

Our mission is promoting critical thinking, education, and informed citizenship.



Free



Nonpartisan



Sourced



Updated

CA Superintendent of Education Encourages Use of ProCon.org



"I'm pleased to encourage California educators to add www.procon.org to the tools they use to help students learn more about important issues and develop their critical thinking skills. I have used www.procon.org personally and recommend that California teachers and librarians take advantage of this great - and free - educational resource."

Tom Torlakson,
California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, May 19, 2011

NPR Chairman (and Journalism Professor) Uses ProCon.org

"I use procon.org in my college level journalism class. It helps me illustrate to my students how there are multiple points of view on every issue and the importance of including them in every story they write."

Dave Edwards,
Adjunct Journalism Professor at Alverno College, Apr. 20, 2011
(Chairman of the National Public Radio (NPR) Board of Directors)



Past President of AASL Finds ProCon.org "Incredibly Practical and Effective"

"ProCon.org is an incredibly practical and effective website for teaching and learning. The well-researched pro/con issues provide much non-biased information for students and staff researching contemporary topics."

Harriet Selverstone,
Past President of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), July 15, 2010



ProCon.org has been used by more than:

- 2,700 schools in all 50 states and 48 countries
- 570 media sources (including New York Times, TIME, USA Today, Fox News, PBS, NPR, etc.)
- 18 US state governments and seven federal agencies
- 32 million people

Culture Clash

Is American education racist?

"Multiplication Is for White People": Raising Expectations for Other People's Children

By Lisa Delpit

The New Press, 2012, \$26.95; 256 pages.

As reviewed by Mark Bauerlein

Lisa Delpit has won awards from the MacArthur Foundation, American Educational Studies Association, and *Teacher Magazine*; her book *Other People's Children* has sold 250,000 copies; and she has a named chair at Southern University. Nonetheless, she is angry. In fact, the phrase "I am angry" appears 11 times in the introduction to this summary critique of the education of African American students. Delpit's anger stems from two things: one, the persistently low achievement of those students, and two, school policies and attitudes that cause and maintain it. Straight off, even the most generous reformers come under indictment. Bill and Melinda Gates, for instance, devote much of their gigantic philanthropy to getting black and brown kids ready for college, yet they earn her scorn for "corporate foundations, which indeed *have* those funds because they can avoid paying taxes that the rest of us must foot." It gets worse, as she adds, "I am left in my more cynical moments with the thought that poor black children have become the vehicle by which rich white people give money to their friends."

The charge extends to the very problem the Gates Foundation, the Broad Foundation, Teach For America, and other groups criticized by Delpit propose to remedy: low African American performance. She dismisses the usual explanations—poverty, poor preparation, homes with no books—

and identifies two other causes, one the result of the other.

Low performance begins with American racism. Our society, Delpit writes, has a "deeply ingrained bias of equating blackness with inferiority," and it "seems always ready to identify African Americans with almost all negative behaviors." At tender ages, black students undergo a series of "microaggressions...small psychic insults" that debilitate them. Black males perform poorly because "our young men have

Delpit praises Afrocentric curricula, but her support focuses entirely on inputs and premises, not on outcomes.

internalized all of the negative stereotypes." Sometimes black students are invisible, unnoticed, and disrespected, and sometimes they are "hypervisible," their normal youth behaviors magnified into pathologies. They end up estranged from school culture ("disidentification"), mistrusting their own capacities and fulfilling belittling expectations.

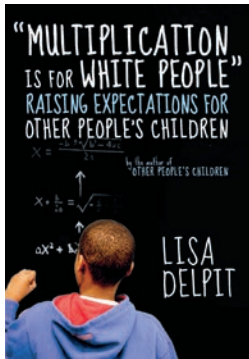
Teachers misinterpret them again and again, Delpit alleges, mainly by disregarding the culture black students inhabit. This is the second cause of low achievement. The classroom is a white,

middle-class space often hostile to African American norms. It downplays collaboration, she notes, even though these students need it to "feel more secure and less vulnerable." It ignores past contributions to learning and science by African Americans. It neglects spirituality, whereas "traditional African education" incorporates "education for the spirit" into everyday lessons.

