving their community.

In 1997, our central labor council in central Oklahoma conducted a brainstorming retreat in one of our members' homes. We were planning for our future, thinking about political action—and thinking about how we could make things better for our members and for the children they serve. The political environment was growing increasingly adversarial, and our best path forward was not at all clear.

There was some debate, but ultimately we agreed that we should seriously think about coalition building. A few of the leaders present (we were all affiliated with each other through the Central Oklahoma Labor Federation) automatically pushed back. They had a hard time seeing beyond the union movement at first. But those of us who wanted to give this a try prevailed. Today, we have a strong coalition that includes the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the United Way, a wide array of religious organizations, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women, to name just a handful of our dozens of partners.

I was one of the primary advocates for coalition building. To me, it was obvious that we needed strong relationships outside the union movement. Some union leaders wanted to stay under the umbrella of the AFL-CIO. My idea for a strong coalition required reaching out beyond where we were. I argued for reaching out to religious leaders—all religious leaders, not just certain

and greet.” All of this happened in 1997: the initial brainstorming and the big meet and greet. And we’ve been meeting ever since: every second Tuesday of every month since 1997. We’ve also continued to do big, open meet and greets. Everyone is welcome. These events provide an opportunity for new organizations and leaders to get to know the coalition. Attending is not a commitment to join, but each time we host one we expand our coalition.

Before I jump into what we’ve accomplished, I have to admit that it was hard to establish these monthly meetings. Everybody is busy. But we realized, well, everybody eats lunch. So we decided to meet from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. every second Tuesday, and that has worked out very well. We average about 20 to 30 leaders a meeting, and we now have close to 50 members who have committed to being part of our coalition and who get involved in our campaigns.

Officially, our coalition is the Central Oklahoma Community Forum, and today we have a mix of progressive religious, labor,



My union members care about the quality of their schools and the well-being of their community. And they want their union to care too.

groups—and then to civic organizations that shared our concerns for people, children, and the environment.

I’m an avid reader; in newspaper and magazine articles throughout the 1990s, I saw the social climate shifting away from America’s pro-union days. I convinced maybe two or three other leaders to see what I was seeing in terms of attitudes toward organized labor here in Oklahoma. In the mid-1990s, the attitudes of the citizens went from strong or lukewarm to indifferent. We agreed that eventually they would become hostile, so it was imperative that we reach out to the community. Sure enough, in recent years the political climate here, along with the media, has become very challenging toward organized labor.

To get started in building a coalition, we formed a small group to think carefully about whom we should contact. Well, it became a no-brainer: we saw some pastors who were well-respected community activists, and we knew we wanted to work more with the United Way. The United Way provides inroads to the community and to the people who believe in our city because it has a network of smaller agencies that it funds and supports. Like our union, these churches and United Way agencies all dealt with human concerns and were dedicated to helping people. We were all already members of the same community; we just needed some structure to help us get organized so we could accomplish more.

Of course, we did not limit our coalition building to these people and organizations—they were just a starting place. To expand, we contacted religious leaders across the board who were like-minded, progressive thinkers, and we invited them to a “meet

and civic leaders. Notice that I’m emphasizing leaders. It’s the leaders, the decision makers, who come to these lunches every month. They can bring staff, but they can’t send someone without decision-making authority in their place. When the coalition makes a decision, it’s done. We go into action. We won’t wait for a staff member to go back and ask the leader of the organization. The leader has to be at the table.

Community support has been critical because the far right, driven in part by the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, has had a long-range plan to eliminate unions in Oklahoma. They’re scratching their heads trying to figure out why we’re still around and have so much support. They would be able to figure it out if they would just come to one of our meet and greets, and get to know the good work our coalition does. We are not a political organization; we invite Republicans, but they don’t come.

Within our coalition, we have groups dedicated to voter registration, immigration, adoption, human trafficking, the criminal justice system, and other important causes. Our work is so broad I usually refer to it as “human concerns.”

When a new leader comes into the community, we reach out. I guess you could say the coalition organizes new leaders just like the union organizes new members. We’re open to everyone. We focus on issues that all progressive thinkers can support—when you’re focused on student services, it’s not very hard to find partners. The attitude among citizens may have become challenging toward unions, but people still want to help children. So even though the leaders of conservative organizations refuse to join us,

we have no problem finding volunteers out in the community.

Getting this coalition started took an enormous amount of time: there is no substitute for personally inviting leaders to join and answering their individual questions. But, as I found out, there is no better use of a local union president's time.

In 2003, we had a threat of privatization. Almost our entire union—more than 1,000 employees—would have lost their jobs. The campaign to privatize was headed by Cliff Hudson, who is the CEO of Sonic Corp. At the time, he was both Sonic's CEO and the chairman of the Oklahoma City School Board. Hudson rallied support from his friends at the Chamber of Commerce; his plan was to give the custodial, bookkeeping, food service, and transportation work to Sodexo—a company that Sonic had been in talks with regarding possible contracts in 2002 and 2003. Hudson's angling to give work in the schools to Sodexo certainly smelled like a conflict of interest.

visit to one of our high schools, he discovered many kids who needed glasses but just couldn't afford them. So we decided right then and there to start a campaign to buy these kids glasses. We found an optical shop that would do it right—not only is it offering a significant discount, it is giving the kids really nice, stylish glasses that they feel good about wearing.

To get the campaign started, I suggested that each union in the area contribute at least \$100. We have 66 locals affiliated with the labor federation in the metropolitan area, so if each local participates, that will provide a decent fund to start buying glasses. This campaign has been a good opportunity to bring more local unions into our coalition. We've been using it as a reason to meet with other locals, and they're coming on board each and every month—getting interested in the coalition and contributing to the eyeglasses campaign. It's a worthy cause. Now people from the community are hearing about the campaign and contributing



Within our coalition, we have groups dedicated to voter registration, immigration, adoption, human trafficking, the criminal justice system, and other causes.

Hudson's privatization effort focused on saving money, but the method for doing that was lowering wages and stripping the workers of health benefits. That was obviously terrible from the union's point of view, but it was devastating from the coalition's point of view too. A lot of our union members had children in the schools, so having hundreds of children with lower family incomes and no health insurance would have negatively affected the broader school community.

Since our coalition of community leaders was strong, we won big. Our leaders communicated directly with their constituents, and some even educated the community on radio programs. The school board chairman and his allies soon discovered that they weren't just going against a local union; they were going against the entire community. We even had the police department on our side. No one has proposed privatizing our work since then. Without our coalition, however, we would not exist today.

Helping Each Other

I started with the privatization example to show that coalition building is important, but that campaign is not typical of our work. Most of the time, the coalition is working not for any particular member group, but to solve a problem we see in the community. For instance, right now the coalition has an eyeglasses campaign. The Reverend Lance Schmitz, who is a regular participant in the AFT's Faith in Action program as well as a coalition member, brought the need to the coalition's attention. In a recent

as well. It has been such a success that we're thinking about moving it to a disadvantaged elementary school.

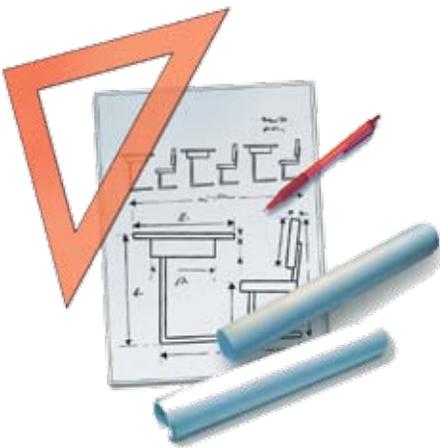
Another ongoing campaign involves student nutrition. Our coalition was able to get a school board member elected who is really concerned about child nutrition, and now we have two big issues to address through this campaign. The first is educating students and parents on healthy eating. We have an obesity problem with the students in the Oklahoma City school district. The second is to go back to real cooking kitchens in our schools so that we can offer better meals to our students.

For years we've had warming kitchens—nothing is cooked, the food is just heated up. Our food service management is run by a private contractor. When that contractor was first selected, it said it would not change the delivery of the services, that the quality of the food and its preparation would remain the same. But after a while, maybe two or three years, the contractor changed from having our food service workers prepare healthy, nutritious food, to having food shipped in that just needs to be warmed up. Well, the kids hardly eat it. It is not the quality food we used to prepare and serve.

With the recent emphasis on child nutrition, we think we can do even better than before. We're certain we can prepare much healthier food than the not-so-appealing things that our food service workers are currently required to simply warm up. Oklahoma City has a very disadvantaged population; 90 percent of our public school students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. During

the school year, our students get most of their food at school. What we serve them is extremely important. (Like so many schools across the country, we also have a Weekend Backpack Program in which we chip in to buy nonperishable food for students. It goes in their backpacks every Friday to get them through the weekend.)

In addition to our campaigns, the coalition hosts events. They are short-term and relatively easy to do—and they provide constant opportunities for us to support each other. For example, the coalition participates in the annual Peace Festival downtown. This is headed by one of our leaders, Nathaniel Batchelder. He is the director of the Peace House Oklahoma City, which is dedicated to social justice. Besides educating the community about nonviolence, the Peace House uses peaceful methods to advocate for human rights, economic justice, and environmental sustainability. This festival has dozens of educational booths hosted by different organizations, as well as local arts and crafts vendors.



In a recent visit to a high school, a reverend discovered kids who needed glasses but couldn't afford them. We decided right then to start a campaign to buy these kids glasses.

It's the type of event that many of my union members choose to attend with their families, so it's an obvious choice for the union to support the event and have a booth. Being part of the coalition gives us many opportunities like this to show that we are caring members of our community.

An annual event in which the coalition supports my local union is the labor breakfast. For us, this is a big deal. The coalition is the sponsor—this is not something we could do on our own. We have a guest speaker to highlight union and community issues, and we normally have about 170 labor, religious, and civic leaders attend. In 2012, we had AFT President Randi Weingarten as our speaker, and she drew in 325 participants—that's almost double our normal attendance. Her message reinforced the work of the coalition and showed the leaders that it's not just our local, but also our national affiliate, that is committed to working with community groups.

Logistics

As I mentioned, our coalition has been meeting every second Tuesday from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. since 1997. Labor issues, and especially education issues, are on every agenda. All of the larger organizations take turns hosting and providing lunch. We open with a welcome from our cochairs—one of whom is the head of a labor union, the other is the head of a religious organization—and we take time for introductions around the table. We always make sure we welcome those who are new and make them feel comfortable. We

also have them tell us a little bit about who they represent.

Then we go into discussions about issues and how we are going to develop campaigns and events to address those issues. We give everybody enough time to make their presentations, and we also make decisions, so the hour and a half is time well spent. We try to have at least three or four good community outreach campaigns going every year, usually concurrently.

Of course, developing a campaign is the easy part. In order to accomplish anything, every coalition leader has to get his or her members involved.

One strategy my local has found effective is to survey our members. Ask your members what interests them and what groups they belong to. It will amaze you. We found out that many of our union members are volunteers for the American Red Cross. We have a leader from the Red Cross in our coalition, so right there we have two ways to reach out to these individuals. Many of our

members also belong to child advocacy groups, as well as religious organizations. Since we regularly conduct these surveys and we know what interests our members, it is easy to do targeted outreach to them. I know which of my members will take a special interest in the coalition's eyeglasses campaign or healthy food campaign, and which ones will want to volunteer at the booth during the Peace Festival. These surveys help in the planning phases too, because I know which issues to raise at coalition meetings; I know what's important to my members not just from the union perspective, but from their varied perspectives as community members.

When it comes to reaching out past our active members to all members, we have a website and newsletters. Person-to-person contact, however, is still the only really effective method. Knowing that, it's not all that difficult to maintain a network of shop stewards and other activists, to create talking points, and to push information out through individual and small-group conversations. The coalition work overlaps with organizing too. Organizing new members and getting existing members active are things we do every day—but we have to have an issue. For my union, the core issues are wages, benefits, and professional development, but everything we do to help the community helps the union too.

Lessons Learned

I've learned more from our big challenges than our big wins, so here's an example of an issue that the coalition struggled with

internally. We all agreed that the minimum wage was too low, so we wanted to launch a campaign to change the city charter to set a higher minimum. The internal debate was whether to advocate for a living wage or an increase in the minimum wage. A living wage is an amount that a family of four could actually live off of—not luxuriously at all, but it’s supposed to be a wage high enough for safe housing, nutritious food, health care, and other basic needs. The exact dollar amount of a living wage depends on where a family lives, but all across America a living wage is a good bit higher than the federal minimum wage. Fundamentally, the idea is that if you work full time, you should not live in poverty. We were having this debate several years ago, when the federal minimum wage was \$5.15 an hour.

The majority of the coalition members thought raising the minimum wage was just as good as establishing a living wage.



It’s not reasonable to expect partners to trust each other after a few months. Most of the leaders in the coalition have been committed and active for 10 years.

