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A review of research Spring 2005, Vol. 3, No. 1

The Education Gospel
According to Marvin Lazerson

Serving Young People at Risk with
“Science That’s Good Enough”

The Quality of Evidence:
Researchers Evaluate Research

A publication of the
University of Pennsylvania
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Created for academics and policymakers in education, @Penn GSE: A Review of Research delineates the terrain of research and service at Penn GSE while providing a forum for faculty thoughts and opinion about topical issues in education.

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High Standards

Your mother held you to them, your ninth-grade English teacher drummed them into you, and your boss insists on them. Wherever you go, there's no escaping "standards."

Ideally, high standards are the expression of high purpose: your mother taught you manners not to torture you, but to teach you how to get along with others. Without an underlying commitment to a higher purpose, the profession of "high standards" is nothing but empty rhetoric.

This issue of @Penn GSE takes a look at some of the ways that high standards and high purpose are playing out in the education community. Is the nation's education system living up to its higher responsibilities, or are our schools attending to purely economic and vocational concerns? How can education researchers improve their science so that it serves the public good? Can the research community hold its work to a higher standard?

Writing in *The Education Gospel*, Marvin Lazerson deconstructs America's collective faith in education as an instrument of economic advancement. In describing this singular focus on workplace preparation, Lazerson demonstrates that we've lowered our standards and lost sight of education's other purposes: to foster civic engagement and a love of learning for its own sake.

"*Science That's Good Enough*" describes Penn GSE Professor Margaret Beale Spencer's work on resiliency among youth. As in all of Spencer's work, this study set out to apply high-quality science to the high purpose of improving the lives of young people at risk.

Weighing the Evidence discusses the work of Penn GSE researchers conducting systematic reviews of evidence for a range of programs. Their work, which focused on sexual risk-taking interventions and after-school programs, represents a larger effort to improve the quality of evaluations and increase the base of knowledge about program effectiveness. Or, in other words, to raise the standards of education research.

Mother would approve.

❧ The Editor ❧

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The Education Gospel

Managing What We Expect of Our Schools

By Marvin Lazerson

More than 30 years ago, when Norton Grubb and I collaborated on a history of vocational education in high schools, we coined the term “vocationalism” to signify that the changes associated with that voc ed movement were much larger than the introduction of specific job preparation courses. Vocationalism transformed the basic purposes of K–12 schools, and of postsecondary education as well, affecting community colleges, comprehensive universities and selective colleges, short-term job training, and proprietary schools.

Indeed, the evolution of economic purposes for schooling was the single most important educational development of the 20th century. It underlay the enormous expansion of formal schooling in the United States, well before all other countries. It shaped the intense battles over equity and access that have dominated American education for more than half a century. It shaped curriculum debates. And it redefined the central ways of getting ahead and fulfilling the American Dream.

In our examination of the interactions between the American faith in education and the transformation effects of vocational purposes, we coined the term “Education Gospel” to refer to a system of belief that has dominated education for more than a century: the belief that social, economic, political, and moral problems can be solved through schooling. Whatever the difficulties we as a country face—economic recessions and economic development, social instability and crime, disengaged youth and deteriorating family life, inequality and poverty—this belief system assumes that more and better education can make them go away.

This faith has taken many forms historically, but in the last decades of the 20th century it increasingly came to focus on economic goals. Its essential message can be summarized as follows: The Knowledge Revolution

(or the Information Society, or the High-Tech Revolution) is changing the nature of work, shifting away from occupations rooted in industrial production to occupations associated with knowledge and information. This transformation has both increased the skills required for new occupations and updated the three Rs, enhancing the importance of “higher-order” skills including communications skills, problem-solving, and reasoning. Obtaining these skills normally requires formal schooling past the high school level, so that some college—though not necessarily a baccalaureate degree—will be necessary for the jobs of the future, a

conclusion that requires a public policy commitment to College for All.

Currently 87 percent of the general public agrees that a college diploma has become as important as a high school diploma used to be, and 77 percent says that getting a college education is more important than it was even 10 years ago. More schooling, economically focused, will lead to a vibrant and expansive economy, a more productive workforce, and greater success in the marketplace of global competition.

A second strand of the Education Gospel focuses on individual goals. It maintains

that individuals are more likely to find their skills becoming obsolete because of the pace of technological change. To keep up with advances in technology, and to change employment as firms innovate, future workers must stay in school longer and be prepared to engage in lifelong learning. New forms of work organization—especially contingent labor, when employers hire temporary rather than permanent workers, and more flexible hiring as technologies and products change—have exacerbated job-changing, further reinforcing the need for more schooling and continuing education. Other forms of work reorganization—including lean production, the elimination of multiple layers of responsibility—require front-line workers to have a

At most “liberal arts” colleges, professional training is the dominant concern.... The power of vocationalism has essentially made the debates over general education pretty much a joke.

greater variety of skills, including personal skills (sometimes called “soft” skills) like independence and initiative. The message, then, is straightforward: any individual who wants to get ahead in the race for economic success and professional status must stay in school for longer and longer periods of time and be prepared regularly to return to school. At the beginning of the 21st century, it is this version of the Educational Gospel that dominates American education. Americans believe, and have largely made a reality of the belief, that education is the path to the American Dream.

In focusing on the growth and consequences of this system of belief, we argue that every other purpose of schooling—civic goals, moral values, intellectual development—has more or less fallen away. These goals are often talked about and occasionally implemented, but they have essentially become side dishes to the main course, which is getting ahead. How did this situation come to be in high schools, colleges and universities, community colleges, and job training programs?

