

# Iris Rotberg: Common Core and Charters are not Silver Bullets

By dianeravitch

October 29, 2014 //

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Iris Rotberg, Research Professor of Education Policy at George Washington University, critiques the endless search for the silver bullet that will close the test score gaps among children from low-income and high-income groups.

In 2009, a study claimed that attendance at a charter school in New York City for several years would virtually close that gap. We now know, Rotberg shows, that this was an exaggeration and in fact, based on the latest state tests, untrue.

She predicts that Common Core will turn out to be yet another distraction.

“The supporters and opponents of the Common Core are now engaged in an escalating debate about whether the Common Core will strengthen U.S. education or, instead, become a dangerous intrusion by the federal government to control the content of the curriculum. Most likely, as in the case of previous reforms of curriculum standards, it will turn out to be irrelevant to any real change in the opportunities available to low-income students, and it is certainly unlikely to become the silver bullet that narrows the achievement gap.

“It is often assumed that the Common Core’s emphasis on reasoning will make it difficult to cram for and, therefore, test preparation will no longer be useful. That is the claim initially made by the College Board when cram courses were first used to prepare for university entrance exams (College Entrance Examination Board, 1965). The SAT, GRE, LSAT, and MCAT all emphasize inductive and deductive reasoning, yet affluent families figured out how to cope: They spent thousands of dollars on their children’s cram courses or tutors because they saw that the preparation was effective in raising test scores. If we continue to reward and punish teachers based on the test scores of their students—even if these scores are based on Common Core tests—educators in low-income communities will continue to have little choice but to narrow the curriculum to give more time for test preparation. Rather than reducing the achievement gap, the risk is that the Common Core test, like those that preceded it, will lead to fewer opportunities for children in high-poverty communities. And the rhetoric surrounding it will continue to detract attention from the policies needed to address the societal inequities that have led to the achievement gap.”

She concludes:

“It has been argued that to critique current policies is equivalent to saying that nothing can be done for low-income children. Just the opposite: we know that economic, social, and educational policies in areas of employment and wages, taxation, housing, health, school integration, school finance, and access to

higher education can be effective in addressing the fundamental problems of poverty. Meanwhile, however, we can work to ensure that our current policies do not make matters worse for the most vulnerable students.”

Categories Charter Schools, Common Core, Poverty, U.S. education

## 6 Comments

*Diene*

October 29, 2014 at 11:03 am

Not only are they not silver bullets, they are more like lead bullets – highly toxic.

Reply

*SomeDAM Poet (Devalue Added Model)*

October 29, 2014 at 11:52 am

“Instruction Destruction”

More a destruction

Than a distraction

A politic disruption

Of public instruction

Reply

*NYS Teacher*

October 29, 2014 at 12:16 pm

Administering impossibly difficult tests to the neglected, the impoverished, the abused, the cognitively impaired, the dyslexic, the underprivileged, the immigrants, the most damaged members of American society does not qualify as a civil rights movement.

Do do so at the ages of 8 to 14, to the exclusion of almost everything else, qualifies as educational malpractice. Its a silver bullet that kills hopes, dreams, curiosity, excitement, and love of learning. Heck of a job, Arne.

Reply

*retired teacher*

October 29, 2014 at 2:18 pm

It is naive to think that Common Core testing will reduce the Gap. More testing does not improve instruction, and at the core of the Gap is poverty, a complex issue, that needs to be addressed. The most successful approach I have seen was in my own school district where poor students attended with middle class children. We addressed the Gap in many ways: parent outreach and social services, summer school and after school compensatory education programs for struggling students, detracking of most high school subjects along with a summer readiness program for high school students. Our schools were clean, repaired, had adequate materials, resources, and an active, wonderful PTA. We didn't erase the Gap, but we made a huge dent with many poor, minority students attending and graduating from college. Lots of my former ESL students had middle class friends in high school, especially if they excelled in sports or theater.

Reply

*K Quinn*

October 29, 2014 at 11:10 pm

But I thought Common Core was going to fix everything, even the gender equity issue:

<http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2014/10/28/99435/for-women-and-girls-the-common-core-is-a-step-toward-greater-equity/>

Reply

*retired teacher*

October 30, 2014 at 9:39 am

This notion shows how ignorant our leaders are. I was just reading, "How Common Standards and Standardized Testing Widen the Opportunity Gap," by Tienken and Zhao. In their study the high-stakes pressure surrounding the tests made the struggling students feel unworthy. As a result they were more likely to drop out or get pressured out by administrators reluctant to post the low scores of these students. The tests hurt more than helped!

Reply

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