But I’ll admit that I could not move from my position on a living wage. Finally, after four or five meetings debating this issue, I said, “Look. Maybe I’m not getting it, okay? Maybe I want a whole loaf, and these folks will settle for half a loaf. So now I’m taking half a loaf at a time, as long as we move.” I gave in because that’s part of the leadership role in working with others: it’s important to fight for what you believe, but it’s also important to listen to your partners. You won’t always win, even with your friends, and you have to figure out when to fold. Since we had so many other important issues to work on, I could not continue to hold up the coalition over this. So I was ready to fully commit to fighting for an increase in the Oklahoma City minimum wage. We were just getting the campaign together when the issue became moot. The US Congress passed an amendment to the minimum wage law in 2007 that established three increases over two years (which brought it to \$7.25 an hour, where it has stayed since 2009).

That’s the only time I remember serious internal conflict. We did fight, but we’re like a family. Even in the middle of a heated debate, we stayed on speaking terms and worked things out. That’s important not only for the strength of the coalition, but for the issue. My fellow coalition members know this is an issue I will raise again. The federal minimum wage is far too low—its purchasing power is much lower than it was 30 years ago. Working people need a living wage. This time, I’ll be a little less bullheaded about it, and I’ll start with educating our community partners about the issue. The United Way of Central Oklahoma will be a big help. It regularly releases a series of reports called “Vital Signs” that track key indicators of community well-being. These should

help leaders see how many of our poverty-related problems could be reduced with a living wage. I think you’ll see a campaign for paycheck justice in Oklahoma City fairly soon.

Today, the coalition is strong, and our campaigns and events are great, but we do struggle to bring the community together. We succeed mainly through our commitment to help each other. We not only fight like a family, we also stick together like one. Above all else, we trust each other. For example, there were times during our campaign to prevent privatization when I just had to step aside. I was president of the local, and it was my union members who were going to lose their jobs, but there were times when I could see that other community leaders would be more effective than I could be. I stepped aside many times to let community leaders take over different projects. Not only did they do a great job leading them, but they garnered

much broader community support and got more people engaged than I could have.

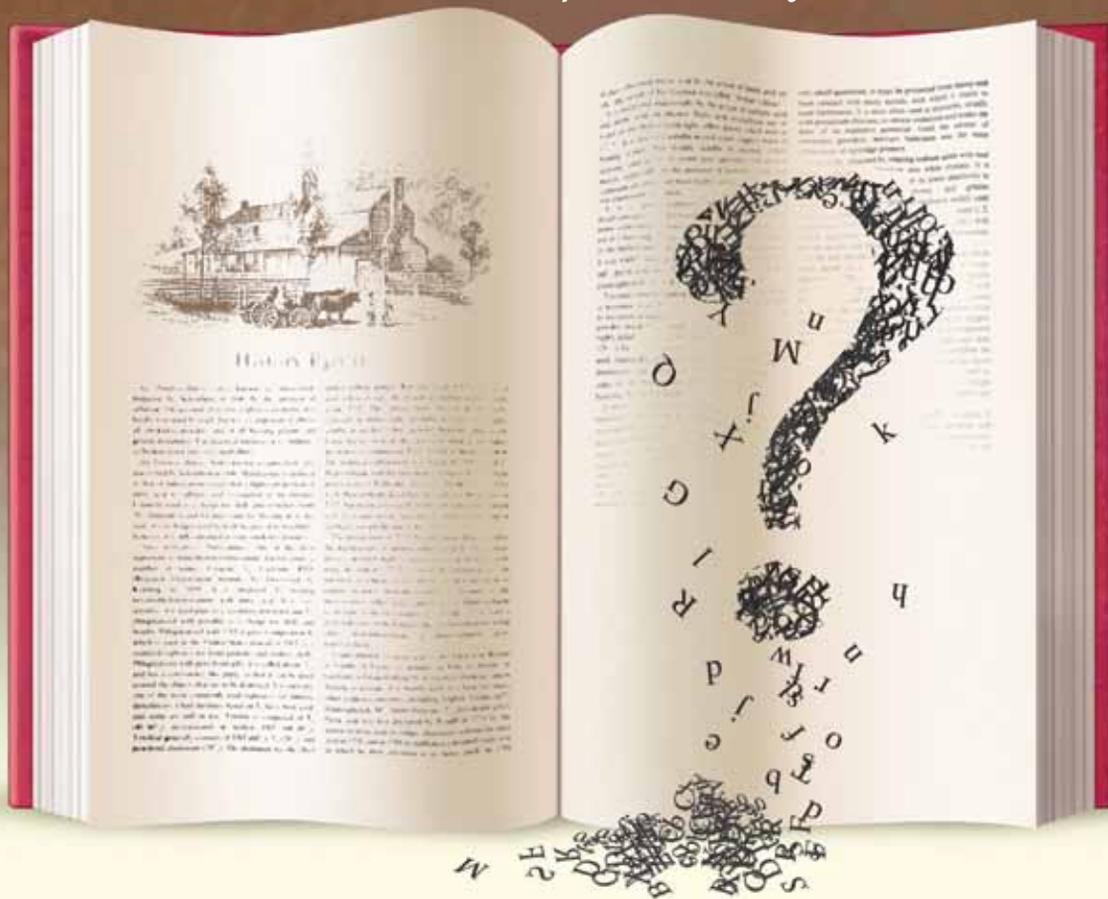
It takes time, but building strong relationships like that is worth the effort. My local was largely in my partners’ hands. That takes years of working with, getting to know, and coming to trust another local leader. And it works. As I said, we won big. But that type of relationship can’t be developed right when you need it; it’s not reasonable to expect partners to fully trust each other after just a few months. We invest time in each other every month. Not just our lunches but also our lower-stakes campaigns and events. And then we’re there for each other when a real challenge arises. Most of the leaders in the coalition have been committed and active for 10 years.

Early in my career, I was the first African American to join the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Allied Workers, Local 94. It was not easy, but I learned a lot about different people, and I developed some lifelong friendships. That experience helped me develop leadership skills, including skills for building relationships and crossing lines.

Looking back over my career, and having worked with a great variety of people, one of the things I’ve noticed is that I have a different leadership style than most. I don’t believe you can go into any leadership position or relationship thinking that you know it all. It turns people off—and it’s not possible to know everything. It’s much better to meet people where they are. You really need to listen and resist focusing on your issues: you have to listen to their issues and concerns. But once you start doing that, pretty soon they start to listen to you too. And then you have the common ground you need to start your own coalition. □

Undue Certainty

Where Howard Zinn's *A People's History* Falls Short



BY SAM WINEBURG

Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* has few peers among contemporary historical works. With more than 2 million copies in print, *A People's History* is more than a book. It is a cultural icon. "You wanna read a real history book?" Matt Damon asks his therapist in the 1997 movie *Good Will Hunting*. "Read Howard Zinn's *People's History of the United States*. That book'll ... knock you on your ass."

The book's original gray cover was painted red, white, and blue for its Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition in 2003, and it is now marketed with special displays in suburban megastores. A week after Zinn's death in 2010, *A People's History* was number 7

*Sam Wineburg is the Margaret Jacks Professor of Education and a professor of history (by courtesy) at Stanford University, and the director of the Stanford History Education Group, which conducts research to improve history instruction (to learn about the group's work, see <http://sheg.stanford.edu>). He is the author of dozens of scholarly articles and the award-winning book *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*. He began his career as a middle school and high school teacher.*

on Amazon's bestseller list—not too shabby for a book first published in 1980.

Once considered radical, *A People's History* has gone mainstream. By 2002, Will Hunting had been replaced by A. J. Soprano, of the HBO hit *The Sopranos*. Doing his homework at the kitchen counter, A. J. tells his parents that his history teacher compared Christopher Columbus to Slobodan Milosevic. When Tony fumes "Your teacher said *that*?" A. J. responds, "It's not just my teacher—it's the truth. It's in my history book." The camera pans to A. J. holding a copy of *A People's History*.

History, for Zinn, is looked at from "the bottom up": a view "of the Constitution from the standpoint of the slaves, of Andrew Jackson as seen by the Cherokees, of the Civil War as seen by the New York Irish, of the Mexican war as seen by the deserting soldiers of Scott's army."¹ Decades before we thought in such terms, Zinn provided a history for the 99 percent.

Many teachers view *A People's History* as an anti-textbook, a corrective to the narratives of progress dispensed by the state. This is undoubtedly true on a topical level. When learning about the Spanish-American War, students don't read about Teddy Roosevelt charging up San Juan Hill. Instead, they follow the

plight of foot soldiers sweltering in the Cuban tropics, clutching their stomachs not from Spanish bullets but from food poisoning caused by rancid meat sold to the army by Armour and Company. Such stories acquaint students with a history too often hidden and too quickly brushed aside by traditional textbooks.

But in other ways—ways that strike at the very heart of what it means to learn history as a discipline—*A People's History* is closer to students' state-approved texts than its advocates are wont to admit. Like traditional textbooks, *A People's History* relies almost entirely on secondary sources, with no archival research to thicken its narrative. Like traditional textbooks, the book is naked of footnotes, thwarting inquisitive readers who seek to retrace the author's interpretative steps. And, like students' textbooks, when *A People's History* draws on primary sources, these documents serve to prop up the main text, but never provide an alternative view or open up a new field of vision.

What does *A People's History* teach young people about what it means to think historically?

Initially, *A People's History* drew little scholarly attention (neither of the two premier historical journals, the *American Historical Review* and the *Journal of American History*, reviewed the book). Among historians who did take notice, the verdict was mixed. Some, like Harvard's Oscar Handlin and Cornell's Michael Kammen, panned the book; others, like Columbia's Eric Foner, were more favorable.² But in the last 30 years, during which *A People's History* has arguably had a greater influence on how Americans understand their past than any other single book, normally voluble scholars have gone silent. When Michael Kazin, a coeditor of *Dissent* and a scholar with impeccable leftist credentials, reviewed the 2003 edition (concluding that the book was “unworthy of such fame and influence”), it was the first time that *A People's History* had captured a historian's gaze in nearly 20 years.³

The original assessments, and Kazin's retrospective, have largely focused on the substance of Zinn's book, pointing out blind spots and suggesting alternatives. My own view is that Howard Zinn has the same right as any author to choose one interpretation over another, to select which topics to include or ignore. I find myself agreeing with *A People's History* in some places (such as Indian Removal, and the duplicity and racism of the Wilson administration) and shaking my head in disbelief at others (e.g., Zinn's conflation of the Party of Lincoln with the Democratic Party of Jefferson Davis). Yet, where my proclivities align with or depart from Zinn's is beside the point.

I am less concerned here with what Zinn says than his warrant for saying it, less interested in the words that meet the eye than with the book's interpretive circuitry that doesn't. Largely invisible to the casual reader are the moves and strategies Zinn uses to tie

evidence to conclusion, to convince readers that his interpretations are right. More is at stake in naming and making explicit these moves than an exercise in rhetoric. For when students encounter Zinn's *A People's History*, they undoubtedly take away more than new facts about the Homestead Strike or Eugene V. Debs. They are exposed to and absorb an entire way of asking questions about the past and a way of using evidence to advance historical argument. For many students, *A People's History* will be the first full-length history book they read, and for some, it will be the only one. Beyond what they learn about Shays' Rebellion or the loopholes in the Sherman Antitrust Act, what does *A People's History* teach these young people about what it means to *think historically*?

A People's History stretches across 729 pages and embraces 500 years of human history. To examine in detail the book's moves and strategies, what I refer to as its *interpretive circuitry*, I train my sights on a key chapter, one of the most pivotal and controversial in the book. Chapter 16, “A People's War?,” covers the period from the mid-1930s to the beginning of the Cold War. Unlike chapters in which Zinn introduces readers to hidden aspects of American history—such as the Flour Riot of 1837—the stakes here are much higher. This is not the first time we've heard about Pearl Harbor or the Holocaust or the decision to drop the atomic bomb. But Zinn's goal is to turn everything we know—or think we do—on its head.

Anecdotes as Evidence

Consider the question of whether World War II was “a people's war.” On one level, as Zinn has to admit, it was. Thousands suited up in uniform, and millions handed over hard-earned dollars to buy war bonds. But Zinn asks us to consider whether such support was “manufactured.” Was there, in fact, widespread resentment and resistance to the war that was hidden from the masses?

Among the military, Zinn says, it is “hard to know” how much resentment soldiers felt because “no one recorded the bitterness of enlisted men.” Zinn instead focuses on a community in which he can readily locate resentment: black Americans.

The claim stands to reason. Domestically, Jim Crow laws were thriving in the North and the South, and overseas in the segregated armed forces. To fight for freedom abroad when basic freedoms were denied at home was a bitter contradiction. In fact, the black press wrote about the “Double V”—victory over fascism in Europe, victory over racism at home.