The Power of Vocationalism

The comprehensive high school took contemporary form in the early 20th century with the goal of preparing the majority of students for direct entry into the labor market and a small minority for college. During the rest of the century two developments occurred that undermined the relevance of secondary education: the youth labor market collapsed and college enrollment became the key to getting ahead. With no real work—other than unskilled, transient, low-wage, no-benefits work—vocational training in high schools became a dumping ground with little learning occurring. With college enrollment booming after World War II, learning in high school had only the purpose of getting into college where the “real” vocational preparation occurred. With the overwhelming number of colleges admitting 80 percent or more of all applicants, academic learning was relevant only to the small minority who wanted to attend selective colleges.

Four-year colleges and universities have themselves become increasingly vocational—usually called

professional preparation to distinguish it from the frowned-upon vocational education courses in high schools and proprietary schools. At most four-year institutions, most majors are vocational. At most “liberal arts” colleges, professional training is the dominant concern. And the few places that still provide a liberal arts education can do so primarily because a majority of their students goes on to graduate professional schools for their job training. The power of vocationalism has essentially made the debates over general education pretty much a joke. It has pushed concerns about civic education into something called “service learning,” which is often sold as an excellent addition to one’s resume.

Community colleges have developed perhaps the most interesting and potentially the most important attempt at combining multiple purposes, hoping simultaneously to prepare some for middle-level professions and for transfer into four-year institutions. The community colleges also manifest one of the genuinely remarkable characteristics of American society, its willingness to provide second-chance opportunities to all individuals. Still, most community colleges struggle with how to blend the vocational and the academic, work with many students who have not been successful previously in school, and are so limited in their resources that they often fall short of expectations, failing to graduate a substantial proportion of their students.

As for job training programs, most are short-term and terribly ineffective. They are a disaster, in part, because they often train for the lowest level of jobs, many of which are not even available, and rarely pay much attention to literacy, communication skills, and logical problem-solving that are necessary for more advanced levels of work. Except where they are integrated into community colleges, they usually do almost nothing to improve the educational opportunities of their participants.

Considering the Consequences

While the stories we tell of these four kinds of institutions reflect disappointments with what we have found, we can point to a number of promising developments

While schools were blamed for the economic downturn of the late 1970s, no one credits the schools with the economic growth of the 1990s

and offer sets of recommendations that can improve the existing situation.

Turning to the consequences of the Gospel and vocationalism, we need to ask what parts of the belief system are good and valuable, what parts are true or false, and in what ways the benefits can be retained while the downsides limited. For example, the American faith in education has led to an enormous expansion of educational opportunities, unprecedented in the world.

Schooling has become the avenue to a better life for millions of Americans who otherwise would be denied such opportunities. The belief that education serves the common good and helps individuals to get ahead has been the basis of public support for schooling. We need to cherish that and reaffirm it.

While the dominance of education by vocational purposes is now so powerful that it will not disappear, there are countless efforts to rebalance it.

Numerous reforms across the United States are directed at improving the intellectual quality of learning, at engendering ethical values, and at teaching young people how to be active participants in a democratic society.

Millions of students take courses in history, literature, and philosophy, as well as in art, music, and a host of other forms of learning that do not easily fit within the professional training that so dominates postsecondary education—even as they are asked by their parents “what good are such courses?”

The Dark Side

The Education Gospel and vocationalism, however, also have their less appealing sides. The claims for what education can do are invariably exaggerated.

Education, for example, does not in itself fuel economic growth. While schools were blamed for the economic downturn of the late 1970s, no one credits the schools with the economic growth of the 1990s, which depended upon a supportive mix of macroeconomic and microeconomic policies and the absence of major wars and oil price increases—the latter two phenomena very much at work now.

Even the simple equation that more schooling leads to more income to the individual turns out to be much more complicated. On average it is economically wise for individuals to progress through the education system. But where you go to school, what your major is, and what kind of a job you take after leaving school also matter in shaping economic outcomes. This means that much more precise information needs to be available to people beyond simply telling them to “stay in school, get a better job.”

Schools quite simply cannot solve social and economic problems. The inequalities of American life make it difficult for them to accomplish even their most basic tasks.

Finally, for all sorts of reasons, schools quite simply cannot solve social and economic problems. The inequalities of American life make it difficult for schools to accomplish even their most basic tasks, like teaching literacy. To ask them to do more, when we are unwilling to invest public resources in addressing our myriad social problems inevitably makes schools seem like failures. We are then caught in a dilemma—I would say, tragedy—of our own making. We exaggerate what education can do and then become cynical about our schools when they do not do what we ask of them. Perhaps the best place to start is to turn down the volume when we call upon schools to do yet something else.

This article is drawn from The Education Gospel: The Economic Power of Schooling by W. Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson, published by Harvard University Press, 2004. It was originally presented at a book-signing conversation at the University of Pennsylvania Bookstore. Marvin Lazerson holds the Howard P. and Judith R. Berkowitz Chair at Penn GSE.

“Science That’s Good Enough”

Researchers Study How Youth Cope

By Tom Kecskemethy

Some kids raised in “high risk” environments cope with circumstances beautifully and excel academically. Some kids with extraordinary economic and social privilege fail out of school and become poster children for “at-risk” behaviors. Why?

Conventional wisdom and intuition point to obvious explanations like parental involvement, safe schools, peer influence, and teacher quality. But what parts of the conventional wisdom are right? Are some parts wrong? Are there researchable explanations for resilience in adolescents that can guide us to the creation of living and learning environments for our kids that truly promote success for all?

Getting to the bottom of resilience in youth has occupied the larger part of Margaret Beale Spencer’s academic career. With colleagues at the Center for Health, Achievement, Neighborhood Growth and Ethnic Studies (CHANGES), Spencer has run a series of research and intervention programs in recent years that are developing a much more complete understanding of youth coping mechanisms than has been previously available.

