

Misdirected Teacher Training has Crippled Education Reform

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Since the 1983 Nation at Risk report, state and national policymakers have set and reset standards aimed at improving schools. Common Core is just the most recent. None has substantially increased student achievement and the reason is that primary school teachers have been trained to treat achievement as little more important than the advancement of favored social, emotional, and cultural ideals. Policymakers may think that educators disagree with them only about the means to educational improvement. In truth, they also disagree about the ends. Teaching practices that enable students to master tool skills have been available for decades but are little used because they have been falsely characterized as boring, ineffective, or harmful by stakeholders in the status quo. The Higher Education Act now being considered by the U. S. Senate may open the way to reform by making it easier for states and universities to identify supportive accreditors and adopt teacher training standards that support the aims and priorities of public policy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Significant Improvement will Require Teaching that Agrees with State Policy Aims

An online controversy about the impact of Common Core on teaching in grades preK-3 revealed an illusion that has crippled education reform for decades. Policymakers may think that educators disagree with them only about the means to education reform. In truth, they also disagree about the ends.

Since the 1983 *Nation at Risk* report, state and national policymakers have set and reset standards aimed at improving schools. *Common Core* is just the most recent. None has substantially increased student achievement and the reason is that primary school teachers have been trained to treat achievement as little more important than the advancement of favored social, emotional, and cultural ideals.

Despite law and policy holding schools and teachers accountable for learning outcomes, the organizations, agencies, and institutions responsible for teacher preparation have allowed special interests in the education community to substitute their own aims and priorities for those of public policy—and not for the first time.

Misdirected Teacher Training describes a doctrine taught to virtually all preK-3 teachers that has undermined the teaching of basic reading and math skills over the past three decades.

Called “developmentally appropriate practice,” its effect has been to prevent struggling students from catching up with their peers—even after 4 or 5 years of schooling. As a result, approximately 2/3 of all students, including 4/5 of minorities, have not mastered reading by grade 4—when schooling shifts from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” As a consequence, they gain minimal benefit from their subsequent schooling and seventy percent ultimately drop out or graduate unprepared for college or a career.

Teaching practices that enable lagging students to catch up have been available for decades but are little used because stakeholders in the status quo characterize them as boring, ineffective, or harmful.

Even the organization that created the doctrine has tried to change its position in response to criticism from researchers but vested interests, including many in its own ranks, have resisted change.

The Higher Education Act now being considered by the U. S. Senate may open the way to reform by making it easier for states and universities to identify supportive accreditors and adopt teacher training standards that agree with the aims and priorities of public policy.

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Improved Outcomes will Require Teaching that Agrees with State Policy Aims

A recent controversy about *Common Core* exposed a little-discussed but critically important division between educators and education policymakers. Policymakers want teaching that improves student achievement. Primary teachers, however, are trained to view student achievement as little more important than the advancement of favored social, emotional, and cultural ideals.¹ The following examines an example that is at the heart of school failure.

A paper issued by two education advocacy groups—*Defending the Early Years*

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(DEY) and *Alliance for Childhood* (AFC)—called for the withdrawal of Common Core’s kindergarten reading standards. Titled *Little to Gain and Much to Lose*, it argued that Common Core’s reading standards put pressure on kindergarten teachers to expect too much from their least-mature students.² The charge was based on educators’ long-held view that typical classroom instruction can put a child at risk of anxiety, confusion, inadequacy, and failure. Think of military training in preschool and you will have a sense of the classroom dangers that they envision. Moreover, *Little to Gain* found no evidence of a long-term benefit to early reading instruction, and concluded that the standards are both unwarranted and possibly harmful.

A few weeks later, Robert Pondiscio, a Senior Fellow and VP for External Affairs at the

Fordham Institute, replied in an online piece: “Is Common Core too hard for kindergarten?”³ His view: Parents would be alarmed if their children were not required to recite the alphabet and demonstrate similar basic skills by the end of kindergarten. Moreover, Pondiscio characterized *Little to Gain*’s finding of “no supporting research” as “deeply misleading and arguably false”.

Days later, DEY Director GERALYN Bywater McLaughlin issued a dismissive rebuttal.⁴ To wit: Pondiscio’s view was predictable. He is a Senior Fellow at the Gates-Foundation-funded Fordham Institute; he misunderstood DEY’s report, insulted its authors, cited dubious research, and engaged in teacher-bashing!

Plainly, this discussion was more than a polite exchange of views about how best to serve the interests of children! The two sides were virtually on different planets. Pondiscio viewed the Common Core requirements as customary, necessary for first grade success, and wholly attainable. *Little to Gain*’s authors viewed them as excessive and requiring a radical departure from the best kind of teaching. The argument went nowhere.