But Zinn argues something else. He asserts that black Americans restricted their support to a single V: the victory over racism. As for the second V, victory on the battlefields of Europe and Asia, Zinn claims that an attitude of “widespread indifference, even hostility,” typified African Americans' stance toward the war.⁴

Zinn hangs his claim on three pieces of evidence: (1) a quote from a black journalist that “the Negro ... is angry, resentful, and utterly apathetic about the war”; (2) a quote from a student at a black college who told his teacher that “the Army jim-crows us. The Navy lets us serve only as messmen. The Red Cross refuses our blood. Employers and labor unions shut us out. Lynchings continue”; and (3) a poem called the “Draftee's Prayer,” published in the black press: “Dear Lord, today / I go to war: / To fight, to die, / Tell me what for? / Dear Lord, I'll fight, / I do not fear, / Germans or Japs; / My fears are here. / America!”⁵

These items seethe with hostility. Many readers will likely con-

clude that they represented broad trends in the black community. But just as we can find instances that embody resentment, so too can we find expressions of African American patriotism and support for the war. Nor do we have to go very far. In the same journal that voiced the resentment of the black college student, one finds the words of Horace Mann Bond, president of Georgia's Fort Valley State College and the father of civil rights leader Julian Bond, who was asked by the editors to address the question, "Should the Negro care who wins the war?"⁶

Bond bristled at the query's implicit racism—the insinuation that blacks were apathetic to America's fate: "If a white person believes that a Negro in the United States is indifferent to the outcome of a great national struggle, that white person conceives of that Negro as divested of statehood.... The Negro who is indifferent to the outcome of the struggle has stripped himself of allegiance



to the state of which he is a native."⁷

To array dueling anecdotes—three for hostility, three against—is not a very sophisticated way to make claims about a community that, to quote Bond, numbered "nearly thirteen million human beings of every variety of opinion, intelligence, and sensitivity."⁸ The three anecdotes Zinn draws on come not from digging in an archive or reading microfiche from the black press. Everything he cites was drawn from a single secondary source, Lawrence Wittner's *Rebels Against War* (1969).⁹

The evidence Zinn uses appears on two adjoining pages in Wittner's 239-page book. Also appearing on these pages is key information Zinn omits. Wittner lists the total number of registrants eligible for the war as 10,022,367 males between the ages of 18 and 37. Of these, 2,427,495, about 24 percent, were black. Wittner then lists the number of conscientious objectors enrolled by the Selective Service: 42,973. If the number of conscientious objectors were proportional for both blacks and whites, there would have been over 10,000 African American conscientious objectors—even more if there was as much hostility to the war among blacks as Zinn claims.

What we learn instead is that the total number of black conscientious objectors was a mere 400.¹⁰ "Even draft evasion remained low," Wittner adds, "with Negro registrants comprising only 4.4 per cent of the Justice Department cases."¹¹ He concludes: "Sur-

prisingly few black men became C.O.'s."¹²

The form of reasoning that Zinn relies on here is known as asking "yes-type" questions.¹³ According to historian Aileen S. Kraditor, yes-type questions send the historian into the past armed with a wish list. Because a hallmark of modernity is to save everything (and this was certainly the case by the mid-20th century), those who ask yes-type questions always end up getting what they want. Kraditor explains: "If one historian asks, 'Do the sources provide evidence of militant struggles among workers and slaves?' the sources will reply, 'Certainly.' And if another asks, 'Do the sources provide evidence of widespread acquiescence in the established order among the American population throughout the past two centuries?' the sources will reply, 'Of course.'"¹⁴

So it is here: will we find pockets of resistance and reluctance among blacks—or, for that matter, among whites, Hispanics, Italians, gays, and lesbians—no matter how just the cause of *any* war? The answer is "Certainly." To objections that it is biased to ask yes-type questions, Zinn might respond (and did, often) that *all* history is biased, that every historian chooses which facts to highlight or discard.¹⁵ Fine and good, provided that a crucial condition is satisfied, a condition again specified by Kraditor: that "the data the historian omits must not be essential to the understanding of the data included." To generalize to nearly 13 million people by citing three anecdotes, while at the same time ignoring data about 2,427,495 eligible black registrants, is a yes-type question in its purest form.

Questions Answered, Then Asked

Questions are what distinguish the history encountered in college seminars from the sanitized versions often taught in lower grades. At their best, questions signal the unfinished nature of historical knowledge, the way its fragments can never be wholly put together.

A People's History parts company with other historical inquiries by being as radical in its rhetoric as in its politics. For Zinn, questions are not shoulder-shrugging admissions of the historian's epistemological quandary so much as devices that shock readers into considering the past anew.

Twenty-nine questions give shape to chapter 16, a question on nearly every page. Big, in-your-face questions with no postmodern shilly-shallying:

- Would America's behavior during the Second World War "be in keeping with a 'people's war'?"
- Would the Allies' victory deliver a "blow to imperialism, racism, totalitarianism, [and] militarism," and "represent something significantly different" from their Axis foes?
- Would America's wartime policies "respect the rights of ordinary people everywhere to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?"
- "Would postwar America, in its policies at home and overseas, exemplify the values for which the war was supposed to have been fought?"¹⁶

No, no, no, and no. When questions aren't rattled off as yes-no binaries, they're delivered in a stark either-or, a rhetorical turn almost never encountered in professional historical writing:

- "Did the behavior of the United States show that her war aims

were humanitarian, *or* centered on power and profit?"¹⁷

- “Was she fighting the war to end the control by some nations over others *or* to make sure the controlling nations were friends of the United States?”¹⁸
- With the defeat of the Axis, were fascism’s “essential elements—militarism, racism, imperialism—now gone? *Or* were they absorbed into the already poisoned bones of the victors?”¹⁹

Facing the abyss of indeterminacy and multiple causality, most historians would flee the narrow straits of “either-or” for the calmer port of “both-and.” Not Zinn. Whether phrased as yes-no or either-or, his questions always have a single right answer.

A Slippery Timeline

In his lead-up to a discussion of the atomic bomb, Zinn makes this claim: “At the start of World War II German planes dropped bombs on Rotterdam in Holland, Coventry in England, and elsewhere. Roosevelt had described these as ‘inhuman barbarism that has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity.’”²⁰ Zinn then adds: “These German bombings [of Rotterdam and Coventry] were very small compared with the British and American bombings of German cities.”²¹ He then lists the names of some of the most devastating Allied bombing campaigns, including the most notorious, the firebombing of Dresden.

In a technical sense, Zinn is on solid ground. In the bombing of Rotterdam on May 14, 1940, there was an estimated loss of a thousand lives, and in the bombing of Coventry on November 14, 1940, there were approximately 550 deaths.²² In Dresden, by comparison, somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000 people lost their lives.²³ Zinn’s point is clear: before we wag an accusing finger at the Nazis, we should take a long hard look in the mirror.

But in order to make this point, Zinn plays fast and loose with historical context. He achieves his desired effect in two stages. First, he begins his claim with the phrase “at the start of World War II,” but the Dresden raid occurred five years later, in February 1945, when all bets were off and long-standing distinctions between military targets (“strategic bombing”) and civilian targets (“saturation bombing”) had been rendered irrelevant. If the start of the war is the point of comparison, we should focus on the activities of the Royal Air Force (the United States did not declare war on Germany until December 11, 1941, four days after Pearl Harbor). During the early months of the war, the RAF Bomber Command was restricted to dropping propaganda leaflets over Germany and trying, ineffectually, to disable the German fleet docked at Wilhelmshaven, off Germany’s northern coast.²⁴ In other words, despite the phrase “at the start of World War II,” Zinn’s point only derives its force by violating chronology and sequence.

A closer look at the claim shows a second mechanism at work, one even more slippery than this chronological bait and switch. The claim ultimately derives its power from a single source: the expected ignorance of the reader. People familiar with the chronology of World War II immediately sense a disjuncture between the phrase “at the start of World War II” and the date of the Coventry raid.

By the time the Luftwaffe’s Stukas dive-bombed Coventry, Nazi

pilots were seasoned veterans with hundreds of sorties under their belts. That’s because the war had begun over a year earlier, on September 1, 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland.

Eight months before striking Rotterdam and fourteen months before bombing Coventry, the Nazis unleashed Operation *Weserkante*, the decimation of Warsaw. Never before in the history of warfare had such a massive force taken to the skies, an assault that made Rotterdam look like a walk in the park. In a single day, September 25, 1939 (“Black Monday”), the Luftwaffe flew 1,150 sorties over Warsaw, dropping 560 tons of high explosives and 72 tons of incendiary bombs with the singular goal of turning the city into an inferno. They succeeded. Smoke billowed 10,000 feet into the sky, and fires could be seen from as far as 70 miles away. When

Facing the abyss of multiple causality, most historians flee the narrow straits of “either-or.” Not Zinn. His questions always have a single right answer.

doomed Polish troops surrendered on September 27, more than half of Warsaw’s buildings had been damaged or destroyed, a small number compared with the toll in human life. Forty thousand Poles perished in the attack.²⁵

But the Nazis’ aims went far beyond forcing a Polish surrender. Their explicit goal was to terrorize—a policy known as *Schrecklichkeit* (“frightfulness”). They outfitted their dive-bombers with screechers, swooping down with ear-piercing ferocity and strafing dazed refugees as they fled the blazing city. On the eve of the Polish assault, Hitler explained that war on Poland did not fit traditional categories such as reaching a certain destination or establishing a fixed line. The goal was the “elimination of living forces,” and Hitler told his commanders to wage war with “the greatest brutality and without mercy.”²⁶ As General Max von Schenckendorff put it, “Germans are the masters and Poles are slaves.”²⁷

Zinn is silent about Poland. Instead, he approvingly cites Simone Weil, the French philosopher and social activist. At a time when the *Einsatzgruppen* were herding Polish Jews into the forest and mowing them down before open pits, Weil compared the difference between Nazi fascism and the democratic principles of England and the United States to a mask hiding the true character of both. Once we see through this mask, Weil argued, we will understand that the enemy is not “the one facing us across the frontier or the battlelines, which is not so much our enemy as our brothers’ enemy,” but the “Apparatus,” the one “that calls itself our protector and makes us its slaves.” Zinn adds that the real struggle of World War II was not between nations, but rather that the “real war was inside each nation.”²⁸ Given his stance, it’s no wonder that Zinn chooses to begin the war not in 1939, but a full year later.

Undue Certainty

The story that Zinn tells about the atomic bomb is familiar to anyone who has paid attention to the debates surrounding this event during the past 50 years. His goal is to demolish the narrative learned in high school: that faced with the prospect of the entire Japanese nation hunkered down in underground bunkers and holed up in caves, the United States dropped the bomb with profound remorse and only then as a last resort. Without the bomb, so the story goes, the war would have dragged on for months, if not years, and the United States would have suffered incalculable losses.

Zinn will have none of it. For him, the bomb was more about the hydraulics of capitalism than the saving of lives, more about cowing the Soviets than subduing the Japanese. The reader again encounters a couplet of rhetorical questions: Was “too much money and effort ... invested in the atomic bomb not to drop it?” Or was it because “the United States was anxious to drop the bomb before the Russians entered the war against Japan?”²⁹

To make his argument, Zinn draws on the two defining texts of the revisionist school, Gar Alperovitz’s *Atomic Diplomacy* (1967) and Martin Sherwin’s *A World Destroyed* (1975).³⁰ Their narrative goes something like this: in a conflict distinguished by war crimes, the atomic bomb tops the list, as the slaughter and destruction it inflicted was wholly unnecessary in bringing the war to an end. With Allied victories at Saipan, Luzon, and Iwo Jima, and the establishment of a beachhead at Okinawa, and following the relentless saturation bombing of Tokyo by conventional B-29s during May of 1945, the Japanese were already on their knees. The real reason for the bomb had little to do with Japanese capitulation and everything to do with the flexing of American muscle. Accordingly, the atomic bomb did not so much end World War II as initiate the first round in yet another conflict: the Cold War.

The linchpin of Zinn’s case is an intercepted cable sent by the Japanese Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo to his ambassador in Moscow on July 13, 1945. The cable ostensibly shows the Japanese desire to capitulate to the Americans. Zinn writes: “It was known the Japanese had instructed their ambassador in Moscow to work on peace negotiations with the Allies.... Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo wired his ambassador in Moscow: ‘Unconditional surrender is the only obstacle to peace.’” The only condition—a minor one for Zinn—called for allowing Emperor Hirohito to remain as a figurehead.³¹

A smoking gun? Not necessarily. Sending a cable is only half the story. What happened when the cable was received at the other end? On this point Zinn is mum.

The Japanese had been courting the still-neutral Soviets for months, with airy proposals containing scant details about surrender terms. In fact, as late as June 1945, their backs to the wall and all hope seemingly lost, the Japanese were still trying to barter with the Soviets, going so far as to offer Manchuria and southern Karafuto in exchange for the oil needed to stave off an American invasion.³² The Japanese dilly-dallying had worn the Soviets’ patience thin. After receiving his foreign minister’s cable, Naotake Sato, Japan’s ambassador in Moscow, wired back to his superiors that the latest proposal would mean little to the Soviets, limited as it was to “an enumeration of previous abstractions, lacking in concreteness.”³³ The Soviet deputy foreign minister, Solomon A.

Lozovsky, was more blunt. The Japanese offer rang hollow with “mere generalities and no concrete proposal.”³⁴ The Soviets snubbed the emperor’s request to send his special emissary, Fumimaro Konoe, to Moscow because Tokyo’s surrender conditions remained too “opaque.”³⁵ Readers of Zinn’s account learn nothing of this broader context.