One such assessment particularly illustrates the unique and powerful ways that Spencer is bringing theory and empirical evidence together to improve treatment. CHANGES has been working with Holy Cross Children’s Services (HCCS) of Michigan (formerly known as Boysville), which provides a variety of programs for adjudicated youth, including residential and day treatment programs focused on group dynamics (e.g., group therapy, group accountability). Spencer and her colleagues assess these programs and provide in-service education for clinical professionals and educators, giving them an opportunity to collect scientific data and then use that information to make suggestions for bettering practice.

One strand of the work done by CHANGES involves the analysis and interpretation of satisfaction surveys administered by HCCS to staff, program youth, and parents. The results of these surveys offer HCCS

administrators a chance to see potential areas for improving the effectiveness of their services. But CHANGES has also administered a survey of psychosocial well-being to 450 HCCS residential program youth in an effort to get a better picture of how a range of factors influence youth resilience.

Theory and Evidence

At the heart of this effort is Spencer’s developmental theory PVEST (Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory), which examines the ways that risk factors and protective factors affect youth behaviors. Joining theory with evidence, however, has been problematic in the field of adolescent developmental research, particularly for high-risk youth. As Spencer states, “I’ve never thought that we’ve had science that’s good enough.”

The HCCS project assessments, however, provide a model for incorporating theory with sound science and applying the results for the public good. “Our theory-driven work in a project called Start on Success doubled graduation rates among special education students, so working with adjudicated youth seemed the next logical step,” says Spencer, and the HCCS assessments offered an opportunity to gather empirical data that could work hand in hand with theory.

In their report to HCCS, Spencer and her colleagues maintain that “an effective program will have a component that explicitly focuses on influencing the processes by which a youth offender perceives, gives meaning to, and responds to individuals and situations.” Understanding these meaning-making processes, they claim, is invaluable in the development of services that “promote rehabilitation and reduce recidivism.”

To that end, the CHANGES psychosocial survey included several measures of students’ perceptions about themselves and their environment. For example, high self-esteem has been shown to work as a protective factor against negative outcomes, so the survey measured

**PVEST-Linked
Vulnerability Level and Resiliency Prediction Dual Axis Model**

		Risk Factor Level	
		High Risk	Low Risk
Protective Factor Level Presence/Experience	Low Protection (Not Evident)	Special Needs Evident: I. (Highly Vulnerable)	Symptoms Not Evident/ Overlooked: II. ("Masked" Vulnerability)
	High Protection (Significant Presence)	Resiliency Expected: III. (Low Vulnerability)	Untested: IV. (Undetermined Vulnerability)

M.B. Spencer, 2004 (Adapted from J. Anthony, 1974)

each respondent's view of himself. Other instruments measured factors like perceived teacher expectations, hypermasculinity (a preference for risky or aggressive behavior), fear of calamity in a given environment, and the number and types of stressful events experienced.

Analyzing the data provided by these measures gave researchers a descriptive snapshot of the students and allowed them to identify statistically significant differences in the characteristics of youth across the different HCCS program sites. They found, for instance, that HCCS students in the Detroit program showed a higher tendency toward hypermasculinity than students in the Clinton program. In the context of other critical data, researchers can show program directors how the needs of youths at one location can differ from those at another.

They also found that boys scoring higher in hypermasculinity reported significantly more exposure to crime and violence, were more likely to have a poorer opinion of their schools, and were more likely to perceive that their teachers viewed them negatively. Since we know that students who perceive that their teachers have higher expectations of them perform and adapt better, learning why different kinds of students may have different teacher perceptions can have a great impact on teacher training.

Measuring Risk and Resilience

But identifying links between risk and negative outcomes or perceptions is only part of the task.

The CHANGES researchers were also interested in how protective factors affect the lives of these youths. Using data from the surveys, they divided the students into four categories according to a PVEST-linked model that gauges vulnerability level and probability of resiliency. (See figure at left.)

Young people with a high level of risk factors and a low level of family, environment, and instructional support, for example, are clearly highly vulnerable and have a greater probability of negative outcomes (Type I). While students with low risk levels and low support

levels may seem better protected, a challenge may reveal their failure to develop coping mechanisms, giving them masked vulnerability (Type II). Adolescents with high levels of risk but also high levels of support are expected to have low vulnerability and be more resilient (Type III), but those with low risk and high support have been largely untested, and therefore have undetermined vulnerability (Type IV).

The researchers believe that "the differences exemplified by these individual typologies determine their resiliency outcomes and may even help to determine the fit with and probable impact of HCCS programs and services." For instance, their analysis found that, compared to other students, masked-vulnerability students reported fewer forms of adaptive coping (such as exercise, participation in sports, or getting sufficient sleep). High- and low-vulnerability students reported more risk-taking behaviors; undetermined and low-vulnerability students scored higher in self-esteem.

With this kind of information, program operators can adjust their training and services to give these students the best chance at becoming well-adjusted adults and productive citizens. "Re-entry into the community is the main concern," affirms Spencer, and being able to identify potential problems is the first step in increasing the chances of success.

Based on the findings from their satisfaction and psychosocial surveys, the CHANGES researchers offer

suggestions for administrators and staff to “maximize their skills as more nuanced providers.” They advise, for example, that HCCS residential treatment services, as currently designed, may be best suited for late elementary and middle school males rather than older students or girls, and that there may be a relationship between coping skills and satisfaction with foster care services.

And HCCS is responding well to the information supplied by CHANGES, according to Spencer. “People are listening, and there is a real attention to changing practice,” she says, as the empirical evidence the researchers are able to present helps to ground the developmental theory, show where

conventional wisdom may be mistaken, and give detailed and specific pictures of individual sites.

Encouraged by the success of their work in Michigan, CHANGES researchers are planning similar work with other youth rehabilitation organizations. By merging theory and science into a usable package that can be brought to bear on programs like this one, Spencer and her colleagues are providing a valuable tool for improving social welfare.

Wayne Kobylinski contributed to this article.