The debate focused on Common Core but it was really about the difference in aims and priorities that exists between educators and policymakers. *No Child Left Behind*, *Common Core*, and the standards-based accountability movement generally have made it clear that education’s consumers—parents, taxpayers, and their elected representatives—want measured student achievement as schooling’s top priority. It is not the only outcome they desire, but it is the indispensable one. The teaching style advocated by *Little to Gain*, however, rejects the notion of accountability for student achievement and replaces it with its own vision of education.

What Pondiscio and policymakers think of as teaching is a classroom activity that is primarily intended to bring about student acquisition of expected knowledge and skills. It is an activity that cannot be considered successful unless it produces these outcomes.

By contrast, *Little to Gain* is talking about a teaching style called “developmentally appropriate practice” or DAP. Its purpose is to optimize the “growth” of the “whole child” as defined by developmental theory.⁵ DAP has its own aims and priorities, and can be considered successful even if it fails to produce measured student achievement.⁶ Importantly, it is the core pedagogical doctrine taught to all preschool and most primary grade teachers.⁷

The term “developmentally appropriate

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practice” is a tagline for a style of teaching that was adopted as “best practice” by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the 1980s.⁸ It is a style that was popular with members of NAEYC’s predecessor group—the National Association for Nursery Education (NANE).⁹

At the time of the Johnson Administration’s *War on Poverty* and the launch of the federal *Head Start* program, NANE was reorganized into the NAEYC. Propelled by federal funding and the growth of preschooling, NAEYC grew exponentially. Today, it has a membership of approximately 100,000 and it claims curricular jurisdiction for schooling from birth through age 8 (i.e., through 3rd grade).

In its original iteration, NAEYC’s position statement on DAP referred to a teaching style that sought to facilitate intellectual and

psychological growth in a way that minimizes interference with the child’s “natural” developmental trajectory. Relevant to the present discussion, it banned the use of teaching designed to directly bring about improved student achievement.¹⁰ For example, teaching a child the alphabet was called “developmentally *inappropriate*”. Such restrictions were thought necessary to remove the risk of unintended damage to the child’s self-esteem, motivation, and longer-term school success that might be caused by learning expectations that exceeded the child’s developmental limits.

The growing popularity of the results-focused school reforms that had been spurred by the *Nation at Risk* report also played a role in NAEYC’s actions. In particular, DAP was adopted to block the growing use of DISTAR (now called Direct Instruction)—a curriculum that had gained notoriety as the most effective approach to teaching disadvantaged children in the massive Follow Through project of the 1960s and 1970s.¹¹ The effect of NAEYC’s adoption of DAP was to shift the focus of preK-3 schooling throughout the U. S. away from student achievement and toward the social, emotional, and cultural outcomes favored by NAEYC.

DAP was revised in 1997 primarily because of researchers’ concerns about its classroom effectiveness.¹² The revision opened the door to a broader range of teaching practices but it retained its focus on social/emotional outcomes and unwavering opposition to results-focused, systematic curricula such as DISTAR.

However, researchers remained skeptical even after the 1997 revisions. In their view, the DAP statement lacked sufficient guidance as to how teachers could promote literacy development; and they called for additional revisions—ones that would give clear emphasis to research-based, results-focused teaching practices.¹³

As a result, DAP was again revised in 2009 and now encourages teacher-guided classroom activities that are “intended” to strengthen specific knowledge and skills.¹⁴ Unfortunately, it still opposes grade-level achievement standards and describes “best practice” teaching as that which produces student achievement only as a byproduct of classroom experiences that are designed to advance intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development. More importantly, it still opposes direct teaching of “isolated” academic skills, i.e., systematic, results-focused instruction. In effect, this most recent version of DAP acknowledges the need to raise student achievement but continues to discourage teachers from using the teaching practices that are most suited to that purpose.

SHOULDN'T DAP BE DISAVOWED?

NAEYC adopted DAP as an accommodation to special interests within its membership.¹⁵ It was and is a public relations device, not some scientifically-based pedagogical principle. The rationale for its adoption was that it would give early childhood educators a clear professional identity, and would steer early grade teaching away from result-focused practices and toward those that were more in concert with the organization's nursery school roots. Not incidentally, it would also deflect growing calls for preK-3 teachers to be accountable for student learning outcomes—a significant challenge for little trained teachers such as the NAEYC members working for Head Start.¹⁶

NAEYC has been inching away from DAP almost since it was adopted but it continues to use the term and support its use in classrooms throughout the U.S.¹⁷ DAP's influence on teachers' concepts of good teaching remains a significant deterrent to the adoption of any teaching practice that is labeled “developmentally inappropriate”—regardless of its effectiveness—thus it remains a major hindrance to the goal of improving student achievement.

From a scientific standpoint, NAEYC has little grounds for defending its doctrine. It has proven to be mistaken, outmoded, and counterproductive—especially when used with disadvantaged children. However, that isn't likely to happen, and for reasons having to do with the organization's internal politics and the interests of a wide variety of external stakeholders—but more about that later.

