

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL ENGLERBERG, CAPELLA UNIVERSITY

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1. As we will be reading and discussing your article on “Tradeoffs, Societal Values, and School Reform,” could you tell us about your own interests and research related to both U.S. and international education.

- Research psychologist turned policy researcher. Entered field at a time where there were few degrees in education policy. Most people were trained in other disciplines.
- Federal education policy/Title I study at the National Institute of Education.
- Policy research program at the National Science Foundation.
- House of Representatives Science, Space, and Technology committee.
- RAND.
- The George Washington University. Teaching approach.
- Research interests: international education; international test-score comparisons; testing and accountability—specifically, the impact of accountability requirements and No Child Left Behind on the teaching environment (e.g., dissertation on attrition rates); federal education policy; and, in terms of general interests, a broad set of policy issues, including school choice and higher education, for example.
- Recent work: book on global education reform (source of article on Tradeoffs).

2. As you analyze the trends related to education in the United States, what are your predictions about the directions in K-12 education and higher education? What changes and consequences do you predict for the future?

- Avoid talking about some of the more publicized points where I have no comparative advantage—e.g., going to the client in higher education—distance learning and off-campus centers.
- Past trends perhaps the best predictor (in the absence of dramatic scientific breakthroughs—e.g., genetic engineering). (“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”) Some predictions based on trends:

- **We will continue to hold the same debates about the objectives of education:**

“(1) That there must be legislation concerning education, then, and that this must be made common, is evident. But what education is, and how one ought to educate, should not be neglected. For at present there is a dispute concerning its tasks. Not everyone conceives that the young should learn the same things either with a view to virtue or with a view to the best way of life, nor is it evident whether it is more appropriate that it be with a view to the mind or with a view to the character of the soul. (2) Investigation on the basis of the education that is current yields confusion, and it is not clear whether one should have training in things useful for life, things contributing to virtue, or extraordinary things; for all of these have obtained some judges [willing to decide in their favor]. Concerning the things relating to virtue, nothing is agreed. Indeed, to start with, not everyone honors the same virtue, so it is reasonable to expect them to differ as well in regard to the training in it.” (Aristotle, “Politics,” 330 B.C.)

- **Dramatic changes in education in the U.S. unlikely—local control of education, three branches of government—change occurs, but very slowly—series of compromises. Peter Schrag on No Child Left Behind:**

“But as the reforms of the past two decades pile up on the schools, as pressure from civil rights groups is brought to bear on what they regard as tests and standards that discriminate against minority children, as education funding is rolled back, and as terrorism, recession, oil shortages, and other issues overwhelm education in the nation’s political debates and in the public mind, fatigue is likely to combine with backlash to produce, if not another swing of the pendulum, a rollback in the demands and standards. ...None of this is likely to involve much conscious, systematic reexamination of the overall reform policies of the past generation, but it will produce a gradual attrition toward a more pragmatic, less utopian mean. That, too, has always been the American way.”

Contrast to England’s parliamentary system.

The speed of change (although not which changes) can be predicted by the country’s history and government—e.g., China, Russia, and South Africa. South Africa is described as “attempting a set of reforms that is much larger in scope than what was attempted in, say, the desegregation of school systems in the United States.”

- **Increases in access/expectations will continue—in the U.S. and globally. Examples from different levels of education and population groups.**
- **Increases in flexible learning environments. Examples and constraints.**
- **The U. S. will not produce the highest math scores on international test-score comparisons!**

3. In discussing reforms and changes in education in the U.S. for the future, what do you see as some benefits of making international comparisons and considering models from other countries? What are the problems with how these international comparisons are made and applied?

- **First, my concerns about international test-score comparisons—typically the main source of information about other countries’ education systems. Serious problems in sampling—examples.**

Even if the sampling were perfect, rankings in themselves provide no information about the reasons for the results—e.g., poverty, societal objectives and values. Yet the rankings in the rhetoric and in the public mind are the indicators of the quality of education when in fact they could be related to biased sampling, the societal context (poverty), or to societal values and the choices specific countries make.

Some examples: Olympics, SAT scores, NAEP scores. These problems also plague the interpretation of test scores under No Child Left Behind.

- **In contrast, information about other countries’ education policies, the tradeoffs and difficult choices all countries must make, and their impact on the learning experiences of diverse populations is extremely valuable, I believe, for all countries. For Americans, it places our dialogue in perspective. Examples: Similar problems (poverty, resources for education), similar proposed solutions (decentralization), similar tradeoffs, similar dramatic effects of culture—for example, quote from a description of Chinese education: “holding new wine with the old bottle,” in the context of a Confucian tradition of more than 2000 years.**
- **Also learn about our own misconceptions about other countries—for example, on testing—in an attempt to emulate the countries we most admire, we adopt testing practices that few of them use.**

4. Could you discuss some examples of what we can learn from the experiences in other countries that could guide our policies in the United States?

- **School choice/vouchers/charter schools:** Hong Kong and charter schools, Chile and vouchers. Bottom line: No dramatic differences in achievement. Some increases in social stratification, but that is very dependent on the specific situation.
- **Testing:** Controversial in every country, and sets up the same incentives in every country—teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum—but in many countries seen as a better alternative and basically fairer because of the concern about corruption if students were selected in a less “objective” way. Few countries hold teachers accountable for test scores.
- **Tracking**—risks of early tracking/German example.
- **Early childhood education.**
- **School finance and inequities.**
- **The role of poverty in every country.**

5. Looking at present educational policy issues and envisioning the future of education in the U.S., what do you see as the important values and ethical questions that need to be considered?

Many of the ethical questions are intrinsic to the tradeoffs and difficult choices that have to be made:

- **Basic questions of equity:** Examples from South Africa (parental contributions), the United States (magnet schools, parental contributions), England (comprehensive education), Germany (tracking), China (nature of test). *maintaining the public school system -*
- **School finance:** *issue of centralization /* Linked to decentralization. Examples from China and Russia, and from the United States (as compared with other industrialized countries).
- **Access: Higher education:** tradeoffs, for example in England; ethical issue in many countries, including the United States, about how best to serve students who do not go to college (especially in the context of economic realities and the diminishing number of low-skilled jobs that pay a decent wage); students with disabilities in the United States and in other countries.

Also, increased access / crowding / stratification -

accountability - / flexible learning environments

- **Allocation of instructional time:** With the emphasis on standardized tests, what will happen to those areas that are not tested? Should we worry more about math scores or about the fact that many of our students (and adults) do not understand the basic principles of the Constitution, are not trained to analyze and question what they are told, and know little about the rest of the world? Should we be concerned about the “censorship” of textbooks, as described in books by Diane Ravitch and Jonathan Zimmerman?
- **Perhaps our greatest ethical issue:** poverty the income gap, and health care.