Also from Margaret Beale Spencer

What Does ‘Acting White’ Mean?

The idea that academic underachievement among African-American youth stems from the Black community’s devaluation of educational attainment—that getting good grades is tantamount to “acting White”—has received a lot of attention in the popular press.

Writing in *What Does ‘Acting White’ Actually Mean? Racial Identity, Adolescent Development, and Academic Achievement among African American Youth*, Margaret Beale Spencer and Vinay Harpalani have a different explanation for the phenomenon. To refute the notion that the African-American community devalues education and academic achievement, the authors first marshal historical and empirical evidence and then offer a reinterpretation of the issue from a developmental perspective that sees “acting White” as a reactive coping strategy adopted by youth as they negotiate hostile environments.

This piece appears in *Minority Status, Collective Identity and Schooling*, edited by J.U. Ogbu (Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum).

Getting Tough or Getting Smart?

Reviewing what we know about the reintegration into the community of young people who have served time, Margaret Beale Spencer and Cheryl Jones-Walker found significant research on juvenile justice and rehabilitation—but only a small body of work assessing services for young ex-offenders.

A review of the research shows that delinquent youth respond positively to well-designed and well-implemented programs. Studies show that while “get-tough” approaches do not deter criminal behavior, comprehensive programs—those that focus on both the youth and the families and schools to which they return—do.

Writing in *Interventions and Services Offered to Former Juvenile Offenders Reentering Their Communities: An Analysis of Program Effectiveness*, the authors emphasize the importance of incorporating cognitive interventions into rehabilitation programs. Citing one experimental study that looked at recidivism among ex-offenders assigned to a comprehensive cognitive program and to a control group, they report impressive results: those receiving the cognitive treatment showed an 18 percent reconviction rate and no reincarceration, as compared to 70 percent and 30 percent, respectively, for the control group.

Spencer and Jones-Walker map out the elements of effective rehabilitation programs and offer recommendations drawn from the lessons of developmental psychology—specifically, community-based interventions and transitional supports. And they argue that, to date, several critical issues have been overlooked in the design of interventions—specifically, identity issues and how race/ethnicity and social class affect the formation of the sense of identity.

This article appears in *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 2(1).

Weighing the Evidence Researchers Evaluate Research

By Wayne Kobylnski

As policymakers on every level work to determine which programs to fund and how much to fund them, they naturally look to studies conducted to determine the effectiveness of such programs. The increased importance of research data in policy decisions is reflected in the rising incidence of the term “evidence-based,” but this push for data can obscure important questions about the nature and usefulness of that evidence. Not all studies are equal, even if they examine the same program, so how does one figure out how to evaluate the information these studies provide in order to get a sense of what is actually working?

Research undertaken at Penn GSE under the direction of Rebecca Maynard seeks to answer that question by conducting systematic reviews of evidence for a range of programs intended to improve youth outcomes. For example, Lauren Scher’s work has focused on intervention programs meant to reduce sexual risk-taking by teenagers, while Susan Zief has studied the effectiveness of after-school programs in improving academic and social outcomes. Both emphasize the importance of rigorously scrutinizing previous studies.

“Program operators need to know if interventions are achieving the goals they are hoping to achieve, while funders and policymakers need to know if one particular program model is more successful or efficient than another,” says Scher. And Zief concurs: “A lot of funding takes place without solid evidence about what effects the funded programs have, so we have to be careful about putting the cart before the horse by investing millions of dollars before we know if programs do what they are intended to do.”

The best way to gauge program effectiveness, they believe, is through the use of randomized controlled trials (RCTs). These studies reduce the risk of bias and increase the likelihood that differences in outcomes can be attributed to the given program rather than other

factors. Accordingly, the first step in the systematic reviews led by Scher and Zief was to examine relevant previous studies and identify their designs. This yielded relatively small sets of RCTs, but even these had to pass criteria for inclusion in the review.

As Scher relates, “In my review of teen pregnancy prevention interventions, I found numerous cases of RCTs that were flawed in a variety of ways, compromising the integrity of the experiments and potentially resulting in statistically invalid results.” In fact, she identified 66 RCTs, but only 34 met the inclusion standards. The

review of after-school program effectiveness conducted by Zief and Sherri Lauver, a Penn GSE Ph.D. currently at the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences, dealt with an even smaller research base—of the 87 studies they reviewed, just five qualified for inclusion.

The Nature of the Evidence

With these bases of evidence, however small, the reviewers conducted meta-analyses to evaluate the impacts of the specific programs. In her study of sexual risk-taking interventions, Scher found no consistent evidence that programs as a whole reduce risky behaviors among teens, although the data did show a slight generally positive drift.

In another study, Scher combined her research synthesis with data from Add Health (the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health) to look for correlational evidence about whether teenagers who attend schools that offer pregnancy and STD prevention services are less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors. The data suggest that females who receive such services tend to be more sexually active, while at the same time more knowledgeable about contraception and consistent in its use. Overall, however, her findings show no clear evidence that intervention programs reduce or increase risky sexual behaviors among teens. Zief and Lauver’s review similarly produced no clear evidence that

“We have to be careful about putting the cart before the horse by investing millions of dollars before we know if programs do what they are intended to do.”

after-school programs with an academic component improved outcomes for participating youths, as 84 percent of the 97 outcomes analyzed showed no significant differences between the students in the programs and the control group.

Such null findings, however, do not necessarily indicate that the examined programs do not work or that the reviews do not provide useful information. Because the reviews synthesize data from a small number of evaluations—those that meet the strict experimental design criteria—their findings are not intended to provide comprehensive statements about effectiveness. Including non-RCTs would broaden the field of data, but at the potential cost of accuracy or validity. “The usefulness of a methodology depends on what your question is,” says Zief, and Scher echoes, “It’s important to understand what RCT evidence can and cannot answer.” Since these reviews aim to evaluate program effectiveness, RCTs offer the most valid information. Someone less interested in whether a program works than in how a program works might be better served by other, non-experimental methods.