Despite NAEYC's continued insistence that DAP is effective and that teacher-led alternatives are unsafe, there is little supporting evidence for their claims.¹⁸

Research to-date finds that while DAP may be said to confer advantages in the realm of student comfort with schooling—for example, it eliminates test anxiety by ruling out the use of standardized tests—there are no consistent findings of positive impact on student achievement. More importantly, there is no evidence that it is effective in helping the overwhelming numbers of children who have knowledge and skill weaknesses that will reduce their chances of success in subsequent grades. In the case of disadvantaged children, weak basic skills are a major cause of schooling failure and its catastrophic economic consequences.

With regard to the alleged threat to student success and emotional health posed by “developmentally inappropriate instruction” (DIP), there simply is no credible scientific support.¹⁹ To the contrary, there have been thousands of studies that have employed systematic, explicit, and direct intervention without reference to developmental suitability and none have reported so much as a hint of adverse emotional or developmental outcomes.²⁰

DAP is derived from the pioneering work of Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget. It is one of a family of “developmentalist” teaching strategies that have emerged and re-emerged over the past 400 or so years.²¹ John Dewey's *Progressive Education* is probably the best known example.

Although Piaget's original theory is now considered outmoded, DAP has been taught to early childhood educators for the last 25–30 years, and its continuing influence on preK-3 teachers is arguably one of the main reasons that school reform since the mid-eighties has had so little impact on student achievement.²² DAP leaves vast numbers of students with weaknesses in the tool skills needed for academic success beyond grade 3.

In the nineteen seventies and eighties, DAP appealed to parents and teachers who worried that preschools were forcing children to grow up too fast.²³ It was intended to limit achievement growth to average levels—a satisfactory rate of progress for children who enter school at or above the knowledge and skill levels of their peers.²⁴ However, for students performing below grade-level standards when they enter preschool or kindergarten, average growth leaves them below grade level by the end of grade 3, and unready for the 4th grade change from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” From that point forward, they typically fall further behind, become discouraged, and ultimately are disadvantaged for a lifetime.

Despite NAEYC's several reformulations of DAP, most practicing teachers still understand it to mean that a child's ability to think and learn is limited by his or her stage of cognitive development and that attempts to teach skills that exceed that limit risk failure, frustration, and a loss of appetite for future learning.²⁵ Thus, they fear *Common Core* or any other standards that might require students to achieve beyond their presumed developmental limitations.

Beyond reported empirical studies, is there any evidence that the alternatives to DAP are unsafe or that they interfere with longer term school success? The *Little to Gain* paper cites a study that was widely read as a result of a 1986 *New York Times* column.²⁶ It found that a small group of 15-year-olds self-reported a higher-than-expected incidence of delinquent

acts 10 years after attending a preschool that used skill-focused teaching. As the authors of the study freely acknowledge, “These findings, based on one study with a small sample, are by no means definitive. . .”

Apparently, that caveat has been widely ignored. A Google search for the article produces thousands of instances where it has been cited by exponents of DAP.

Contrary to the image created by selective media exposure, there had been no studies reporting such an effect prior to the 1986 report and none has arisen since. Instead, the opposite has been found, i.e., numerous reports of positive long-term outcomes from skill-focused preschool programs.²⁷

Beyond empirical findings or informal observations, the claim of delayed harm from DIP has a plausibility problem. The notion that exposure to an hour or so per day of results-focused instruction with 4 or 5-year-old children would materially contribute to the emergence of juvenile delinquency 10 years later is virtually without parallel in the educational literature. Skill-focused classroom instruction has been used with children worldwide and for centuries without any evidence that it brings about delinquent behavior.

Finally, it is well to recognize that most of the very research-based teaching practices that DAP would characterize as developmentally inappropriate have been used for decades by special educators. For example, the reading instruction widely recommended for use with learning disabled children is described as “explicit”, “intensive”, and “supportive”—meaning that systematic corrective feedback is employed.²⁸ Moreover, today's popular Response to Intervention (RTI) program accelerates the progress of struggling learners through the use of intensive, targeted, research-based interventions.²⁹ Nothing in the relevant literature even hints that these practices are dangerous to children or should

be used sparingly because of their known or suspected side effects.

HOW DAP WORKS IN PRACTICE

As formulated in the nineteen eighties and used in many classrooms today, DAP is designed to protect children from the harm that theoretically occurs if classroom expectations exceed developmental limitations. Its goal is to ensure “normal” or average rates of school progress and it does so by exposing the child to a variety of activities that are intended to engage and produce a variety of social, emotional, and academic outcomes.

Its signature teaching practice is the creation of classroom activity or learning “centers” that serve to “unite the child’s interests with the teacher’s goals” and “artfully direct the child’s focus” to a developmentally appropriate task.³⁰ If an activity fails to produce the learning outcome intended by the teacher, DAP can still be said to have succeeded because it enhanced other facets of the child’s development, i.e., reached its goal of educating the “whole child”.