Anyone who raises the possibility of a negotiated peace versus an unconditional surrender is playing the game that historians call the counterfactual, a thought experiment about how the past might have turned out had things not happened as they did. Its game pieces are *if*, *may*, and *might*. Consider this gambit by John Dower, one of the deans of Japanese studies and the author of the



Pulitzer Prize-winning *Embracing Defeat*: “Perhaps an American guarantee of the imperial system might have prodded the Japanese militarists to capitulate before the bombs were dropped. We will never know.” Or this by Japan’s Sadao Asada, professor of history at Kyoto’s Doshisha University: “Perhaps no account of Japan’s surrender decision is complete without counterfactuals, however risky they may be.... Without the use of the atomic bomb, but *with Soviet entry* and with continued strategic bombing and naval blockade, would Japan have surrendered before November 1—the day scheduled for the U.S. invasion of Kyushu? Available Japanese data do not provide a conclusive answer.” Or this formulation by Stanford University’s Barton J. Bernstein: “These alternatives—promising to retain the Japanese monarchy, awaiting the Soviets’ entry, and even more conventional bombing—very probably could have ended the war before the dreaded invasion. Still, the evidence—to borrow a phrase from F.D.R.—is somewhat ‘iffy,’ and no one who looks at the intransigence of the Japanese militarists should have full confidence in those other strategies.”³⁶

The counterfactuals’ qualifiers and second-guesses convey the modesty one is obliged to adopt when conjuring up a past that did not occur. But when Zinn plies the counterfactual, he seems to know something no one else knows—including historians who’ve given their professional lives to the topic: “If only the Americans had not insisted on unconditional surrender—that is, if they were willing to accept one condition to the surrender, that the Emperor,

a holy figure to the Japanese, remain in place—the Japanese would have agreed to stop the war.”³⁷ Not *might have*, not *may have*, not *could have*. But “*would have* agreed to stop the war.” Not only is Zinn certain about the history that’s happened. He’s certain about the history that didn’t.

From where might Zinn have derived such certainty? It seems that once he made up his mind, nothing—not new evidence, not new scholarship, not the discovery of previously unknown documents, not the revelations of historical actors on their deathbeds—could shake it. In the 20-plus years between the book’s original publication and the 2003 Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition, Zinn’s narrative remained virtually untouched by decades of prodigious scholarship.

For example, in the wake of Hirohito’s death in 1989, a veil of silence lifted, and Japan experienced an outpouring of memoirs,

Not only is Zinn certain about the history that’s happened. He’s certain about the history that didn’t.

diaries, and tell-all exposés about the war years, some by the emperor’s inner coterie.³⁸ These works, as well as previously untranslated Japanese documents, have transformed historians’ understanding of the war’s last days. Yet not a single new reference to these works finds its way into Zinn’s narrative. Despite a 2003 copyright, chapter 16, “A People’s War?,” remains the same, word-for-word, as the original 1980 edition, save for one new reference (to a book published in 1981) and two new sentences, one about the Haitian Revolution and the other about the War Resisters League.³⁹

Nor is chapter 16 an exception. The 20 original chapters in the book constitute 575 of its 729 pages. From 1980 to 2003, *A People’s History* went through four editions, each time adding new material on contemporary history, right up through the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As for the original 20 chapters, spanning a half millennium of human history, only four new references spruce up its original 1980 bibliography—with three of the four by the same author, Blanche Wiesen Cook.

On occasions when Zinn was asked if a quarter century of new historical scholarship had shed light on his original formulations, he seemed mostly unfazed. Consider his response to questions about the espionage trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. *A People’s History* devotes nearly two and a half pages to the case, casting doubt on the legitimacy of the Rosenbergs’ convictions as well as that of their accomplice, Morton Sobell. Sobell escaped the electric chair but served 19 years in Alcatraz and other federal prisons, maintaining innocence the entire time. However, in September 2008, Sobell, age 91, admitted to a *New York Times* reporter that he had indeed been a Russian spy, implicating his fellow defen-

dant Julius Rosenberg as well. Three days later, in the wake of Sobell’s admission, the Rosenbergs’ two sons also concluded with regret that their father had been a spy.⁴⁰ Yet, when the same *New York Times* reporter contacted Zinn for a reaction, he was only “mildly surprised,” adding, “To me it didn’t matter whether they were guilty or not. The most important thing was they did not get a fair trial in the atmosphere of cold war hysteria.”⁴¹

Undue Popularity

In the 32 years since its original publication, *A People’s History* has gone from a book that buzzed about the ear of the dominant narrative to its current status where, in many circles, it has *become* the dominant narrative. The book appears on university reading lists in economics, political science, anthropology, cultural studies, women’s studies, ethnic studies, Chicano studies, and African American studies, in addition to history. *A People’s History* remains a perennial favorite in courses for future teachers, and in some, it is the only history book on the syllabus.⁴²

In 2008, the National Council for the Social Studies invited Zinn to address its annual conference—the largest gathering of social studies teachers in the country. Zinn’s speech met with raucous applause, after which copies of *A People’s History* were given out to attendees courtesy of HarperCollins. Writing in the organization’s newsletter, its president Syd Golston hailed Zinn as “an inspiration to many of us.”⁴³ Back in 1980, who could have predicted that a book that cast the Founding Fathers as a shadowy cabal who foisted on the American people “the most effective system of national control devised in modern times” would one day be featured on the National History Education Clearinghouse’s website, an initiative funded by the US Department of Education?⁴⁴

In many ways, *A People’s History* and traditional textbooks are mirror images that relegate students to similar roles as absorbers—not analysts—of information, except from different points on the political spectrum. In a study examining features of historical writing, linguist Avon Crismore found that historians frequently used qualifying language to signal the soft underbelly of historical certainty. But when Crismore looked at the writing historians do in textbooks, these linguistic markers disappeared.⁴⁵ A search in *A People’s History* for qualifiers mostly comes up empty. Instead, the seams of history are concealed by the presence of an author who speaks with thunderous certainty.

To be sure, *A People’s History* brings together material from movements that rocked the discipline during the 1960s and 1970s—working-class history, feminist history, black history, and various ethnic histories. Together, these perspectives blew apart the consensus school of the 1950s by showing the validity of interpretations that arose from varied “positionalities” toward historical events. However, while *A People’s History* draws liberally from this work, the book resolutely preserves that old-time, objectivist epistemology. It substitutes one monolithic reading of the past for another, albeit one that claims to be morally superior and promises to better position students to take action in the present.

There is, however, one way that *A People’s History* differs from traditional history textbooks. It is written by a skilled stylist. Zinn’s muscular presence makes for brisk reading compared with the turgid prose of the textbook.

It’s no surprise then that, for many readers, *A People’s History* becomes not a way to view the past but *the* way. Such is the

impression one gets from scanning reviews of the book on Amazon. To some readers, *A People's History* takes on, as Michael Kazin puts it, “the force and authority of revelation.”⁴⁶ Reader gmt903 recommends the book to “any history teacher or anyone just interested in American history” because “TRUTH is the core of this book.” Malcolm from New York writes, “This book tells the truth, whether it tells the ‘patriotic’ truth or not.” For Knowitall from Santa Monica, *A People's History* simply provides “the plain, unvarnished truth.”⁴⁷ Zinn’s charisma as a speaker apparently evoked similar reactions. In *You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, a documentary film that loosely follows Zinn’s autobiography of the same name, an aspiring teacher, sporting a shock of red hair and a three-day scruff, explains why he came to hear Zinn lecture: “I want to teach the truth to my students someday so that’s why I am here.”⁴⁸



A History with No Hands

Howard Zinn lived an admirable life, never veering from the things he believed in. But the man himself is not the issue when a teacher conducts a lesson on the atomic bomb using an account based on two secondary works written more than 40 years ago; or conflates the Nazi bombing campaign with the Allies, ignoring Hitler’s assault on Poland; or places Jim Crow and the Holocaust on the same footing, without explaining that as color barriers were being dismantled in the United States, the bricks were being laid for the crematoria at Auschwitz.

It is here that Zinn’s undeniable charisma becomes educationally dangerous, especially when we become attached to his passionate concern for the underdog. The danger mounts when we are talking about how we educate the young, those who do not yet get the interpretive game, who are just learning that claims must be judged not for their alignment with current issues of social justice, but for the data they present and their ability to account for the unruly fibers of evidence that stubbornly jut out from any interpretive frame. It is here that Zinn’s power of persuasion extinguishes students’ ability to think and speaks directly to their hearts.

Many reasons account for *A People's History's* preternatural shelf life. Historians may have known about Columbus’s atrocities since 1552, when Bartolomé de las Casas laid them out in grisly detail. But for Americans raised on textbooks with names like *The American Pageant* or *Triumph of the American Nation*, such descriptions came as shocking revelations. Zinn shrewdly recog-

nized that what might have been common knowledge among subscribers to the *Radical History Review* was largely invisible to the broader reading public.

Americans like their narratives clean. It took Zinn’s brilliance to draw a direct line from the rapier Columbus used to hack off the hands of the Arawaks, to the rifles aimed by Andrew Jackson to give the Creek Nation no quarter, and to the 9,000-pound “Little Boy” that Paul Tibbets fatefully released over Hiroshima in August 1945. For many, seeing these disparate events as part of a single unbroken narrative had a transformative effect. Sportswriter Dave Zirin recalled encountering *A People's History* as a teenager: “I thought history was about learning that the Magna Carta was signed in 1215. I couldn’t tell you what the Magna Carta was, but I knew it was signed in 1215. Howard took this history of great men ... and turned it on its pompous head ... speaking to a desire so many share: to actually make history instead of being history’s victim.”⁴⁹

In his 2004 *Dissent* review, Michael Kazin suggested that the major reason behind Zinn’s success was the timeliness of his narrative: “Zinn fills a need shaped by our recent past. The years since 1980 have not been good ones for the American left.... *A People's History* offers a certain consolation.”⁵⁰

Kazin often hits the mark, but on this score he’s way off. Zinn remains popular not because he is timely but precisely because he’s not. *A People's History* speaks directly to our inner Holden Caulfield. Our heroes are shameless frauds, our parents and teachers conniving liars, our textbooks propagandistic slop. Long before we could Google accounts of a politician’s latest indiscretion, Zinn offered a national “gotcha.” *They’re all phonies* is a message that never goes out of style.

It was only a matter of time before *A People's History* spawned no-qualification narratives from the other side of the political aisle, their pages full of swagger and, like their inspiration, best-sellers. Some commentators are not terribly bothered by these feisty one-sided blockbusters. At the height of the 2010 Texas curriculum controversy, Jonathan Zimmerman, a tireless editorialist and a historian of education at New York University, suggested that teachers pair *A People's History* with one of its conservative counterparts and teach both. Students would then learn “that Americans disagree—vehemently—about the making and the meaning of their nation. And it would require the kids to sort out the differences on their own.”⁵¹

I shudder to think about the implications of Zimmerman’s recipe for intellectual alchemy. Pitting two monolithic narratives, each strident, immodest, and unyielding in its position, against one another turns history into a European soccer match where fans set fires in the stands and taunt the opposition with scurrilous epithets. Instead of encouraging us to think, such a history teaches us how to jeer.

In criticizing Harvard history professor Oscar Handlin, who reviewed *A People's History* when it first came out, Zinn said, “He hated my book.... Whether historians liked or disliked my book depended really on their point of view.”⁵²

Admittedly, this happens frequently. Too often, whether or not we like someone’s politics determines whether or not we like their history. Many of us find ourselves reading the present onto the past, especially with issues we care about deeply. I know I do it, and I don’t consider it a source of pride. Instead of entering the past with a wish list, shouldn’t our goal instead be open-

mindfulness? Shouldn't we welcome—at least sometimes—new facts or interpretations that lead to surprise, disquiet, doubt, or even a wholesale change of mind?

When history, in the words of British historian John Saville, is expected to “do its duty,” we sap it of autonomy and drain it of vitality.⁵³ Everything fits. The question mark falls victim to the exclamation point.

A history of unalloyed certainties is dangerous because it invites a slide into intellectual fascism. History as truth, issued from the left or from the right, abhors shades of gray. It seeks to stamp out the democratic insight that people of good will can see the same thing and come to different conclusions. It imputes the basest of motives to those who view the world from a different perch. It detests equivocation and extinguisches *perhaps, maybe, might*, and the most execrable of them all, *on the other hand*. For the truth has no hands.

Such a history atrophies our tolerance for complexity. It makes us allergic to exceptions to the rule. Worst of all, it depletes the moral courage we need to revise our beliefs in the face of new evidence. It ensures, ultimately, that tomorrow we will think exactly as we thought yesterday—and the day before, and the day before that.