Restricting the field of data through rigorous experimental design criteria helps increase the likelihood of credible evidence, but also raises new concerns. Zief recounts the process of conducting her review: “We pooled evidence from evaluations and asked, ‘Are programs helping students with achievement and behavior?’ Before we could answer that question, we found that we had to answer another question: ‘Can the data from different studies be combined?’ In most cases, the answer is no.” Although the five evaluations being synthesized met the design standards, they differed greatly in the elements and outcomes they measured.

Scher tells a similar story: “Teen pregnancy was an already widely ‘reviewed’ topic, but these reviews varied widely in their study inclusion criteria, in the methods used to synthesize studies, in their findings, and in how authors interpreted these findings as policy recommendations.”

How to Conduct a Systematic Review

With a relatively small number of high-quality evaluations and little consistency in methodology even among those, systematic reviews can only offer limited information, but researchers are working to remedy this situation. Rebecca Maynard, Matt Stagner (of the

Urban Institute), and Lauren Scher are at work on creating a “practical guide for conducting a systematic review of the evidence.” They recognize that the body of research currently available often leads to reviews “of limited scope or finding no rigorous evidence,” but they insist that such reviews are still valuable. Even non-representative findings offer some information about effectiveness, they say, and limited reviews can “resolve discrepancies in findings from prior reviews.” In addition, these examinations can illustrate what information is still needed, and help direct future research.

Scher also notes that “there has definitely been a push in funding for more rigorous evaluation designs, particularly from IES [the Institute of Education Sciences] at the Department of Education.” Another important entity promoting this kind of research is the International Campbell Collaboration. Based at Penn GSE, the Campbell Collaboration is building a library of systematic reviews of research evidence in social and educational policy. Aided by these organizations, the coming years will likely bring a significant increase in high-quality evaluations and reviews, constantly developing a larger base of knowledge about program effectiveness.

In the meantime, current research continues to offer valuable lessons about both the reviewed topic and the research itself. Scher remarks, “I have to say that for the teen pregnancy prevention review, I probably learned more about study quality and how to conduct a high-quality evaluation than about what types of programs are more effective than others.” Zief too has had opportunity to carry over lessons from her systematic review, as she recently conducted her own small-scale evaluation of an after-school program in the William Penn (PA) School District. In this way, rigorous reviews can lead to rigorous evaluations, with each additional high-quality evaluation giving researchers and policymakers a better picture of the impact of social and educational programs.

The review of after-school program effectiveness has been submitted to the International Campbell Collaboration. Pending approval, it will be available on the C2 website at www.campbellcollaboration.org.

In Practice: Cornerstone Lays the Foundation for Literacy

By Devon M. Skerritt

Of the many literacy programs springing up across the country to aid students from underprivileged backgrounds, Cornerstone National Literacy Initiative takes a unique approach. Developed in partnership with the New York Institute for Special Education and Penn GSE, Cornerstone is a school-based initiative that seeks to develop educators' capacity to effectively teach students to read, write, and think.

Director Steven Prigohzy states, "We are a literacy initiative but that's the vehicle for school change." The changes that Cornerstone hopes to bring about are *cultural* and *systemic*, springing from the creation of a professional learning community among the teachers and parents in each school—a community that works together to build expectations for student achievement.

While unique to each environment's needs and resources, Cornerstone's literacy model includes four essential components. First, with Cornerstone facilitators assisting in asset mapping and vision creation, schools are asked to evaluate their resources. Second, to move the school toward progress in one year, a newly created leadership team establishes a literacy action plan that focuses on certain areas and skills. Third, a professional learning environment is created, including a summer institute, regional meetings, and teleconferencing among Cornerstone schools and leadership team members. And finally, to enhance performance, schools work closely with Cornerstone to monitor progress and, in the process, gain valuable experience in evaluation to build their own skills in implementing a self-review.

Currently, Cornerstone is in its fifth year of operation and serves schools in nine districts from the northeast to the south. In determining which schools to target, the organization does not take applications but uses professional recommendations, demographic information, and school and district leadership evaluations. According to

Prigohzy, "We look for superintendents who have a vision for the district, principals who give us a flying chance, and people who are willing to learn."

Once a site is established, the relationship between Cornerstone and the school and district gets underway with a Cornerstone literacy fellow working alongside faculty coaches, the principal, and family representatives at the school level and a Cornerstone liaison facilitating the process with the district superintendent. Each school's leadership team receives direct professional development specific to its environment, including book studies, lesson demonstrations, and debriefing sessions.

Cornerstone is attempting to introduce school reform that doesn't lose momentum when the program ends and the experts go home.

A Penn GSE alumna and one of the literacy fellows at Cornerstone, Rahshene Davis describes the end result as a portrait of educators sharing work and engaging in conversation about what works in advancing students' reading, writing, and thinking skills. "It's a reflective community," she says, "self-evaluative, always asking questions to get better and trying to find that way together."

The Cornerstone process takes place over a four-year cycle, and after the final year's self-assessment, a school that has sufficiently built a shared vision and sustainable capacity for change may achieve Foundation School status. Defined as a school that has successfully enabled faculty growth, worked directly with educators and parents, empowered its principal, and connected parents and students to literacy, the Foundation School can then serve as a model for reform efforts that can be scaled up throughout the district. Foundation schools "need to show faculty can share and teach this work to other schools in the district," Prigohzy explains. Thus far, public schools in Jackson, Mississippi, and Talladega, Alabama, school districts have been granted foundation status.

In Springfield, Massachusetts, Frank H. Friedman Elementary School is turning the corner in its literacy initiatives after three years as a Cornerstone school.