From the standpoint of Piaget’s theory, restricting expectations for achievement to developmental limits seems reasonable.

In other words, by telling teachers, “when in doubt, assume that failure to learn is the result of developmental limitations, not ineffective teaching,” DAP encourages them to be inactive precisely where they should be proactive.

Children do pass through stages of development and these stages have a bearing on the ease or difficulty of learning. In fact,

however, the stages have ambiguous dimensions, they change unevenly, and they are not easily identified even by researchers—much less by teachers with a roomful of children and on a day-to-day basis. Thus, given the exaggerated notion of DIP’s dangers, a DAP-informed teacher is less likely to guide, direct, or encourage an unengaged student than they would otherwise be—even if the student was merely bored, distracted, or shy.³¹

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WHY SCHOOLS NEED MORE EFFECTIVE EARLY GRADE TEACHING

Today, roughly two-thirds of fourth-grade students lack mastery of reading and math—and that’s as measured by the current “gold standard”, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).³³ State standards differ from each other and from the NAEP,³⁴ but the vast majority of schools in every state have a substantial number of students who have not mastered reading—the most basic of basic skills.³⁵ These numbers have changed little in recent decades.

Foundational skills cannot be skipped or easily remediated, and preschooling cannot prevent failure by somehow inoculating children against ineffective early-grade teaching—a fact now acknowledged even by the NAEYC.³⁶ As clearly evidenced by research, students lacking proficiency in reading and math by the end of grade three are impaired for the remainder of their school careers and into their adult lives.³⁷ Learning deficiencies and discouragement cumulate, leading to drop-outs and underprepared graduates. Teachers of grades 4–12 are faced with a daunting, if not impossible, task. Reforms at the middle and high school level are, effectively, blunted even before they are implemented.

The longer term outcomes are ruinous. According to ACT, only 26% of high school graduates are prepared for college or the workplace—an outcome that is largely predictable from third grade reading data.³⁸ About 70% of students who fail to read at a proficient level by third grade either dropout or graduate unprepared for a future in college or the workplace. Dropouts alone cost taxpayers roughly \$90,000 apiece in added health care, public safety, welfare, and education benefits alone.³⁹ Bottom line: Students deficient in tool skills do not fully benefit from their subsequent years in school, higher standards notwithstanding.

Schools are inundated with children who are 1 to 3 grade levels behind their peers when they enter kindergarten and are still behind at the end of third grade—four years later. If their rate of achievement growth in K-3 is only one year of growth per year of school, such a result is inevitable. To have a chance of

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catching up and reaching grade level (i.e., mastery) by grade 4, they need to gain from 1.25 to 1.75 grade levels per school year in the course of each of the K-3 grades.⁴⁰

Mastery by grade 4 is critical because schooling turns from “learning to read” to “reading to learn”. By definition, DAP is the wrong tool for reaching this goal. It was chosen by its proponents precisely because it would discourage teachers from using the structured and systematic types of instruction that will produce the needed annual gains. DAP is not some kind of “developmentally safe” alternative

to ordinary classroom instruction, it is the pedagogical embodiment of a different set of goals and priorities—ones wholly unsuited to the great majority of students attending today’s public schools.

In truth, *Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind*, and now *Common Core* might have been unnecessary had the great majority of preK-3 students not experienced DAP but instead received results-focused instruction. Students entering grade 4 with tool skill mastery would have had a much greater chance of emerging as college and career-ready graduates even without national standards because their enhanced tool skills would have allowed them to gain much more from the existing 4–12 curriculum. As matters stand, they and future reform efforts will be futile until this fundamental problem is fixed.

Bottom line: Whether educational goals are defined by *No Child Left Behind*, *Common Core*, or standards set by individual states, substantial improvement in student achievement will remain out of reach so long as preK-3 teachers are hobbled by DAP.

WHY DEBATES BETWEEN EDUCATORS AND POLICYMAKERS GO NOWHERE

The online exchange that prompted the present paper is a classic instance of conversations that have taken place between educators and the policy community for decades. They talk past each other.

The *Little to Gain* paper objects to *Common Core* on the grounds that it interferes with sound teaching practice and Pondiscio argues that whatever approach educators are taking, it isn’t producing satisfactory results. Each side stays within its bailiwick and the illusion that they disagree only about means, not ends, is maintained.

Little to Gain’s DAP-based-teaching aims to produce one year of achievement growth per school year, and Pondiscio’s *Common Core* reforms are designed to ensure

that all students become college or career-ready—a goal that inevitably requires students who are low performers at school entry to gain more than one year of achievement growth per year.