Is that what we want for our students? □

Endnotes

- Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 10. In this article, all references to Howard Zinn's *A People's History* are drawn from the Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition.
- Michael Kammen, “How the Other Half Lived,” *Washington Post Book World*, March 23, 1980, 7; Oscar Handlin, “Arawaks,” review of *A People's History of the United States*, by Howard Zinn, *American Scholar* 49, no. 4 (Autumn 1980): 546–550; and Eric Foner, “Majority Report,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1980, BR3–BR4.
- Michael Kazin, “Howard Zinn's History Lessons,” *Dissent* 51, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 81–85.
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 418–419 (emphasis added).
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 418–419.
- Horace Mann Bond, “Should the Negro Care Who Wins the War?” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 223, no. 1 (1942): 81–84.
- Bond, “Should the Negro Care Who Wins the War?” 81.
- Bond, “Should the Negro Care Who Wins the War?” 81.
- Lawrence S. Wittner, *Rebels Against War: The American Peace Movement, 1941–1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).
- Wittner, *Rebels Against War*, 47.
- Wittner, *Rebels Against War*, 47.
- Wittner, *Rebels Against War*, 46.
- Aileen S. Kraditor, “American Radical Historians on Their Heritage,” *Past & Present* 56, no. 1 (1972): 137.
- Kraditor, “American Radical Historians.”
- See, for example, “Why Students Should Study History: An Interview with Howard Zinn,” in *Rethinking Schools: An Agenda for Change*, ed. David Levine, Robert Lowe, Bob Peterson, and Rita Tenorio (New York: New Press, 1995), 97.
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 408.
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 412 (emphasis added).
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 412 (emphasis added).
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 424 (emphasis added).
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 421.
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 421.
- British National Archives, “Heroes & Villains: Winston Churchill and the Bombing of Dresden,” www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/heroesvillains/g1/cs1/g1cs1s1a.htm.
- Zinn lists the number of deaths at Dresden as “more than 100,000” (page 421), citing David Irving's 1965 book, *The Destruction of Dresden*. With purposes that have become easier to discern with time, Irving credulously (or calculatingly) drew on mortality figures provided by the Nazis for propagandistic purposes. More recently, a commission of 13 prominent German historians led by Rolf-Dieter Müller, scientific director of the German Armed Forces Military History Research Institute in Potsdam, conducted an exhaustive examination of the city's birth records, comparing them to lists of refugees from the firebombing. The commission identified 18,000 victims of the raids, with “a maximum of 25,000,” once and for all debunking the claims long favored by Nazi sympathizers who held up the Allies' bombing of Dresden as tantamount to Nazi atrocities at Auschwitz. See Rolf-Dieter Müller, cited in Bojan Pancevski, “Dresden Bombing Death Toll Lower Than Thought,” *The Telegraph* (London), October 2, 2008. See also Rolf-Dieter Müller, Nicole Schönherr, and Thomas Wiedera, eds., *Die Zerstörung Dresden* [The Destruction of Dresden] (Germany: V&R Unipress, 2010). On David Irving's mendacity, see Richard J. Evans, *Lying about Hitler: History,*

Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

- Alan J. Levine, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany, 1940–1945* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992).
- Walter J. Boyne, *The Influence of Air Power upon History* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican, 2003), 198; and E. R. Hooton, *Phoenix Triumphant: The Rise and Rise of the Luftwaffe* (London: Arms and Armour, 1994), 188.
- Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 9. Rossino is citing from the Nuremberg war trials, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals*, vol. 10 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1951), “Fuehrer's Speech to Commanders in Chief, 22 August 1939,” 698ff.
- Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland*, 141.
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 420.
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 423.
- Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam; The Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power* (New York: Vintage, 1967); and Martin J. Sherwin, *A World Destroyed: The Atomic Bomb and the Grand Alliance* (New York: Knopf, 1975).
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 423. Zinn's source is Sherwin's *A World Destroyed*, 235. However, a cable containing these words is a chimera with astonishing longevity, for this quotation can be found nowhere in the record of decrypted Japanese communiqués. Zinn recapitulates a blunder made by Sherwin, who falsely attributed these words to a cable sent by Shigenori Togo. But Sherwin's footnote shows his source to be not a decoded Japanese cable, but Robert J. C. Butow's *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1954). The plot gets murkier, as Butow's source is not an actual cable, either. Rather, Butow drew on a diary entry by Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, in which Forrestal jotted down his impressions of the meaning of the Japanese intercept. To add insult to injury, rather than quoting Forrestal's actual words, Butow paraphrased. In other words, Zinn's intercepted “cable” is actually Sherwin's interpretation of Butow's interpretation of Forrestal's interpretation of a War Department briefing that, over time and an endless number of repetitions, has turned into the supposed cable (a document now easily accessible on the Internet, as it has been declassified for over 30 years; <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1945Berlinv01>). For the broader context of the Shigenori Togo-Naotake Sato exchanges, which show that Japanese demands went well beyond retaining the emperor, see Robert Maddox, “*American Prometheus*: Beating the Dead Horse of Hiroshima Revisionism,” *Passport: The Newsletter of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations* (December 2007), www.shaftr.org/passport/2007/december/Maddox.pdf; and Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 221–232. For Forrestal's original diary entry, see *The Forrestal Diaries*, ed. Walter Millis (New York: Viking, 1951), 74–76.
- Herbert P. Bix, “Japan's Delayed Surrender: A Reinterpretation,” *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 214.
- Sato Naotake cited in Bix, “Japan's Delayed Surrender,” 215.
- Solomon Lozovsky cited in Sadao Asada, “The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan's Decision to Surrender: A Reconsideration,” *Pacific Historical Review* 67, no. 4 (November 1998): 502.
- Asada, “The Shock of the Atomic Bomb.”
- John W. Dowder, “Three Narratives of Our Humanity,” in *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, ed. Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 84–85; Asada, “The Shock of the Atomic Bomb,” 510; and Barton J. Bernstein, “The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered,” *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 1 (January/February 1995): 150.
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 423.
- See Herbert P. Bix, “Emperor Hirohito's War,” *History Today* 41, no. 12 (December 1991): 12–19.
- The new reference is to Blanche Wiesen Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower* (New York: Doubleday, 1981).
- Sam Roberts, “Figure in Rosenberg Case Admits to Soviet Spying,” *New York Times*, September 12, 2008; and Sam Roberts, “Father Was a Spy, Sons Conclude with Regret,” *New York Times*, September 17, 2008.
- Sam Roberts, “Podcast: Rosenberg Case Open and Shut?” *New York Times*, September 18, 2008. Zinn's attitude toward new scholarship seems to have characterized his talks to teachers as well. The chief historian of the JFK Library, Sheldon Stern, invited Zinn to speak several times at summer institutes for local teachers, where Zinn was “always a big hit.” Stern, however, recalls being struck by the fact that Zinn “invariably placed a folder of handwritten, yellowed, dog-eared, and clearly decades-old notes on the podium before he spoke. Not surprisingly, he never referred to recent studies, interpretations, or evidence.” Sheldon M. Stern, “Howard Zinn Briefly Recalled,” *History News Network*, February 9, 2010.
- See, for example, EDU 514, “Teaching Elementary Social Studies,” at the State University of New York College at Cortland; SS ED 430W, “Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary Grades,” at the Pennsylvania State University, Altoona; EDUC M442, “Teaching Secondary Social Studies,” at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis; and Education 342/542, “Critical Approaches to Teaching High School English and Social Studies (Social Studies Specialization),” at Occidental College.
- Syd Golston, *The Social Studies Professional* (March/April 2010), 4.
- Zinn, *A People's History*, 59; and Lee Ann Ghajar, “The People Speak: To Zinn or Not to Zinn,” TeachingHistory.org, January 5, 2010. Although I was executive director of the National History Education Clearinghouse from 2007–2009, this blog entry was posted after my tenure.
- Avon Crismore, “The Rhetoric of Textbooks: Metadiscourse,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 16, no. 3 (1984): 279–296.
- Kazin, “Howard Zinn's History Lessons,” 84.
- Amazon.com customer reviews of *A People's History*: gmt903, “Great Ideas for the Classroom!” January 17, 2007; Malcolm Tramm, “Zinn Has Given Research a New Meaning,” December 25, 2003; and Mr. Knowitall, “Some Things Never Change,” May 28, 2007.
- Howard Zinn: You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, directed by Deb Ellis and Denis Mueller, narrated by Matt Damon (First Run Features, 2004), DVD, minute 1:08.
- Dave Zirin, “Howard Zinn: The Historian Who Made History,” *ColdType* (March 2010), www.coldtype.net/Assets/10/Pdfs/0210.Zinn.pdf.
- Kazin, “Howard Zinn's History Lessons,” 84.
- Jonathan Zimmerman, “American History—Right and Left: Liberals and Conservatives Have Differing Views; Why Not Give Students Both Sides and Let Them Decide?” *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 2010.
- Howard Zinn: You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, DVD, minute 56:30.
- John Saville, “The Radical Left Expects the Past to Do Its Duty,” *Labor History* 18, no. 2 (1977): 267–274.

Are Sleepy Students Learning?



How does the mind work—and especially how does it learn? Teachers’ instructional decisions are based on a mix of theories learned in teacher education, trial and error, craft knowledge, and gut instinct. Such knowledge often serves us well, but is there anything sturdier to rely on?

Cognitive science is an interdisciplinary field of researchers from psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, philosophy, computer science, and anthropology who seek to understand the mind. In this regular American Educator column, we consider findings from this field that are strong and clear enough to merit classroom application.

BY DANIEL T. WILLINGHAM

Question: Some of my students seem really sleepy—they stifle yawns and struggle to keep tired eyes open—especially in the morning. This can’t be good for their learning, right? Is there anything I can do to help these students?

Answer: Sleep is indeed essential to learning, and US teenagers (and teenagers in most industrialized countries) don’t get enough. Although recent work shows there is a strong biological reason that teens tend not to sleep enough, there is some good news in this research. First, the impact on learning, although quite real, does not appear to be as drastic as we might fear. Second, the sleep deficit teens tend to run is not inevitable; with some planning, they can get more shuttley.

Daniel T. Willingham is a professor of cognitive psychology at the University of Virginia. His most recent book, When Can You Trust the Experts? How to Tell Good Science from Bad in Education, provides a shortcut for evaluating claims about programs and strategies. His previous book, Why Don’t Students Like School?, helps teachers apply research on the mind to the classroom setting. For his articles on education, go to www.danielwillingham.com. Readers can pose questions to “Ask the Cognitive Scientist” by sending an e-mail to amered@aft.org. Future columns will try to address readers’ questions.

Researchers studying both humans and other animals have worked over the last 50 years to answer what would seem to be a straightforward question: Why do we sleep? The need for sleep appears to be as basic and universal as the need to eat. All animals sleep (with the possible exception of sharks), and all animals, if deprived of sleep, will “catch up” with extra sleep when given the chance. The universality of sleep across species indicates that it is essential to life. Yet its purpose is not known. It may be related to energy conservation or nervous system recuperation.¹ One thing sleep clearly doesn’t do: it doesn’t provide a time for the brain to “turn off.” Most of the brain is active during most of the time you’re asleep.² But whatever sleep does for the brain, it’s clear that lack of sleep brings wide-ranging cognitive costs,³ and sleepiness is a major contributor to workplace and automotive accidents.⁴

As many teachers and parents are well aware, US high school students don’t sleep enough. Although no set of guidelines is considered authoritative, a generally accepted rule of thumb is that adolescents should ideally get nine or more hours of sleep

each night. Eight hours is considered borderline, and less than eight, insufficient. By this measure, only about 8 percent of teens report optimal sleep, and the majority—69 percent—report insufficient sleep.⁵

Despite the fact that teenagers don't get enough sleep, research confirms that students actually sleep less as they get older. Large-scale studies of sleep habits in as many as 20 countries show that students sleep less as they progress through their teen years, especially on school days. American 9-year-olds get about 10 hours of sleep on weeknights. By the time they are 18, the figure is just 7.5 hours. But on weekends, the decline is much smaller: 9-year-olds sleep just over 10 hours, and 18-year-olds sleep about 9.5 hours each night.⁶

The reduction in sleep as the teen years progress is correlated with a change in chronotype—that is, an individual's time-of-day preference. Some people like to stay up late and feel most alert at that time, whereas others prefer mornings. These preferences do have an impact on cognitive performance: people perform better on measures of attention, memory, and executive functioning when tests are administered at their preferred time of day,⁷ and these effects are observed at all different ages.⁸ Throughout the teen years, the preference for evenings increases,⁹ and this preference is observed in cultures throughout the world.¹⁰ Hence, the increasing sleep loss as kids move through the teen years is due to staying up late. On weekends, staying up late causes little sleep loss because kids can sleep in. On weekdays, they go to bed somewhat earlier, but not early enough to make up for the fact that they must rise quite early to get to school.

Cognitive Consequences of Poor Sleep

What happens to students' ability to think and reason when they are sleepy? Conducting this research is more difficult than one might think. First, researchers are reluctant to conduct experiments in which they ask children to reduce sleep significantly, and parents are, of course, reluctant to enroll their children in such studies. Thus, these studies tend to entail relatively mild sleep deprivation, and usually only for one night or occasionally for as many as three or four nights. But what really concerns us is chronic insufficient sleep, not brief sleep loss.

The alternative is not to ask students to sleep less as part of an experiment, but rather to measure typical sleep and cognition in a large group of students and test whether the poor sleepers differ from the good sleepers. This method seems to get at the sleep issue of interest but carries drawbacks of its own. Poor sleepers may differ from good sleepers in many ways other than the amount of sleep they get—for example, socioeconomic status (homes of low-income families tend to be noisier and more crowded), diet, level of anxiety in the child, and so on.