Springfield's demographics include high poverty and large numbers of students on free or reduced lunch, criteria Cornerstone evaluates before engaging a school district in reform. Says Davis, "The whole staff is moving together—the principal, teachers, professional staff—they all see themselves as a learner." She notes the school community has united behind a determination to do better, no longer impeded by limited resources or past failures but building on "what the kids can do."

The principal's is a pivotal leadership position in the Cornerstone model, and as Davis reflects on her experience in Springfield, she observes, "The principal [Dr. Gloria Williams] does not accept anything less than what she believes the children can achieve."

While its participant schools are excited about Cornerstone's plan, it places a lot of responsibility on everyone in the school community. Says Prigohzy, "Our experience is mostly creating and developing change, but the real challenge is sustaining it. You can sustain momentum and accountability when you're there, but what about when you are not there?"

By seeking to embed literacy throughout the community, Cornerstone is attempting to introduce school reform that doesn't lose momentum when the program ends and the experts go home—the kind of reform that the community itself embraces and sustains.

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More on Curriculum and Reform

The Mathematics Curriculum

Prompted by the flood of newly designed mathematics curriculum materials for elementary teachers, Janine Remillard and Martha Bryans wanted to understand how reform-oriented curricula might support teacher learning. To answer that question, they studied how eight teachers, all of whom worked in the same school, used one such curriculum, called Investigations in Number, Data, and Space.

What they found was that teachers stayed true to their own orientations, whatever their opinion of the curriculum. As a result, different teachers made different uses of the curriculum, thereby discovering different opportunities for student and teacher learning. Inexperienced teachers were most likely to take a piloting stance toward the curriculum and engage all of its resources fully.

Presenting their findings in *Teachers' Orientations Toward Mathematics Curriculum Materials: Implications for Teacher Learning*, the authors conclude that reform efforts should be sure to familiarize teachers with new materials and new approaches to curricula.

This article appears in *Journal of Research in Mathematics Education* 35(5).

Getting the Picture of Instructional Reform

Implementation of school reform can fail when there is inadequate monitoring of the depth of implementation. While ways of capturing instructional outcomes have burgeoned, ways of monitoring the implementation of practices that can improve outcomes have been largely overlooked.

In *Dashboard Lights: Monitoring Implementation of District Instructional Reform Strategies*, Jonathan A. Supovitz and John Weathers report on a system for monitoring implementation of reform in Duval County, Florida. Principals and district leaders work collaboratively to gather and analyze implementation data from schools across the district. The system provides leaders with "snapshots" of the depth of implementation of reform components such as connecting student work to standards and data-driven decision-making. According to the authors, this work in Duval County demonstrates how systems in which leaders work together to collaboratively monitor reform "can deepen the buy-in and understanding of a district's reform vision," consequently furthering implementation.

The report is available at www.cpre.org/Publications/pdf/snapshotstudy.pdf.

Research Notes

Penn GSE faculty and researchers explore the issues at the forefront of American education today—urban education, equity and diversity, educational opportunity and educational excellence, and the management of complex organizations. They engage in high-impact research, innovation, and training

in public education, as well as in literacy, psychology, social policy, higher and adult education. The following pages present a sampling of recent studies and findings from Penn GSE faculty and researchers.

The Feds Go to School

What does NCLB mean for state and local control of education? Is the federal government poised to dominate American education in the 21st century? Susan Fuhrman ponders these questions in *Less than Meets the Eye: Standards, Testing, and Fear of Federal Control*. She offers an analysis of the contemporary practice of education and lays out some principles for intergovernmental cooperation.

Although many of the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act claim an unprecedented level of federal control over education, Fuhrman argues that “like other laws, NCLB will be one creature on paper and quite another in practice.” Not only has Washington historically lacked both the capacity and the political will to enforce policies fully, but with NCLB, it depends entirely on the states for success—and the states have not demonstrated an exceptional capacity to influence schools. Says Fuhrman, “NCLB is not likely, as a consequence, to be the epitome of federal dominance that some have feared.”

But if the power of the federal government is so circumscribed, should education policy simply be left to the states? Fuhrman argues that a strategic partnership is inevitable and in some senses desirable. Inevitable because of the size of the federal expenditures on education, and desirable because of Washington’s concern about equity and its ability to offset the states’ traditional weaknesses in designing and implementing reform.

Fuhrman also identifies principles of cooperative partnership that would lead to more productive intergovernmental collaboration: federal commitment to flexibility for states and localities and consultation with them about policies, sufficient funding, and an investment in research. She cautions, though, that these principles require “more patience, longer time frames, and larger budgets than most policymakers bring to the process.”

This chapter appears in *Who’s in Charge Here? The Tangled Web of School Governance and Policy*, edited by Noel Epstein (Denver and Washington, DC: Education Commission of the States & Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

Districts and High School Accountability

One important goal of state accountability systems is to motivate instructional improvement in low-performing high schools. A key assumption of these systems is that schools have the capacity to improve adequately on their own. But a study of responses to state accountability in low-performing high schools challenges this assumption.

Reporting on the study in a CPRE Policy Brief, *Holding High Hopes: How High Schools Respond to State Accountability Policies*, Margaret E. Goertz and Diane Massell acknowledge that accountability systems can focus high school educators on reform and motivate modest changes in practice. However, few schools in the study’s six-state sample made coherent efforts to improve

teaching and performance. Critical to more effective response to accountability measures was district action. Districts with strong leadership and larger central offices were better able to identify coherent improvement strategies and direct schools to embrace these strategies. The authors recommend that states strengthen district capacity to support the efforts of low-performing high schools to bring about the changes that accountability policies intend.

The brief is available at www.cpre.org/Publications/rb42.pdf.

Winning the Teacher Turnover Battle

Do High-Poverty Schools Leave Teachers Behind?