Here is the “hidden” disagreement about public education’s aims and priorities. The teaching tools with which teachers have been equipped are not suited to the aims and priorities of the standards-based educational reforms that have been public policy since the nineteen eighties. The conflict is not hidden in the sense that the positions, aims, and priorities of the two sides are little documented or veiled in secrecy, it is hidden in the sense that it is almost never mentioned as a barrier to everyone’s presumed goal of improved student achievement.

Little to Gain objects that Common Core’s early-grade benchmarks will pressure teachers to abandon “play-based” programs (i.e., DAP) but voices no objection to Common Core’s overall aims—as though the issue is not goals, just teaching methods. Pondiscio objects to *Little to Gain*’s recommendations but appears to believe that DAP can somehow be refined to reach Common Core’s aims. For whatever reason, the contradiction between the two positions is never addressed.

It is the failure to address such contradictions that has historically obscured the disconnect between the public’s educational aims and those widely embraced by the teaching profession—especially those of the teacher preparation community.⁴¹ For example, from roughly 1920 to 1950, John Dewey’s progressive education sought broad intellectual growth instead of the educational objectives set by school boards—but the discrepancy was little recognized in public discussions of school policy.

A more recent example is the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education’s (NCATE) decades-long emphasis on ensuring that accredited teacher preparation

programs were infused with equity, diversity, and social justice instead of training in results-focused teaching practices.⁴² Its rationale was that the effectiveness of best practice teaching required teachers to be advocates of social justice for their students.

In today’s public discussions about educational policy and practice, policymakers are given to understand that teachers are trained in the use of “best practices”—practices that they presume are the most effective means available of accomplishing the aims of education policy. What no one says is that these so-called “best practices” are, for the most part, “best” at advancing the education community’s aims and priorities, not the consuming public’s.⁴³ Over the years, scholars and commentators concerned with education policy have written about teaching practice lacking “alignment” with policy but the underlying contradictions have been given little attention in debates about No Child Left Behind and Common Core.⁴⁴

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BARRIERS TO REDUCING THE USE OF DAP IN THE SCHOOLS

Developmentally appropriate practice is not only sanctioned and promoted by the NAEYC, it is taken to be “best practice” teaching by both K-3 teachers and the wider education community. Following the NAEYC’s lead, groups such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and similar professional organizations embrace DAP as an ideal style of teaching.⁴⁵

More importantly, the accreditors of teacher preparation programs embrace the standards established by NAEYC, NAESP, and other professional societies and rely on them in the assessment of training programs for a wide range of educator specializations.⁴⁶ The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP)—formerly known as NCATE—partners with most states to accredit teacher-training programs, thus DAP-friendly teacher preparation is essentially mandated by most states. More about this issue later.

The arrangement ensures that virtually all preK-3 teachers have a developmental perspective, and that schools attempting to improve preK-3 outcomes by implementing results-focused curriculum will encounter barriers that go well beyond the usual institutional inertia. They range from a lack of teachers trained in alternatives, to unyielding teacher skepticism, to outright refusals to implement programs on professional and ethical grounds.⁴⁷

For example, an article in a recent edition of NAEYC’s *Young Children* suggests that a teacher in a low-performing school has an ethical obligation to resist mandated kindergarten testing if she thinks that the test makes students feel uncomfortable.⁴⁸ Moreover, the article urges teachers to publicly advocate against the use of such testing as ethically dubious and potentially harmful in letters to the editor and similar forums.

Even when schools or districts successfully implement results-focused reforms, the reforms typically remain in place only until a new and DAP-friendly teacher or administrator takes over and replaces them. The history of school reform is littered with successful projects that were discontinued when new leadership brought in some popular innovation or well marketed curriculum.⁴⁹

In response to a growing body of opinion that DAP was insufficiently supportive of research-based instruction, NAEYC attempted to modify its position on DAP in 1997 and 2009. The attempts, however, encountered significant resistance among NAEYC members and appear to have had little effect on classroom practice. As a result, even NAEYC’s present (2009) position on DAP continues to treat student achievement as one outcome among many, and results-focused practices such as direct instruction as something that must be avoided.⁵⁰

Without policymaker intervention, DAP is likely to remain the preeminent practice in preK-3 classrooms for the foreseeable future. A variety of education stakeholders are invested in its survival.

For teachers who are familiar only with DAP-centric thinking, change may seem like heresy. Most teachers, however, are willing to try new approaches if they are convinced that a different approach will benefit their students. Other stakeholders, however, may not be so accommodating.

For advocacy organizations like DEY and AFC, rejection of DAP may be unthinkable—even in the face of NAEYC’s revisions and mounting state policies to halt the social promotion of students with basic skill deficiencies. Developmentally appropriate practice has a canonical status and an about-face would undermine their reason for existence i.e., that they are acting to defend children from skill-focused teaching. For a number of other stakeholders, there are less

obvious but potent disincentives that potentially come into play.