While both types of research have limitations, in this case both also lead to similar conclusions: poor sleep leads to worse perfor-

mance on an array of cognitive and behavioral measures. Most of these effects are seen in both younger children¹¹ (under 12 years) and older children¹² (aged 12–18). (This article will focus on older children, as most of the research has been conducted on this age group.) What's surprising is that the consequences of sleep deprivation are not as widespread as you might think—some cognitive functions seem little affected—and the effect is not as large as you might guess.

In both correlational and experimental studies, poor sleepers show slightly worse performance than good sleepers on measures of executive function—that is, tasks that require maintaining or manipulating information in mind.¹³ For example, a student might hear a sequence of four letters and numbers in random order, and be asked to report first the numbers, then the letters, each in ascending order (e.g., if a subject heard “8 J 3 R,” she should say, “3 8 J R”). Each sequence is scored as correct (1 point) or incorrect (0 points). In one study like this, subjects who got insufficient sleep averaged 10.7 points (of 24 possible) and subjects who got sufficient sleep averaged 11.7 points.¹⁴

There are also reliable effects of sleep deprivation on students' mood and behavior. Both younger and older kids who have slept less are rated by parents as more irritable, hyperactive, and inattentive. They are also more likely to be anxious or depressed.¹⁵ However, since these findings come from correlational studies, we must question whether the mood disturbances are caused by lack of sleep, or are merely associated with it. Data from children with sleep-related breathing disorders (e.g., sleep apnea, which involves pauses in breathing and shallow breathing that disturb sleep) are helpful in showing that sleep loss actually causes changes in mood. Some cases of disordered sleep can be corrected via surgery that helps children's breathing, and such children not only sleep better postsurgery, they show dramatic improvement in mood.¹⁶

Teachers and parents most often note that sleep-deprived children of all ages seem inattentive and have difficulty concentrating.¹⁷ Most will seem sleepy and lacking in focus, but some become impulsive and hyperactive. Indeed, it has been suggested that sleep-deprived children are behaviorally similar to children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.¹⁸ Curiously, formal studies of attention in which the speed and accuracy of responses is recorded (in contrast to ratings of attention made by parents or teachers) show little or no cost when young children are sleep deprived.¹⁹ This finding contrasts with that of adults, who do show sleep-related deficits on attention tasks.²⁰ Young children also show little (if any) effect of sleep deprivation on memory.²¹ This finding is particularly surprising, as sleep is known to have a consistent and fairly robust effect on memory in adults.²² (It's important to keep in mind here the limitations of this body of research mentioned above. Some children may suffer severe, chronic sleep deprivation and may experience attention and memory problems,

Only about 8 percent of teens report optimal sleep, and the majority—69 percent—report insufficient sleep.

but researchers are not going to design studies in which children must endure long-term sleep loss.)

In sum, sleep deprivation influences many (but not all) aspects of children's mood, cognition, and behavior. But do these effects have consequences for performance at school? Yes. Again, the data are mostly correlational, but experiments draw the same conclusions.²³ Lack of sleep is associated with poorer school performance as rated by students themselves²⁴ and by teachers.²⁵ Restricted sleep is also associated with lower grades in studies in the United States,²⁶ a finding replicated in Norway²⁷ and Korea.²⁸ Students who sleep less are more likely to repeat a grade (21 percent vs. 11 percent in one study of Belgian 8- to 10-year-olds²⁹), and according to studies conducted in Germany³⁰ and Turkey,³¹ they score lower on standardized tests taken at the end of schooling.

Biological Changes That Prompt Teen Sleep Loss

Why don't teens get enough sleep? The answer would seem obvious: teens are hypersocial, and so they stay up late on the phone or on Facebook. And they feel pressure from peers to stay up late, as it's a mark of being grown up. Those social factors may play a role, but biological factors are likely more important.

Humans know that it's time to go to sleep via internal cues generated by the body. There are two types of internal cues. One is a circadian rhythm in which hormones that induce sleepiness are released at night and those that induce wakefulness are released throughout the day, beginning early in the morning. Two of the most important hormones are melatonin, which makes you sleepy (and the release of which is suppressed by light exposure), and cortisol, which makes you wakeful. The cyclical workings of these hormones are obvious to anyone who has suffered from jet lag: your body's release of hormones that affect sleepiness remains (at first) on your home schedule when you travel. The second internal cue for sleep is sleep pressure, meaning that the longer you have been without sleep, the more you feel inclined to sleep.³²

We are also sensitive to cues external to the body that it's time to go to sleep: cues like reduced light and knowing it's the right time for sleep. These external cues are also important for adjusting the internal circadian cues; if you travel to a new time zone, your body does not stay on your home schedule forever. External cues (especially the local day-night cycle) adapt the internal cues to the new time zone.

Both sleep pressure and circadian rhythms appear to be affected by puberty,³³ likely through interactions with other hormonal changes occurring at that time. The precise mechanism is not well understood, but the contention that the change is biological is supported by the observation that sleep rhythms change in the adolescence phase of other species.³⁴

Some studies of adolescents lend fairly direct support to this

hypothesis. For example, in one study,³⁵ researchers measured cortisol levels in 357 children when they were 9 years old, and then again at ages 11, 13, and 15. At each age, cortisol was measured upon waking, between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., and just before sleep. These collections continued for three days. Because cortisol is associated with wakefulness, levels are highest in the morning and fall during the day. That pattern was observed at all ages in this study, but the decline in cortisol levels during the day differed by age: it was steepest for the youngest children and shallowest for the oldest children. In other words, there is a daily cycle—a wave form—for cortisol, and the wave flattens as children go through adolescence. That means the internal signal about when one should be sleepy and when one should be wakeful is weaker in teens than in younger children. (The signal returns to its earlier, stronger form in the early 20s.) The weakness of the melatonin

and cortisol signals means teenagers should be less sleepy in the evening (and so they stay up later) and less wakeful in the morning.³⁶

If teenagers don't go to sleep at night because of weak internal cues that it's time to sleep, we might expect they would be more susceptible to external cues such as light or noise that would keep them awake. Although there are no data (positive or negative) showing teens are more likely to stay awake in the presence of light or noise than younger children or adults, there is evidence these external cues cost them sleep. For

example, teens sleep less in spring than they do in winter, plausibly because it gets dark earlier in winter.³⁷ Other data show that teens living in brightly lit urban districts are more likely to be "night owls" than "morning people."³⁸

Other studies are consistent with the hypothesis that teens are especially dependent on external cues to help them fall asleep. Many studies show a correlation between electronic media use and later bedtimes, and therefore less sleep.³⁹ One interpretation of this correlation is that kids who would stay up late anyway use electronic media—phones, computers, games—to pass the time until they feel sleepy. But another interpretation is that they don't feel sleepy *because* they are using these devices and, in particular, are exposed to lighted screens and content that make them wakeful. Some small-scale experimental studies show that playing an action video game or watching a movie they find exciting makes it more difficult for teens to go to sleep.⁴⁰ Many teens report that they watch television to help them go to sleep,⁴¹ though nighttime television viewing is associated with daytime sleepiness.⁴²

Interventions to Help Teens Sleep

Lack of sleep affects how students do in school, but just how large a cost does it exact? By standard measures, not a very big one. The effect size for most of these studies is about $d=.10$, which statisticians classify as a "small" effect. Now, it might be that studies to date have not measured school performance with very sensitive



measures, and that the real cost of sleep loss is actually bigger. And of course, there is a quality-of-life issue here. Most parents, upon seeing their child miserably sleepy and dragging through a school day, would not shrug and say, “Well, as long as it doesn’t affect your grades.” So how might we help teens sleep more?

The rather obvious “tell them to go to sleep” might actually work. Although parents are less likely to set bedtimes as their children move through high school, students with parent-set bedtimes do get more sleep on school nights than students without them. On weekends, sleep patterns of the two groups do not differ.⁴³

What else might be done? The core of the problem for teens seems to be that weak internal cues to sleep make it likely they will stay up later at night. They will sleep later in the morning to compensate, but they can’t do so on weekdays when they must get up for school. Indeed, by some estimates, school start time is the most important predictor of sleep/wake patterns in students.⁴⁴ So why not start school later?

If kids know school starts later and they can therefore sleep later, won’t they just stay up later? Surprisingly enough, the answer seems to be “no.” Researchers have examined sleep patterns in schools with different start times, and students do get more sleep if their school starts later.⁴⁵ The same applies to college students,⁴⁶ but these data must be interpreted with considerable caution, as college students have much more control over their class schedules.

One study tracked the performance of students in seven Minneapolis high schools as they changed their start times from 7:15 a.m. to 8:40 a.m. Researchers reported that the later start time was associated with better student attendance, fewer reports of sleeping in class, and reduced depression among students. There was no impact on grades, but the researchers cautioned that they were not terribly confident in this analysis because of difficulties in equating grades across different courses and different schools.⁴⁷

A second study comes from the school system in Wake County, North Carolina. Between 1999 and 2006, 14 middle schools in the system changed their start times—nine to later times, but five schools switched to earlier times. The researcher examined data from standardized state tests and calculated that earlier start times were associated with lower test scores, equivalent to about a 2 percentile point decline.⁴⁸

Perhaps the best study on the subject comes from the United States Air Force Academy. Like many high schools, the Academy divides the day into seven periods. Students sign up for classes,

but if there are multiple sections, they are randomly assigned to one; hence, a student cannot arrange to avoid (or ensure) an early morning class. Analysis of grades shows that those students who happen to have later start times earn higher grades.⁴⁹

What Are the Implications?

Inadequate sleep represents a challenge to educators that is in one sense overt—teachers see students drowsy in class every day—and in another sense subtle, because it seems like a common nuisance rather than a real threat to education. And indeed, the problem should not be overstated, at least insofar as it affects education. The impact of typical levels of inadequate sleep on student learning is quite real, but it is not devastating. All the same, its impact lasts for years, and there is every reason to think that it is cumulative.

Starting school later seems like a natural solution, but the logistics of the change are far from simple. The Fairfax County School Board in Virginia has considered whether to change the county high schools’ 7:20 a.m. start time on no fewer than eight occasions in the past 24 years.⁵⁰ Recently, it decided to hire a consultant to develop a plan for later high school start times.⁵¹ Some of the obstacles (in Fairfax and elsewhere) include: increased costs associated with transportation; objections from parents to a later start because they don’t want to leave their child at home unattended when they leave for work; objections from parents and students to a later end to the school day because it interferes with athletics as well as afterschool clubs and jobs; and objections from parents to changes in elementary school start times (nec-

The impact of inadequate sleep on learning is not devastating. All the same, there is every reason to think it is cumulative.



essary due to bus route changes prompted by the change in the high school start time).

Another change that administrators could contemplate without the logistical problems of a later start time would be to adjust the schedule of classes. Put simply, it’s a good bet that most middle and high school students are sleepiest during the first period and grow more alert as the day wears on. So what ought to be scheduled for first period? Are there classes where the sleepiness cost could best be borne? In high school, perhaps electives could come at the start of the day. If these are the classes students are most interested in, that may give them an incentive to go to sleep earlier so they get to school on time; they also may feel more alert if they find these electives more exciting than their required classes.

Finally, teachers can explain to students (and if possible, their parents) that they can influence the amount of sleep they get.