Teacher shortages, often thought to be due to increased retirements and student enrollments, are particularly acute in urban schools. Could it be that the conditions of urban schools are more important to shortages there than are demographic trends? Richard Ingersoll considers this question in a recent report, *Why Do High-Poverty Schools Have Difficulty Staffing Their Classrooms with Qualified Teachers?* Ingersoll finds that school staffing problems in low-income communities are primarily due to large numbers of qualified teachers departing from their jobs long before retirement.

Much of the turnover, Ingersoll finds, is accounted for by teacher job dissatisfaction. As contributing factors, teachers leaving these schools report low compensation, inadequate support from school administration, student discipline problems, and limited input in school decision-making. These findings suggest that if high-poverty schools want to ensure that all students are taught by qualified teachers, then they must be concerned about addressing the local factors influencing low teacher retention.

This report was published by *Renewing Our Schools, Securing Our Future: A National Task Force on Public Education*, a joint initiative of the Center for American Progress and the Institute for America's Future. The report is available at www.americanprogress.org.

I Can't Get Started Without You

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of programs offering support, guidance, and orientation for beginning teachers during the transition into their first teaching job. Among their advantages, a recent study shows, are a positive effect on the retention of beginning teachers.

In *What Are the Effects of Induction and Mentoring on Beginning Teacher Turnover*, Thomas Smith and Richard Ingersoll describe their analysis of data on induction and mentoring from the nationally representative 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. Smith and Ingersoll observe, “beginning teachers who were provided with mentors from the same subject field and who participated in collective induction activities, such as planning and collaboration with other teachers, were less likely to move to other schools and less likely to leave the teaching occupation after their first year of teaching.” While some components of induction examined did not individually have a statistically significant impact on teacher turnover, most did collectively. That is, teachers participating in a combination or packages of mentoring and group induction activities were far less likely to depart at the end of their first year.

This article appears in *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(3).

Boys and Girls

Improving the Lives of Boys

The Center for the Study of Boys' Lives (CSBL), a consortium of five independent schools, was founded to conduct research and develop programs to improve the lives of boys within their schools and communities. Specifically, CSBL helps schools "excavate their 'hidden' masculinity curricula through a process of school-based research," explain co-founders Peter Kuriloff and Michael Reichert.

A New Look at Boys: Extending the Conversation about Gender and Justice describes how two member schools developed programs based on inquiry into their students' experiences. Faced with high attrition rates among its younger male population, Episcopal High School conducted research that indicated the need for a comprehensive plan to improve the quality of boys' emotional lives. Measures adopted included a dedicated freshman boys' dormitory, academic support that emphasized encouragement rather than punishment, and the recruitment of a more diverse student body and faculty.

The Haverford School began its research with an alumni survey that pointed to gaps in the school's curriculum, specifically in the social and emotional arenas. As a result, Haverford revamped its peer counseling program. Two years later, the school conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses and found that two-year veterans of the program scored higher in an emotional-intelligence evaluation than those who had only been involved for one year.

This article appeared in *Independent School*, Winter 2005.

Mothers and Daughters

Most children learn about sexuality from their parents, but while many researchers have looked at *what* parents are teaching their kids, few have assessed *how*.

To redress that deficit—to examine the process of communication in families—Erika Pluhar and Peter Kuriloff looked at data drawn from a qualitative, observational study of family sexuality communication with low- and middle-income African-American mothers and their adolescent daughters.

Detecting two dimensions to these communications, the affective (emotional) and stylistic (verbal/behavioral), the researchers found that the process of sexuality communication is just as important as the context, if not more so. That is, the *how* matters every bit as much as the *what*. Moreover, the authors found that mothers and daughters who enjoy a close and connected relationship in the first place engage in more open and interactive conversations about sexuality.

Implications for parent sexuality education, say the authors, include emphasizing the affective aspects of the process by teaching active listening techniques and other interactive communication skills.

What Really Matters in Family Communication about Sexuality? A Qualitative Analysis of Affect and Style among African American Mothers and Adolescent Daughters appears in *Sex Education* 4(3).

The Life Span of Literacy

In a critical review of the literature on both children's literacy and adult literacy, Daniel Wagner suggests that literacy might be most usefully conceptualized as having both a life span (i.e., across an individual's life time from childhood to adult) and a life space (i.e., literacy practices across the globe). Writing in *Literacy in Time and Space:*

Issues, Concepts and Definitions, he contends that a more literate world can only develop through a synergy of the life-span and life-space approaches.

This chapter appears in *Handbook of Children's Literacy*, by T. Nunes and P. Bryant (Lancaster, UK: Kluwer Academic Press, 2004).

Worth a Thousand Words

In focusing on the use of images in the fundraising efforts of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), Marybeth Gasman and Edward Epstein use a visual communication lens to capture the evolving image of Black colleges in the mid-20th century and the UNCF's ability to mold its fundraising campaigns to fit any

audience. In particular, by juxtaposing the operations of the UNCF with issues of the Cold War, the authors reveal the calculated strategy for raising funds for the education of African Americans.

This article appears in *Educational Foundations 18*(2).

Language Lessons

Until recently, most Asian schools didn't introduce English-language instruction until the high school years. These days, though, students are having their first encounter with English in their elementary schools, much to the consternation of their teachers—many of whom have not been adequately prepared to teach the notoriously difficult language.

A new study undertaken by Yuko Butler examines the English proficiency of elementary teachers in three Asian countries—Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. A total of 522 teachers (204, 206, and 112, respectively) responded to surveys designed to determine both what they

considered the minimum level of proficiency needed to teach English and how they evaluated their own skills.

In assessing their own proficiencies, teachers in all three countries identified substantial gaps between their own proficiency and what they considered the minimum level to teach successfully. (In general, the teachers rated themselves stronger in the receptive skills of listening and reading than in the productive skills of speaking and writing.)