For example, the NAEYC and the early childhood profession could suffer a serious blow to their credibility if there is widespread recognition that children have been deprived of effective teaching because of ideological maneuvering or a desire to avoid accountability.⁵¹

Imagine a similar situation in the pharmaceutical industry. A company that sells drugs to pediatric hospitals finds that a vaccine intended to prevent a disabling adult condition is ineffective and that the alternatives they had been denigrating are far better. However,

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instead of admitting the facts to their clients and trying to do the right thing, they keep pushing the old product because of their marketing investment. The outcome would eventually be legal action, public outrage, and calls for better consumer protection.

NAEYC's stance on DAP may not well serve education's consumers but it benefits a variety of interests within the education community. For example, because DAP is both individualized and inefficient, it requires more teachers and teacher training than might otherwise be the case. The same can be said about its ineffectiveness in closing learning gaps. The greater the learning gaps, the greater the need for remedial programs and tutoring.

In a broader public policy context, DAP's ineffectiveness enhances the perceived need for preschools and anti-poverty programs. And, in the marketplace for vendors of educational materials and services, NAEYC's position creates demand for that which is DAP-friendly and suppresses demand for alternatives. With the exception of special education, the zealous propagation of DAP by the NAEYC and its partners has virtually shut the vendors of results-focused programs and curricula out of the school marketplace.

In a world without DAP, effective, research-based approaches to preK-3 teaching would be welcomed—especially those that have been used for decades by special educators and teachers in high poverty schools.⁵² Englemann's Direct Instruction (DI) and Slavin's Success for All (SFA) are two well established, empirically documented examples.

Both are comfortably able to produce the 1.5 to 2.0 years of achievement growth per school year needed to bring delayed students to grade level by third grade and yet both have been widely defamed as "drill and kill" and "push-down curricula."⁵³ In truth, both are highly engaging and well received by students and teachers who are trained and supported.

The Engelmann program, in particular, was found to be the most effective teaching model in the massive federal Follow Through project of the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁴ Direct instruction was shown to be both the most effective approach to teaching basic skills and the most effective in boosting student self-esteem. Children taught by DI like going to school.⁵⁵

Despite their documented success with children, the use of both DI and SFA by schools has suffered because they are systematic, results-focused, and teacher-led; and therefore considered "developmentally inappropriate". Full disclosure, DI is recommended by the Education Consumers Foundation.⁵⁶

WHAT CAN BE DONE

States regulate teacher training, accreditation, and licensure, but most use NCATE/CAEP or similar standards to accredit teacher preparation programs. Thus given CAEP's reliance on NAEYC program standards, the vast majority of training programs that prepare teachers for preK-3 teaching have a DAP-centered curriculum.

In principle, state control of accreditation protects those who seek to become teachers from incompetent training. In practice, it is a mechanism whereby the dominant organizations within teaching profession regulate teacher training with the blessing of the state.⁵⁷ Although CAEP and NAEYC are separate from the teacher preparation programs for which they set standards, they are in essence two sides of the same coin. Both organizations are comprised of similarly trained educators and teacher educators, and they work collaboratively with public agencies that are staffed by members of the same fraternity.

The arrangement is a classic case of regulatory capture. The state agencies that exist to protect the public from faulty teacher preparation, in fact, set the standards for teacher preparation and licensure primarily with the guidance of the educators whom they are charged with regulating. Not surprisingly, the guidance they receive affirms that the DAP teaching style that both the NAEYC and the teacher preparation programs call "best practice" is, indeed, affirmed to be best practice—the vast body of research disseminated by agencies like National Institute of Child Health and Human Development notwithstanding.⁵⁸

The regulatory process governing teacher preparation and licensure would appear to be a blatant instance of self-dealing by a special interest except that it parallels the accrediting, training, and licensure mechanism

that is used by the health professions and other licensed professionals—most of which are deemed to well-serve the public interest. Doctors, dentists, nurses, and other health care providers are trained and licensed according to standards set by professional associations and mandated by state regulatory bodies.

There is a critical difference, however, in the circumstances surrounding teacher training and licensure and those relevant to the training and licensure of doctors and dentists. Health care professionals have historically offered their services in a competitive marketplace while educators have primarily been employed by public monopolies serving a captive clientele.

School districts, in contrast to doctor's offices or hospitals, almost never go out of business or worry about whether they have hired the best-available professional staff.

There are effective alternatives to the teaching practices now employed by many preK-3 teachers but they are largely excluded from teacher training because of special interest influence in the regulation of teacher preparation, licensure, and employment.

Historically, they have had to focus on teacher quality in hiring only to the extent evidenced by teacher credentials. Thus the distinction is that medical educators and graduates have had to concern themselves with the satisfaction of paying customers while teacher educators and their graduates have only had to meet paper standards—standards that they played a key role in formulating.