Although students must fight their own biological system to acclimate to the school schedule, they are not wholly victims of it. Just as travelers can adapt to new time zones, so too can students train their bodies to sleep at a reasonable hour. According to current research, the best strategy is to maintain a consistent bedtime and to refrain from gaming, movies, or other activities they find exciting in the few hours before bedtime. The payoff in grades may accumulate slowly or even be mostly unnoticeable, but the payoff in reduced sleepiness and overall mood will likely be almost immediate. □

Endnotes

1. Jerome M. Siegel, "Clues to the Functions of Mammalian Sleep," *Nature* 437, no. 7063 (2005): 1264–1271.
2. Richard S. J. Frackowiak et al., eds., "The Neural Correlates of Consciousness," in *Human Brain Function* (New York: Academic Press, 2004), 269–285.
3. William D. S. Killgore, "Effects of Sleep Deprivation on Cognition," *Progress in Brain Research* 185 (2010): 105–129.
4. Pierre Philip and Torbjorn Akerstedt, "Transport and Industrial Safety: How Are They Affected by Sleepiness and Sleep Restriction?" *Sleep Medicine Reviews* 10, no. 5 (2006): 347–356.
5. Danice K. Eaton, Lela R. McKnight-Eily, Richard Lowry, Geraldine S. Perry, Letitia Presley-Cantrell, and Janet B. Croft, "Prevalence of Insufficient, Borderline, and Optimal Hours of Sleep among High School Students—United States, 2007," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 46, no. 4 (2010): 399–401.
6. Tim Olds, Sarah Blunden, John Petkov, and Fabricio Forchino, "The Relationships between Sex, Age, Geography and Time in Bed in Adolescents: A Meta-Analysis of Data from 23 Countries," *Sleep Medicine Reviews* 14, no. 6 (2010): 371–378.
7. Christina Schmidt, Fabienne Collette, Christian Cajochen, and Philippe Peigneux, "A Time to Think: Circadian Rhythms in Human Cognition," *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 24, no. 7 (2007): 755–789.
8. Carolyn Yoon, Cynthia P. May, and Lynn Hasher, "Aging, Circadian Arousal Patterns, and Cognition," in *Cognition, Aging, and Self-Reports*, ed. Norbert Schwarz, Denise Park, Barbel Knauper, and Seymour Sudman (Levittown, PA: Psychology Press, 1999), 151–171.
9. Mary A. Carskadon, Christine Acebo, Gary S. Richardson, Barbara A. Tate, and Ronald Seifer, "An Approach to Studying Circadian Rhythms of Adolescent Humans," *Journal of Biological Rhythms* 12, no. 3 (1997): 278–289; Sunghan Kim, Gwendolen L. Dueker, Lynn Hasher, and David Goldstein, "Children's Time of Day Preference: Age, Gender, and Ethnic Differences," *Personality and Individual Differences* 33, no. 7 (2002): 1083–1090; and Christoph Randler, "Age and Gender Differences in Morningness-Eveningness during Adolescence," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 172, no. 3 (2011): 302–308.
10. Christoph Randler, "Morningness-Eveningness Comparison in Adolescents from Different Countries around the World," *Chronobiology International* 25, no. 6 (2008): 1017–1028.
11. For a review, see Rebecca G. Astill, Kristiaan B. Van der Heijden, Marinus H. Van IJzendoorn, and Eus J. W. Van Someren, "Sleep, Cognition, and Behavioral Problems in School-Age Children: A Century of Research Meta-Analyzed," *Psychological Bulletin* 138, no. 6 (2012): 1109–1138.
12. For a review, see Amy R. Wolfson and Mary A. Carskadon, "Understanding Adolescents' Sleep Patterns and School Performance: A Critical Appraisal," *Sleep Medicine Reviews* 7, no. 6 (2003): 491–506.
13. Basil Anderson, Amy Storfer-Isser, H. Gerry Taylor, Carol L. Rosen, and Susan Redline, "Associations of Executive Function with Sleepiness and Sleep Duration in Adolescents," *Pediatrics* 123, no. 4 (2009): e701–e707; Joseph A. Buckhalt, Mona El-Sheikh, and Peggy Keller, "Children's Sleep and Cognitive Functioning: Race and Socioeconomic Status as Moderators of Effects," *Child Development* 78, no. 1 (2007): 213–231; Michael Gradisar, Grace Terrill, Anna Johnston, and Paul Douglas, "Adolescent Sleep and Working Memory Performance," *Sleep and Biological Rhythms* 6, no. 3 (2008): 146–154; Majja-Riikka Steenari, Virve Vuontela, E. Juulia Paavonen, Synnove Carlsson, Mika Fjallberg, and Eeva T. Aronen, "Working Memory and Sleep in 6- to 13-Year-Old Schoolchildren," *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 42, no. 1 (2003): 85–92; Angela C. Randazzo, Mark J. Muehlbach, Paula K. Schweitzer, and James K. Walsh, "Cognitive Function Following Acute Sleep Restriction in Children Ages 10–14," *Sleep* 21, no. 8 (1998): 861–868; and Avi Sadeh, Reut Gruber, and Amiram Raviv, "The Effects of Sleep Restriction and Extension on School-Age Children: What a Difference an Hour Makes," *Child Development* 74, no. 2 (2003): 444–455.
14. Gradisar et al., "Adolescent Sleep and Working Memory Performance."
15. Melisa Moore, H. Lester Kirchner, Dennis Drotar, Nathan Johnson, Carol Rosen, Sonia Ancoli-Israel, and Susan Redline, "Relationships among Sleepiness, Sleep Time, and Psychological Functioning in Adolescents," *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* 34, no. 10 (2009): 1175–1183; E. Juulia Paavonen, Eeva T. Aronen, Irma Moilanen, Jorma Piha, Eila Rasanen, Tuula Tamminen, and Fredrik Almqvist, "Sleep Problems of School-Aged Children: A Complementary View," *Acta Paediatrica* 89, no. 2 (2000): 223–228; and E. Juulia Paavonen, Tarja Porkka-Heiskanen, and Anja Riitta Lahikainen, "Sleep Quality, Duration and Behavioral Symptoms among 5–6-Year-Old Children," *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 18, no. 12 (2009): 747–754.
16. N. J. Ali, D. Pitson, and J. R. Stradling, "Sleep Disordered Breathing: Effects of Adenotonsillectomy on Behaviour and Psychological Functioning," *European Journal of Pediatrics* 155, no. 1 (1996): 56–62; Ronald D. Chervin, Deborah L. Ruzicka, Bruno J. Giordani, Robert A. Weatherly, James E. Dillon, Elise K. Hodges, Carole L. Marcus, and Kenneth E. Guire, "Sleep-Disordered Breathing, Behavior, and Cognition in Children Before and After Adenotonsillectomy," *Pediatrics* 117, no. 4 (2006): e769–e778; and Niria A. Goldstein, J. Christopher Post, Richard M. Rosenfeld, and Thomas F. Campbell, "Impact of Tonsillectomy and Adenoidectomy on Child Behavior," *Archives of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery* 126, no. 4 (2000): 494–498.
17. Dean W. Beebe, Gahan Fallone, Neha Godiwala, Matt Flanigan, David Martin, Laura Schaffner, and Raouf Amin, "Feasibility and Behavioral Effects of an At-Home Multi-Night Sleep Restriction Protocol for Adolescents," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 49, no. 9 (2008): 915–923; and Gahan Fallone, Christine Acebo, Ronald Seifer, and Mary A. Carskadon, "Experimental Restriction of Sleep Opportunity in Children: Effects on Teacher Ratings," *Sleep* 28, no. 12 (2005): 1561–1567.
18. E. Juulia Paavonen, Katri Raikonen, Jari Lahti, Niina Komsu, Kati Heinonen, Anu-Katriina Pesonen, Anna-Liisa Jarvenpaa, Timo Strandberg, Eero Kajantie, and Tarja Porkka-Heiskanen, "Short Sleep Duration and Behavioral Symptoms of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Healthy 7- to 8-Year-Old Children," *Pediatrics* 123, no. 5 (2009): e857–e864.
19. Astill et al., "Sleep, Cognition, and Behavioral Problems."
20. Julian Lim and David F. Dinges, "A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Short-Term Sleep Deprivation on Cognitive Variables," *Psychological Bulletin* 136, no. 3 (2010): 375–389.
21. Astill et al., "Sleep, Cognition, and Behavioral Problems."
22. Susanne Dieckelmann and Jan Born, "The Memory Function of Sleep," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 11, no. 2 (2010): 114–126.
23. For reviews, see Julia F. Dewald, Anne M. Meijer, Frans J. Oort, Gerard A. Kerkhof, and Susan M. Bogels, "The Influence of Sleep Quality, Sleep Duration, and Sleepiness on School Performance in Children and Adolescents: A Meta-Analytic Review," *Sleep Medicine Reviews* 14, no. 3 (2010): 179–189; and Howard Taras and William Potts-Datema, "Sleep and Student Performance at School," *Journal of School Health* 75, no. 7 (2005): 248–254.
24. Christopher Drake, Chelsea Nickel, Eleni Burduvali, Thomas Roth, Catherine Jefferson, and Pietro Badia, "The Pediatric Daytime Sleepiness Scale (PDSS): Sleep Habits and School Outcomes in Middle-School Children," *Sleep* 26, no. 4 (2003): 455–458; Andre Kahn, Carine Van de Merckt, Elisabeth Rebuffat, Marie Jose Mozin, Martine Sottiaux, Denise Blum, and Philippe Hennart, "Sleep Problems in Healthy Preadolescents," *Pediatrics* 84, no. 3 (1989): 542–546; Anne Marie Meijer, "Chronic Sleep Reduction, Functioning at School and School Achievement in Preadolescents," *Journal of Sleep Research* 17, no. 4 (2008): 395–405; and Robert E. Roberts, Catherine Ramsay Roberts, and Hao T. Duong, "Sleepless in Adolescence: Prospective Data on Sleep Deprivation, Health and Functioning," *Journal of Adolescence* 32, no. 5 (2009): 1045–1057.
25. Fallone et al., "Experimental Restriction of Sleep Opportunity in Children."
26. Katia Fredriksen, Jean Rhodes, Ranjini Reddy, and Niobe Way, "Sleepless in Chicago: Tracking the Effects of Adolescent Sleep Loss during the Middle School Years," *Child Development* 75, no. 1 (2004): 84–95; and Wolfson and Carskadon, "Understanding Adolescents' Sleep Patterns."
27. Ingvild W. Savvig, Stale Pallesen, Ane Wilhelmsen-Langeland, Helge Molde, and Bjorn Bjorvatn, "Prevalence and Correlates of Delayed Sleep Phase in High School Students," *Sleep Medicine* 13, no. 2 (2012): 193–199.
28. Chol Shin, Jinkwan Kim, Sangduck Lee, Yongkyu Ahn, and Soonjae Joo, "Sleep Habits, Excessive Daytime Sleepiness and School Performance in High School Students," *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences* 57, no. 4 (2003): 451–453.
29. Kahn et al., "Sleep Problems in Healthy Preadolescents."
30. Christoph Randler and Daniela Frech, "Correlation between Morningness-Eveningness and Final School Leaving Exams," *Biological Rhythm Research* 37, no. 3 (2006): 233–239.
31. Senol Besoluk, "Morningness-Eveningness Preferences and University Entrance Examination Scores of High School Students," *Personality and Individual Differences* 50, no. 2 (2011): 248–252.
32. Stephanie J. Crowley, Christine Acebo, and Mary A. Carskadon, "Sleep, Circadian Rhythms, and Delayed Phase in Adolescence," *Sleep Medicine* 8, no. 6 (2007): 602–612; and Megan Hastings Hagenauer, Jamie I. Perrymann, Theresa M. Lee, and Mary A. Carskadon, "Adolescent Changes in Homeostatic and Circadian Regulation of Sleep," *Developmental Neuroscience* 31, no. 4 (2009): 276–284.
33. For a review, see Ian M. Colrain and Fiona C. Baker, "Changes in Sleep as a Function of Adolescent Development," *Neuropsychology Review* 21, no. 1 (2011): 5–21.
34. Megan Hastings Hagenauer and Theresa M. Lee, "The Neuroendocrine Control of the Circadian System: Adolescent Chronotype," *Frontiers in Neuroendocrinology* 33, no. 3 (2012): 211–229.
35. Elizabeth A. Shirtcliff, Amber L. Allison, Jeffrey M. Armstrong, Marcia J. Slattery, Ned H. Kalin, and Marilyn J. Essex, "Longitudinal Stability and Developmental Properties of Salivary Cortisol Levels and Circadian Rhythms from Childhood to Adolescence," *Developmental Psychobiology* 54, no. 5 (2012): 493–502.
36. Mary A. Carskadon, Christine Acebo, and Oskar G. Jenni, "Regulation of Adolescent Sleep: Implications for Behavior," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1021 (June 2004): 276–291.
37. Mariana G. Figueiro and Mark S. Rea, "Evening Daylight May Cause Adolescents to Sleep Less in Spring Than in Winter," *Chronobiology International* 27, no. 6 (2010): 1242–1258.
38. Christian Vollmer, Ulrich Michel, and Christoph Randler, "Outdoor Light at Night (LAN) Is Correlated with Eveningness in Adolescents," *Chronobiology International* 29, no. 4 (2012): 502–508.
39. For a review, see Neralie Cain and Michael Gradisar, "Electronic Media Use and Sleep in School-Aged Children and Adolescents: A Review," *Sleep Medicine* 11, no. 8 (2010): 735–742.
40. For example, see Malena Ivarsson, Martin Andersson, Torbjorn Akerstedt, and Frank Lindblad, "Playing a Violent Television Game Affects Heart Rate Variability," *Acta Paediatrica* 98, no. 1 (2009): 166–172.
41. Steven Eggermont and Jan Van den Bulck, "Nodding Off or Switching Off? The Use of Popular Media as a Sleep Aid in Secondary-School Children," *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* 42, no. 7–8 (2006): 428–433.
42. Jan Van den Bulck, "Television Viewing, Computer Game Playing, and Internet Use and Self-Reported Time to Bed and Time Out of Bed in Secondary-School Children," *Sleep* 27, no. 1 (2004): 101–104.
43. Christoph Randler, Sabrina Bilger, and Juan Francisco Diaz-Morales, "Associations among Sleep, Chronotype, Parental Monitoring, and Pubertal Development among German Adolescents," *Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied* 143, no. 5 (2009): 509–520; and Michelle A. Short, Michael Gradisar, Helen Wright, Leon C. Lack, Hayley Dohnt, and Mary A. Carskadon, "Time for Bed: Parent-Set Bedtimes Associated with Improved Sleep and Daytime Functioning in Adolescents," *Sleep* 34, no. 6 (2011): 797–800.
44. Jihui Zhang, Albert Martin Li, Tai Fai Fok, and Yun Kwok Wing, "Roles of Parental Sleep/Wake Patterns, Socioeconomic Status, and Daytime Activities in the Sleep/Wake Patterns of Children," *Journal of Pediatrics* 156, no. 4 (2010): 606–612.
45. Donn Dexter, Jagdeep Bijwadia, Dana Schilling, and Gwendolyn Applebaugh, "Sleep, Sleepiness and School Start Times: A Preliminary Study," *Wisconsin Medical Journal* 102, no. 1 (2003): 44–46; and Amy R. Wolfson, Noah L. Spaulding, Craig Dandrow, and Elizabeth M. Baroni, "Middle School Start Times: The Importance of a Good Night's Sleep for Young Adolescents," *Behavioral Sleep Medicine* 5, no. 3 (2007): 194–209.
46. Serge V. Onyper, Pamela V. Thacher, Jack W. Gilbert, and Samuel G. Gradess, "Class Start Times, Sleep and Academic Performance in College: A Path Analysis," *Chronobiology International* 29, no. 3 (2012): 318–335.
47. Kyla Wahlstrom, "Changing Times: Findings from the First Longitudinal Study of Later High School Start Times," *NASSP Bulletin* 86, no. 633 (2002): 3–21.
48. Finley Edwards, "Early to Rise? The Effect of Daily Start Times on Academic Performance," *Economics of Education Review* 31, no. 6 (2012).
49. Scott E. Carrell, Teny Maghikian, and James E. West, "As from Zzzz's? The Causal Effect of School Start Time on the Academic Achievement of Adolescents," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 3, no. 3 (2011): 62–81.
50. Emma Brown, "Fairfax Takes Small Step in Debate over High-School Start Times," *Washington Post*, June 12, 2012.
51. Donna St. George, "More Sleep for Teens? Montgomery Petition Signed by Thousands," *Washington Post*, November 2, 2012.