Delpit assembles classroom anecdotes, including her daughter's experiences, with research on "stereotype threat" to prove the point. Voices of black students bespeak the demoralizing results, as with the middle schooler who announces, "Black people don't multiply; black people just add and subtract. White people multiply." On the other hand, Delpit provides counterexamples of success, for instance, Afrocentric assignments, inspiring teachers who love and sympathize but maintain rigor, and a beloved white teacher whom the students consider "black" for this reason: when asked "how he felt as a white man teaching black history... tears came to his eyes as he answered that when he learned about Emmett Till and other terrible things white people had done to black people, it sometimes made him ashamed to be white."

Of course, tales and profiles and selective research don't amount to proof, nor do they serve as grounds for policy revision. Delpit identifies a significant problem—the clash of school culture with African American out-of-school culture—but her racial lens casts it simply as one of respect and morale, not of effective education. She believes that the former produces the latter, for "African American students are gifted and brilliant," and they would prosper if schools and teachers became sensitive to their culture.

But this translation of teacher sensitivity into student achievement is precisely what remains to be demonstrated. Delpit praises Afrocentric curricula, but her support focuses entirely on inputs and premises, not on outcomes. A unit that instills math by taking racial profiling as the subject wins her admiration, but her only evidence for its effectiveness comes from a student who professes, “now I realize that you could use math to defend your rights and realize the injustices around you.” But what about the math scores those students attain in 12th grade? What grades do they get in first-year college calculus? Delpit claims that schools impart the message that “you must give up identifiably Afri-



can American norms in order to succeed,” but she never shows that embracing those norms produces higher college enrollment or workplace readiness.

If that evidence doesn’t exist, then Delpit’s argument isn’t with schools. It’s with U.S. history, society, culture, economics. Many pages in “*Multiplication Is for White People*” suggest that this is, indeed, the case, such as the indignant section on racist actions after Hurricane Katrina. If society at large is racist, though, then schools should receive more credit than Delpit allows. She asserts that “Typical university curricula leave out contributions of people of color to American culture, except in special courses in African American studies,” a flatly

false claim. Syllabi in U.S. history, literature, music, and other areas at nearly every campus amply represent African American creators. Her complaint really is that schools haven’t sufficiently countered popular attitudes.

Delpit’s prescription that schools show more respect for African American culture, then, may have the effect of cultivating an adversarial posture among students. If American society is anti-African American, then a “culturally relevant curriculum” necessarily conflicts with it. If high schools offer an Afrocentric curriculum, will students find university offerings uncongenial and drift toward African American studies and away from STEM fields, where job prospects are brighter? Will a high school teacher ashamed of his whiteness alienate students from white college teachers and employers not so ashamed? Delpit notes that yelling is often assumed in African American culture to be a sign of caring, but won’t failing to inform students of the inappropriateness of yelling in public and in workplaces set them up for future tensions?

These are open questions, and this book doesn’t begin to consider them. We might easily dismiss it as an expression of resentment—the shadow of Jim Crow looms on every page—but we do better to take the starting point seriously: we have a culture clash in the classroom. Rather than expounding the pains and injustices and prescribing a “sensitivity” reform, however, let’s examine various schools and curricula on the standard accountability measure. Do they produce graduates who proceed to college and workplace and thrive?

Mark Bauerlein is professor of English at Emory University.



GUY & RODD / CARTOONSTOCK.COM

Grading the President

With Race to the Top, Obama earns a B+ in ed reform

President Obama and Education Reform: The Personal and the Political

By Robert Maranto and Michael Q. McShane

Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, \$28; 256 pages.

As reviewed by Nathan Glazer

This book, and this review, will be published while the presidential campaign is in full swing, and whether there will be anything more to be said about President Obama's efforts at education reform, still fragmentary now, depends on the outcome of the election. *President Obama and Education Reform* was written when there was really only half a presidential term to evaluate: after the midterm elections of 2010, there was nothing the administration could do that was in any way dependent on Congress, and even the long-delayed effort to reauthorize the primary basis of the federal role in education, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, it was clear, would have to be delayed further, perhaps to the next administration.

