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By Lance T. Izumi and Gwynne Coburn

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Facing the Classroom Challenge, Teacher Quality and Teacher Training in California's Schools of Education

Lance T. Izumi and Gwynne Coburn

Finally, someone has put their finger on the problem: Schools may want to improve but the teaching skills taught to their teachers aren't up to the job

In *Facing the Classroom Challenge*, Lance T. Izumi and K. Gwynne Coburn examine teaching and learning in California, but their analysis could be applied to the rest of the country.

Izumi and Coburn describe popular teaching methods--both those that work and those that do not. They then analyze the prescribed courses and reading material for teacher trainees in major California schools of education. Their conclusion: The Golden State's teacher training programs emphasize teaching skills of unknown effectiveness and ignore the ones that are known to work.

Izumi and Coburn cite convincing evidence and expert opinion that the teacher is the critical factor in school success and that teacher effectiveness is strongly influenced (for good or for ill) by teaching methodology.

Given that the key ingredients of successful teaching and learning are known, why is sound training so elusive? Because the effective methods all represent a teacher-centered philosophy of teaching--a philosophy that is at odds with the student-centered view favored by professors of education.

The teacher-centered approach emphasizes teacher-prescribed skills and knowledge whereas the student-centered view is more concerned about student self-exploration and self-esteem. Objective research shows that the teacher-centered approach is far superior in producing measured achievement.

Despite this reality and against the wishes of policymakers and the public, California's schools of education stick to their philosophy and extol the "virtues" of the inferior student-centered approach. They find support in dubious qualitative studies and they denigrate teacher-centered methodologies by referring to them as dated, as "drill and kill," and as stifling impediments to creativity and initiative.

The discrepancy is evident in the mission statements and course syllabi at most California State University teacher training programs. Most reflect an unequivocal commitment to student-centered instruction. In fact, many seem ideological and more like propaganda than material relevant to the preparation of teachers.

A number of the studies cited by Izumi and Coburn suggest that student-centered teaching is not merely ineffective; it is detrimental, especially to disadvantaged learners. Despite characterizing themselves as champions of the disadvantaged learner, CSU institutions dogmatically adhere to their preferred philosophy. Don't confuse us with the facts, they seem to say.

The high student achievement in Asian and European countries stands in sharp contrast to the lackluster performance attained in most American public schools. Asians and Europeans use teacher-centered instruction and believe in the adage that "practice makes perfect"--a key notion rejected by the student-centered view.

Singapore math, the Japanese Kumon program, and the nationally recognized Bennett-Kew elementary school in Los Angeles are cited as successful teacher-centered models. They show that teacher-centered instruction can and does work in the U. S.

Just how detrimental is student-centered teacher training? Nancy Ichinaga, principal of Bennet-Kew elementary school says that 90 percent of the teachers she hires hold emergency credentials, i.e., they have no teacher training. She avoids hiring teachers who have gone through the schools of education.

Why? "The teachers who have gone through the credential programs at the colleges come with baggage. They think they know better because they have been brainwashed and those are the teachers with whom we have trouble."

Ms Ichinaga also strongly criticizes the teacher-training programs for not being aligned with the state standards. She believes that the schools of education have no intention of aligning their courses to the standards, "because that goes against their grain and their philosophy."

Izumi and Coburn conclude that, "Student-centered ideology has failed our schools and our children, and that crucial fact must be made widely known to policymakers, parents, and the public." Clearly they have identified a critical issue that remains below the radar of most policymakers.

Rather than mandating change in teacher training curricula, the authors suggest using a mix of tighter accountability and incentives for improved outcomes. In particular, they urge the use of value-added assessment as an indicator of effectiveness for recent teacher training graduates. Instead of testing graduates on whether they have learned their professors' student-centered doctrine, value-added assessment would gauge the quality of their training by assessing the achievement gains of their students--a direct measure of teaching effectiveness.

In addition, Izumi and Coburn recommend:

- Public reporting of achievement test averages.
- Teacher sanctions and rewards based on student achievement gains.
- Teacher-centered instruction and proficiency in basic skills as a prerequisite.
- Classroom-level implementation of California's rigorous academic-content standards.
- School-choice scholarships for students.

The Education Consumers Consultants Network is an alliance of experienced and credentialed educators dedicated to serving the needs of parents, policymakers, and taxpayers for independent and consumer-friendly consulting. For more information, contact J. E. Stone, Ed.D., at (423) 282-6832, or write: professor@education-consumers.com