Economic Integration

(Continued from page 14)

31. For a more detailed look at Wake and Jefferson counties, see Sheneka M. Williams, "The Politics of Maintaining Balanced Schools: An Examination of Three Districts," in *The Future of School Integration*, ed. Kahlenberg, 257–279.
32. Maja Vouk, *School Statistics and Maps, 2011–2012* (Cary, NC: Wake County Public School System, April 6, 2012), 1.
33. Andy Kroll, "How the Koch Brothers Backed Public-School Segregation," *Mother Jones*, August 15, 2011.
34. Erin Dillon, *Plotting School Choice: The Challenges of Crossing District Lines* (Washington, DC: Education Sector, August 25, 2008).
35. Jennifer Jellison Holme and Amy Stuart Wells, "School Choice beyond District Borders: Lessons for the Reauthorization of NCLB from Interdistrict Desegregation and Open Enrollment Plans," in *Improving on No Child Left Behind*, ed. Richard D. Kahlenberg (New York: Century Foundation, 2008), 208–215.
36. Mantil, Perkins, and Aberger, "The Challenge of High-Poverty Schools," 156.
37. Gerald Grant, *Hope and Despair in the American City: Why There Are No Bad Schools in Raleigh* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 92.
38. Arne Duncan, "Education Reform's Moon Shot," *Washington Post*, July 24, 2009, A21.
39. Arne Duncan, "Start Over: Turnarounds Should Be the First Option for Low-Performing Schools," *Education Week*, June 17, 2009.
40. Sam Dillon, "U.S. Effort to Reshape Schools Faces Challenges," *New York Times*, June 2, 2009.
41. Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, *Still Left Behind: Student Learning in Chicago's Public Schools* (Chicago: Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, June 2009), 1.
42. Kahlenberg, *All Together Now*, 62; and Kathleen Herrold and Kevin O'Donnell, *Parent and Family Involvement in Education, 2006–07 School Year, from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2007* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, August 2008), 9, Table 3.
43. Richard D. Kahlenberg, *Turnaround Schools That Work: Moving Beyond Separate but Equal* (New York: Century

Foundation, 2009).

44. Magnet Schools of America, "MSA Supports Senate Reauthorization Bill," October 14, 2011.
45. Richard D. Kahlenberg and Halley Potter, *Diverse Charter Schools: Can Racial and Socioeconomic Integration Promote Better Outcomes for Students?* (Washington, DC: Poverty & Race Research Action Council; Century Foundation, May 2012).
46. David L. Kirp, "Making Schools Work," *New York Times*, May 20, 2012.
47. "Is Segregation Back in U.S. Public Schools?" *Room for Debate* (blog), *New York Times*, May 20, 2012 (see especially, Richard D. Kahlenberg, "Integrating Rich and Poor Matters Most"; and Michelle Rhee, "Zip Code Shouldn't Affect School Quality").
48. See Richard D. Kahlenberg, "Still Waiting for Superwoman: What Michelle Rhee's Fans Don't Get about Education Reform," *Slate*, February 21, 2011; and Richard D. Kahlenberg, "Gov. Scott Walker Can Thank Michelle Rhee for Making Teachers Unions the Enemy," *Washington Post*, February 27, 2011.

High-Flying Schools

(Continued from page 9)

- Jacobsen, Lawrence Mishel, and Richard Rothstein, *The Charter School Dust-Up: Examining the Evidence on Enrollment and Achievement* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2005), 51–65; and Paul Tough, *Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008), 161. But Jeffrey Henig's review of seven studies disputes the "creaming" charge. See Jeffrey R. Henig, *What Do We Know about the Outcomes of KIPP Schools?* (East Lansing, MI: Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice, November 2008), 1.
7. Carnoy et al., *Charter School Dust-Up*, 61, Table 5.
 8. Katrina R. Woodworth, Jane L. David, Roneeta Guha, Haiwen Wang, and Alejandra Lopez-Torkos, *San Francisco Bay Area KIPP Schools: A Study of Early Implementation and Achievement, Final Report* (Menlo Park, CA: SRI International, 2008), ix, 13–14.
 9. Christina Clark Tuttle, Bing-ru Teh, Ira Nichols-Barrer, Brian P. Gill, and Philip Gleason, *Student Characteristics and Achievement in 22 KIPP Middle Schools: Final Report*

(Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, June 2010).

10. Gary Miron, Jessica L. Urschel, and Nicholas Saxton, *What Makes KIPP Work? A Study of Student Characteristics, Attrition, and School Finance* (New York: National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, March 2011), ii.
11. Ira Nichols-Barrer, Christina Clark Tuttle, Brian P. Gill, and Philip Gleason, "Student Selection, Attrition, and Replacement in KIPP Middle Schools" (working paper presented at the 2011 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 8, 2011). See also Richard D. Kahlenberg, "Myths and Realities about KIPP," *The Answer Sheet* (blog), *Washington Post*, January 4, 2011; and Richard D. Kahlenberg, "Do Self-Selection and Attrition Matter in KIPP Schools?" *The Answer Sheet* (blog), *Washington Post*, June 14, 2011.
12. Henig, *What Do We Know about the Outcomes of KIPP Schools?*
13. Jay Mathews, "Don't Save Bad Schools—Terminate Them," *Washington Post*, November 17, 2009.
14. Mathews, *Work Hard*, 74.
15. Woodworth et al., *San Francisco Bay Area KIPP Schools*, 32. See also Erik W. Robelen, "KIPP Study Finds High Student Achievement Amid Big Learning Gains," *Education Week*, September 24, 2008, 10; and Nanette Asimov, "Students at KIPP Perform Better, Study Finds," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 18, 2008.
16. Mathews, *Work Hard*, 263, 285, 308.
17. Mathews, *Work Hard*, 263, 285 (per pupil expenditure), 308 (more than \$50 million); and Chester Finn, "A Great Philanthropist," *Education Gadfly*, October 1, 2009 (more than \$60 million).
18. Miron, Urschel, and Saxton, *What Makes KIPP Work?*, ii.
19. Jennifer Radcliffe, "KIPP College Grad Rates Draw Both Praise and Concern," *Houston Chronicle*, April 28, 2011.
20. Erica Frankenberg, Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, and Jia Wang, *Choice without Equity: Charter School Segregation and the Need for Civil Rights Standards* (Los Angeles: Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA, January 2010), 72, Table 30. Data are from the 2007–08 NCES Common Core of Data.
21. Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO), *Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States* (Stanford, CA: CREDO, Stanford University, June 2009), 44, Table 9.

Folly of the Big Idea

(Continued from page 21)

In Aesop's fable "The Frog and the Ox," a frog tries to puff himself up to the size of an ox and bursts in the process. We have seen many a reform burst, not because it was too big per se, but because it puffed itself beyond its actual worth. To gauge the worth of education reform, we must hold it up against our best conception of education. This conception must build slowly; it must be grounded in literature, mathematics, history, and other subjects. If we let these subjects guide us, if we make room to contemplate, absorb, and discuss what they hold, we will not get lost. Or, if we do, we can call up those things we have learned and, through the recalling and reviving, find our way again. □

Endnotes

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Colonial Press, 1900), 432.
2. P. J. O'Rourke, "Let's Cool It with the Big Ideas," *Atlantic Magazine*, July/August 2012.

3. Nathan Heller, "Listen and Learn," *New Yorker*, July 9 and 16, 2012, 76; and Alex Pareene, "Don't Mention Income Inequality Please, We're Entrepreneurs," *Salon*, May 21, 2012.
4. Sir Ken Robinson, "Sir Ken Robinson: Bring on the Learning Revolution!" TEDTalks video, filmed February 2010, posted May 2010; Salman Khan, "Salman Khan: Let's Use Video to Reinvent Education," TEDTalks video, filmed March 2011, posted March 2011; and Susan Cain, "Susan Cain: The Power of Introverts," TEDTalks video, filmed February 2012, posted March 2012.
5. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 90. Scott credits the term "high modernism" to David Harvey (ibid., 377n3).
6. For a history of education reform of the past century, see Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Battles Over School Reform* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).
7. Sol Stern, "Bloomberg and Klein Rush In," *City Journal*, April 8, 2003; and David M. Herszenhorn, "Teachers Protest the Methods of a Regional Superintendent," *New York Times*, February 4, 2005.
8. National Center on Universal Design for Learning, "What Does It Mean to Say That Curricula Are Disabled?" www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlcurriculum/disabledcurricula; National Center on Universal Design for Learning, "UDL Guidelines—Version 2.0: Principle 1. Provide Multiple Means of Representation," www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines/principle1; and National Center on Universal Design for Learning, "FAQs from the National UDL Task Force," www.udlcenter.org/advocacy/faq_guides/general.
9. Sabrina Tavernise, "Soaring Poverty Casts Spotlight on 'Lost Decade,'" *New York Times*, September 13, 2011; Alemayehu Bishaw, "Poverty: 2010 and 2011" (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, September 2012); Michael I. Norton and Dan Ariely, "Building a Better America—One Wealth Quintile at a Time," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6, no. 1 (January 2011): 9–12; Lawrence Mishel and Natalie Sabadish, *CEO Pay and the Top 1%: How Executive Compensation and Financial-Sector Pay Have Fueled Income Inequality* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2012); Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Mass Layoffs—

- September 2012," news release, October 23, 2012, www.stats.bls.gov/news.release/archives/mmls_10232012.pdf; and Catherine Rampell, "The Help-Wanted Sign Comes with a Frustrating Asterisk," *New York Times*, July 25, 2011.
10. For the sake of simplicity, I treat the terms "college" and "university" as near-synonyms here, but they refer to institutions with different purposes and histories. For more on the distinction, see Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 67–101.
11. Delbanco, *College*, 32–33.
12. Terence J. G. Tracey and Steven B. Robbins, "The Interest-Major Congruence and College Success Relation: A Longitudinal Study," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 69, no. 1 (August 2006): 64–89.
13. Many districts have implemented career education programs in elementary and middle schools. In 2005, the South Carolina Legislature passed the Education and Economic Development Act, which includes the mandate that all middle school students must take a career inventory to help determine their career major in high school. See SC Commission on Higher Education, "South Carolina Education and Economic Development Act," www.che.sc.gov/AcademicAffairs/EEDA/EEDA.htm. For a critique of the "dropout billionaire," see Frank Donoghue, "Idolizing Dropouts: The Real Issues," *Innovations* (blog), *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 23, 2012.
14. For more information on these programs, see their respective websites: www.dallasinstitute.org; www.yale.edu/ynhti; and www.bard.edu/mat. I am on the faculty of the Dallas Institute's Sue Rose Summer Institute for Teachers.
15. Robert Frost, "Birches," *Mountain Interval* (New York: Henry Holt, 1916), 37–40.
16. Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso* 13.94–102.
17. Jan Marthedal Rasmussen, "Arithmetic by Geometry," *Kanooth* (blog), April 24, 2010, www.kanooth.com/blog/2010/04/arithmetic-by-geometry.html.
18. G. H. Hardy, *A Mathematician's Apology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 98.



Share and Win a Dream Vacation!

Win a dream vacation worth up to **\$5,000**



Just log on to Share My Lesson and share your resources by Jan. 31, 2013. It's a simple process that will take only a couple minutes. The more resources you share, the better your chance of winning!

There are many reasons why it's great to share:

- Get invaluable feedback from educators who have used your resources in their own classrooms.
- Sharing classroom practice with others can contribute to building your professional network.
- You will be part of a mutually supportive network of educators, and you'll feel great knowing that your resources are inspiring others.

www.sharemylesson.com/dreamvacation