Nevertheless, there is still a story to be told, and the essential part of it is that the program that education reformers have tried to promote now for decades—introduce more choices of schools for students, enable competition among schools, open up paths for preparing teachers and administrators outside schools of education, improve measures of student achievement and teacher competence, enable administrators to act on the basis of such measures, and limit the power of teachers unions—has been advanced under the Obama administration, in the judgment of authors Maranto and McShane.

They are political scientists steeped in the discipline's current theories and methods, and there will be somewhat more of this than I think most readers will want. The authors are well aware of the limitation our complex political system places on any effort at change and reform, and in view of this complexity, they do not expect much: if some policy does more good than harm, that is good enough for them. They describe themselves as a "centrist conservative" and a "centrist liberal," and one should expect neither enthusiasm nor denunciation from them. They differentiate themselves from those "progressive academics...who see the Obama reforms as destroying American schools" or those who see them "as shoring up a defunct system." They appreciate that as a Democratic president Obama has had to act against the firmly held positions of major supporters of the Democratic Party, the teachers unions, but note that there are limits to how far he will go: yes to including data on effectiveness in teacher evaluations, no to providing private school vouchers for students in the District of Columbia. But Obama has certainly gone much further in the direction of reform than Hillary Clinton would have as president.

Noting how long it takes to introduce any major policy in our system, the authors divide presidents, following political scientist Michael Nelson, between "presidents of preparation" and "presidents of achievement." Among the first they place Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Clinton. Among the latter is George W. Bush, because of No Child Left Behind, and possibly Barack Obama: "We think it likely [his] reform will make him a second president of achievement." This is not because of any major legislative accomplishment,

but because of the significant changes attributable to Race to the Top (RttT), the primary education-reform move of the Obama administration.

There is not much to go on in view of the limited time during which RttT has been in effect, and the even more limited time available to judge the effectiveness of the substantial sums disbursed to winning states. (The sum is "substantial" in one respect, at \$4 billion, minor in another, compared to \$80 billion to sustain teachers' employment in the stimulus act, or to the total sums spent at state and local levels for schools and teachers.) The key point is that RttT rewarded states on the basis of how far they went in certain directions favored by education reformers. A good number of states changed their laws to permit administrators to use measures of teacher effectiveness in judging teacher competence, which has been a no-no to the teachers unions. This is in itself a remarkable accomplishment.

Maranto and McShane emphasize the strong push in Race to the Top in the direction of national standards. While the law establishing the Department of Education forbids the federal government to "exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, or administration or personnel of any educational institution..." in Race to the Top, "the Obama administration tacitly gave its approval to a set of 'Common Core Standards' developed by a consortium of state school officers and tied Race to the Top dollars to participation in the program." This may be a path to finally getting a set of national standards and overriding the standards the states set, which have in many states been pushed lower. This "race to the bottom" has made it easier to show adequate yearly progress (AYP)

NEW BOOKS THIS FALL

Harvard
Education
Press

The Futures of School Reform

Edited by Jal Mehta, Robert B. Schwartz, and Frederick M. Hess

The Futures of School Reform represents the culminating work of a three-year discussion among national education leaders convened by the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Based on the recognition that current education reform efforts have reached their limits, the volume maps out a variety of bold visions that push the boundaries of our current thinking. Taken together, these visions identify the leverage points for generating dramatic change and highlight critical trade-offs among different courses of action.

The goal of this book is not to present a menu of options. Rather, it is to surface contrasting assumptions, tensions, constraints, and opportunities, so that together we can better understand—and act on—the choices that lie before us.