This article appears in *TESOL Quarterly 38*(2).

Battling Attrition

To understand more about the high school dropout rate, Ruth Curran Neild and Elizabeth Farley have been examining administrative data from the School District of Philadelphia that tracked the progress of ninth-graders who entered high school in 1996.

Writing in *Whatever Happened to the Class of 2000? The Ninth Grade Crisis in Philadelphia*, they focus on timing—since when kids drop out can reveal much about why. The portrait they paint differs dramatically from that drawn from national data sets. What they found was a potential dropout rate of between 35 and 40 percent, with most dropouts leaving in either the ninth

or tenth grade. Although most of the attrition happens in the early grades of high school, many have been *enrolled* for several years—but without having made significant progress toward graduation.

According to Neild and Farley, these data suggest that “the best dropout prevention programs may be those designed to help students make the transition into the high school environment.”

This chapter appears in *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduate Rate Crisis*, by Gary Orfield (Harvard University Press, 2004).

A Sisterhood of Giving

African-American sororities have long been one of the major arenas for Black self-help and educational advancement. *Sisters in Service: African American Sororities and Philanthropic Support of Education*, by Marybeth Gasman, illuminates the philanthropic efforts of Black sorority women to support and further education—both formal and informal—as a means of serving their communities and working toward social

justice. Gasman's exploration of these sororities provides a deeper historical understanding of the range and significance of Black women's civic leadership and contributions to public life.

This chapter appears in *Women and Philanthropy in Education*, edited by Andrea Walton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

The Effect of Magnets

What is the effect of magnet schools on neighborhood high schools? Some critics argue that, by siphoning away the overachievers, magnets intensify the concentration of disadvantaged, low-achieving students in the neighborhood schools.

It ain't necessarily so, writes Ruth Curran Neild in *The Effects of Magnet Schools on Neighborhood High Schools: An Examination of Achievement among Entering Freshmen*. Her analysis of the impact of selective magnet schools on the average achievement of ninth-graders attending neighborhood high schools shows that the composition of most of the lowest-achieving schools is affected little by magnet schools because few students from these

neighborhoods have the academic credentials to qualify for admission to magnet schools. On the contrary, it is schools in high-achieving residence areas that are more likely to feel the impact of the magnet schools.

Disbanding magnet schools would not make much difference, Neild argues. Rather, remaking the lowest-achieving schools will require greater investments of human and financial capital, comprehensive school reform, and a long-term focus on ameliorating the underlying racial and class segregation of neighborhoods.

This article appears in *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 9(1).

We're Not as Dumb as We Think

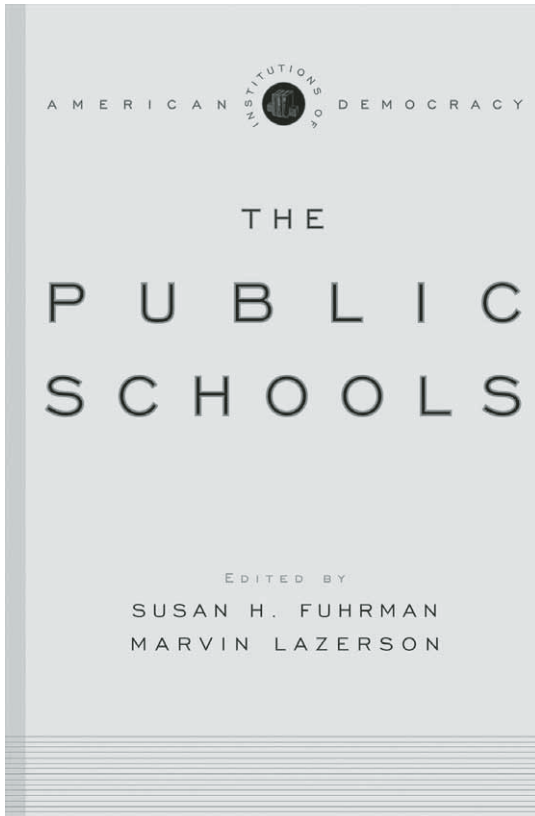
Pundits lament that American students can't compete against their international counterparts and predict a bleak economic future for the U.S.

But according to a new report titled *Is the United States Winning or Losing the International Horse Race in Academic Achievement?*, it's time for the pundits to change their tune. Based on an analysis of the latest generation of international achievement surveys, Erling Boe and Sujie Shin indicate that students in the United States score somewhat higher than their peers in other industrialized nations—across subject matter and grade levels.

When the field is narrowed down to the G7 nations, the scores of the U.S. students are comparable to those of other Western countries in reading, mathematics, and science and considerably higher in civics. (All the Western G7 nations trail Japan in mathematics and science.)

This paper has been published by the Center for Research and Evaluation in Social Policy, 2004, and is available from CRESP, University of Pennsylvania, 3440 Market Street, Suite 465, Philadelphia, PA 19104.

What is the role of public education in a democracy?



*One of the fundamental institutions of **democracy**, public schools have traditionally educated children into **citizenship** and, by teaching people of all backgrounds, have been instrumental in forging **American society**.*

THE INSTITUTIONS OF DEMOCRACY: THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EDITED BY SUSAN H. FUHRMAN &
MARVIN LAZERSON

GENERAL INTRODUCTION BY JAROSLAV PELIKAN
AFTERWORD BY AMY GUTMANN

The Public Schools explores the place of public education in American democracy and the role of schools in the creation of an informed citizenry. The nation's leading education scholars and professionals address some of today's most hotly debated issues—from curriculum standards and testing to school vouchers and prayer in the classroom—and suggest ways to ensure that the public schools stay at the heart of American democracy.

Commissioned in association with the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands and the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, this volume is the first in a series designed to enhance public understanding of the nature and function of democratic institutions. Future volumes will focus on the press and the three branches of government.

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