Bottom line: There are effective alternatives to the teaching practices now employed by many preK-3 teachers but they are largely excluded from teacher training because of special interest influence in the regulation of teacher preparation, licensure, and employment. State regulators use standards set by the dominant professional groups, accrediting bodies, and the teacher preparation programs—none of which are accountable to parents or the larger public.

RECOMMENDATION: STATES SHOULD INVITE PROPOSALS FROM MULTIPLE ACCREDITORS AND ENCOURAGE INSTITUTIONS TO ADOPT STANDARDS THAT AGREE WITH THE AIMS OF PUBLIC POLICY.

State regulation of teacher training and licensure has failed to protect education's consumers from teachers trained in obsolete and ineffective practices such as DAP because the relevant agencies in most states routinely approve training curricula that conflict with the aims and priorities of public policy.

Even states that have alternative teacher certification require the graduates of all training alternatives to demonstrate the same set of pedagogical competencies and skills regardless of the training provider. Thus even if an alternative program trains teachers in an alternative approach to teaching, its students must demonstrate competencies and pass an examination that is founded on the same vision of teaching taught by all other training programs in the state.

For example, in the 1990s, the Texas Board of Educator Certification adopted a "learner-centered" vision of teaching that was fundamentally at odds with the state's achievement-focused educational aims.⁵⁹ Despite the existence of multiple alternative certification providers and the state's broader reform aims, all teacher training programs had to align their curricula with the aims and competencies required by the state's teacher

certification exam—the *Examination for the Certification of Teachers in Texas*.

Legislation now being considered by the United States Senate may offer a way to relieve the pedagogical stranglehold now exercised by teacher education's accreditors.⁶⁰ Provisions of the Higher Education Reauthorization bill now before the U.S. Senate's Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee could expand

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postsecondary accreditation alternatives for institutions and programs in the interest of improving quality, increasing innovation and competition among training providers, and fostering transparency.⁶¹

One effect would be that states could find or create an accreditor whose standards align with public policy. At a minimum, the availability of alternative accreditors would allow institutions to choose consumer-friendly accreditors and prevent incumbent organizations and allied special interests from serving as sole curricular gatekeepers.

If alternative accreditors were available and institutions were to invite candidates to document how their standards would serve the aims and priorities of the state policy, it would be possible for institutions to select an

accreditor whose aims align with policy, and for teachers and taxpayers to gain a clearer understanding of the aims and priorities of the training offered by the institutions.

In truth, accreditors may already have an ethical if not a legal duty to inform states as to the aims of their standards—especially in instances where the standards fail to support policy aims such test-based accountability, data-driven instruction, and evidence-based teaching.

When partnering with the states, accreditors are acting not just as private organizations seeking to maintain the quality of their discipline or profession; they are serving as stewards of the public’s interest in public school personnel who are equipped to carry out

their assigned duties. In any case, the good faith requirements of such a partnership would surely presuppose that recommended standards are not intended to negate the aims of state policy.⁶²

In the absence of accreditors that agree with state policy, state agencies could simply set accreditation standards that are supportive of the state’s aims and priorities—as is now the case with many facets of education policy where reform is sought. With or without legislative change, state adoptions of teacher preparation standards should be guided by a process that ensures their alignment with the aims and priorities of state policy and not with an alternative designed to serve the sociopolitical vision of a special interest.

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Endnotes

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⁶ DAP's opposition to intervention was controversial from the outset. For example, educators who teach young children with disabilities disagreed with its rejection of learning goals and accountability: "... programs serving young children with special needs must be outcome-based, with specific criteria, procedures, and timelines used to determine if individual children progress toward stated outcomes" (p.7). "These contrasting positions on accountability reflect key philosophical differences about the validity of intervention to accelerate a child's development" (p.8). Carta, J. J., Schwartz, I. S., Atwater, J. B., & McConnell, S. R. (1991). Developmentally appropriate practice: Appraising its usefulness for young children with disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 11(1), 1-20. Online: <http://tec.sagepub.com/content/by/year>

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¹¹ "The 1987 NAEYC document *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8* (Bredekamp, 1987) had a substantial impact on preschool education. It strongly promoted the view that preschool should be structured around play and other child-selected activities. . . . These recommendations were in large part an oppositional response to the direct instruction programs (e.g., DISTAR) that were prominent in preschool and kindergarten settings [italics added] Thus, the 1987 NAEYC document helped to swing the pendulum from advocating structured activities that were teacher-directed to advocating child-selected and child-initiated activities in which teachers served more as guides. Likewise, the goal of the preschool experience moved from an emphasis on specific academic skill development to one that fostered social skill development [italics added]. . . ." VanKleeck, A., & Schuele, C. M. (2010). Historical perspectives on literacy in early childhood. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 19, 349-50. Online: <http://vnulib.edu.vn:8000/dspace/bitstream/123456789/4191/1/6.%20Historical%20%20perspectives%20on%20literacy%20in%20early%20childhood.pdf>