*“American education is at a crossroads. In *The Futures of School Reform*, Mehta, Schwartz, and Hess present six essays on education reform strategies that will spark a provocative discussion on how to transform our education system.”*

—Jeb Bush, governor of Florida from 1999–2007, and chairman of the
Foundation for Excellence in Education

Making Civics Count

Citizenship Education for a New Generation

Edited by David E. Campbell, Meira Levinson, and Frederick M. Hess

“By nearly every measure, Americans are less engaged in their communities and political activity than generations past.” So write the editors of this volume, who survey the current practices and history of citizenship education in the United States. They argue that the current period of “creative destruction”—when schools are closing and opening in response to reform mandates—is an ideal time to take an in-depth look at how successful strategies and programs promote civic education and good citizenship.

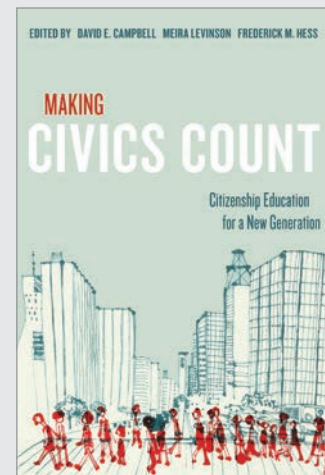
Making Civics Count offers research-based insights into what diverse students and teachers know and do as civic actors, and proposes a blueprint for civic education for a new generation that is both practical and visionary.

“This collection of state-of-the-art essays advances the discussion of civics from noble aspiration to empirical evidence and pedagogical practice. The authors, all noted scholars, have shown us how to improve civic education and—in the process—how to strengthen our democracy. It’s time for policy makers to pay attention.”

—William A. Galston, Ezra Zilkha Chair in Governance Studies,
The Brookings Institution



978-1-61250-471-1/\$29.95 paper
978-1-61250-472-8/\$49.95 cloth
280 pages/INDEX



978-1-61250-476-6/\$29.95 paper
978-1-61250-477-3/\$49.95 cloth
328 pages/INDEX

Order online at www.harvardeducationpress.org

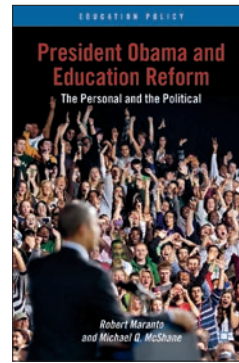
book reviews

and avoid triggering measures required for schools that do not show AYP.

Despite alternative tendencies in academic political science, Maranto and McShane take seriously the role and motivation of the president in making policy, as against the requirements and restrictions of the larger forces affecting policymaking. (Note the book's subtitle, "The Personal and the Political.") Thus the authors review in detail the educational experiences and points of view of the last President Bush and President Obama, and they would argue that neither No Child Left Behind nor Race to the Top were written in the cards: the programs were specifically shaped by presidents whose own educational experiences demonstrated to them the need for effort and judgment. (Think of young George Bush, coming from a lax Texas school to the rigors of Phillips Andover, which he strained to meet, or young Barack Obama being awakened early in the morning by his mother in Indonesia so he could master the curriculum he would face once back in the United States.)

I should note that the "Education Industrial Complex," or EIC, plays a large role in this book as the uniform enemy of school reform. The authors quote Jeanne Allen, president of the Center for Education Reform, as describing this as "more than 200 associations, federations, alliances, departments, offices, administrations, councils, boards, commissions, panels, organizations, herds, flocks, and coveys...." This makes too much of an amalgam, including everyone within education. Surely here and there are supporters of some of the measures the reformers, and Maranto and McShane, favor, and more differentiation would have been desirable.

Maranto and McShane conclude by noting four large forces that will shape the future of education and its funding: the increasing number and percentage of the aged, putting pressure on all other public functions, primarily because of the cost of medical care; the rise of the "creative class," as described by urban theorist Richard Florida, as those who work with ideas and demand more from teachers and schools; the new technology for education, rivaling and undermining traditional approaches and structures; and advances in measurement of achievement and competence,



making the failings of current schools and educational approaches more apparent.

This makes for a sobering future for traditional education: it will not be able to count on more public resources, and ideas will become more important than ever. Clearly, despite NCLB and Race to the Top, we are only at the beginning of an age of reform in education, whoever comes out ahead in the election.

Nathan Glazer is professor emeritus of sociology and education at Harvard University.