¹² "A decade later, the NAEYC published a new version of Developmentally Appropriate Practice that reflected the current trend among a number of scholars of attempting to achieve a balance between direct instruction and child-selected activity in preschool settings (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). As Dickinson (2002) notes, gone were

the admonitions against direct teaching of content area academic skills, such as those related to alphabet knowledge. Instead, it was noted that children need to learn ‘letter names and letter-sound combinations’ (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 131) and that such knowledge is not discoverable by children on their own but requires direct instruction (Schickedanz, 2003). . . .” Ibid, p. 350. Online:

<http://vnulib.edu.vn:8000/dspace/bitstream/123456789/4191/1/6.%20Historical%20%20perspectives%20on%20literacy%20in%20early%20childhood.pdf>; Also see Dickinson, D. K. (2002). Shifting images of developmentally appropriate practice as seen through different lenses, *Educational Researcher*, 31(1), 26-32; See also Schickedanz, J. A. (2003), Engaging preschoolers in code learning: Some thoughts about preschool teachers’ concerns. In D. M. Barone & L. M. Morrow (Eds.), *Literacy and young children: Research-based practices* (pp. 121-139). New York: Guilford Press

¹³ “Shortly after the publication of the 1997 NAEYC document, the presiding president of the International Reading Association (IRA), Jack Pikulski, wrote an article voicing concerns that the document had simply not done enough to illuminate how teachers could support children’s early literacy development (Pikulski, 1997). He initiated collaboration between the IRA and the NAEYC that resulted in a new position statement (NAEYC, 1998) as well as a book of the same title (Neuman et al., 2000). These publications go far beyond the 1997 document in explaining and providing examples of the many ways teachers can enhance young children’s literacy skills.” Ibid, p. 350. Online <http://vnulib.edu.vn:8000/dspace/bitstream/123456789/4191/1/6.%20Historical%20%20perspectives%20on%20literacy%20in%20early%20childhood.pdf>; See also Pikulski, J. (1997, August/September). Reading and writing in kindergarten: Developmentally appropriate? *Reading Today*, 15(1), p. 24; See also Neuman, S. B., Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2000), *Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

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¹⁵ As is evident from the reports of participants in the meetings in which DAP was adopted, the move to embrace DAP had little to do with advancing the use of proven teaching methods and much to do with NAEYC’s internal politics and the advancement of certain social and political ideals. In their words, the goal was, “. . . to foster professional identity and visibility for the early childhood practitioner, administrator, supervisor, teacher educator, curricular specialist and the like (Bredekamp, 1987, 1991). Enhancement of the quality of experiences afforded to young children was obviously the original intent, but it soon became apparent that DAP could serve political and advocacy aims in negotiating with the educational establishment and dealing with the public at large. A ‘flag to rally around’ would be very helpful for public relations. . . .” “The overriding concern was to build consensus and advance the field of ECE as a whole and to enhance the status of the profession. . . .” “The larger aim was to help society reach a state of “economic, social, and civic justice” commensurate with membership in the “larger global community.” Structured, systematic, and results-focused approaches to teaching were intentionally excluded.

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<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0885200686900050> ; The Schweinhart, Weikart, and Lerner

article might have been ignored had it not been for a *New York Times* article that highlighted its findings. (See Hechinger, F. M. [1986, April 22], Preschool programs, *The New York Times*. Columnist Fred Hechinger quoted High/Scope Foundation President and co-author David Weikart regarding the “dangers” of DI and its “pressure cooker” approach. The High/Scope preschool model was Direct Instruction's principal competitor for federal funding at the time. Following Hechinger's report, the Schweinhart, Weikart, and Lerner study was cited hundreds of times in the academic literature, and today it generates thousands of hits on Google. For many readers, their only exposure to the term *Direct Instruction* has been in conjunction with the Hechinger article and its fallout. The fact that a subsequent study by Mills, Cole, Jenkins, and Dale was unable to replicate the findings of Schweinhart, Weikart, and Lerner has received little media attention.

²⁷ Stockard, J. (2015, June 15). *Harmful effects of academic early education? A look at the claims and the evidence*.

Eugene, OR: National Institute for Direct Instruction. Online: <http://nifdi.org/news/latest-news/565-psychology-today-june-2015-article-rebuttal>

²⁸ One of the foremost reading researchers in the U.S. describes the critical necessity of early intervention:

Torgesen, J. K. (2004). Avoiding the devastating downward spiral: The evidence that early intervention prevents reading failure. *American Educator*, 28(3), 6–19. Retrieved from <http://www.aft.org/periodical/american-educator/fall-2004/avoiding-devastating-downward-spiral>

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- ²⁹ RTI Action Network. *What is RTI?* The National Center for Learning Disabilities, Inc. Online: <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti>
- ³⁰ DEY. Defending the Early Years. (2015). *Reading instruction in kindergarten: Little to gain and much to lose*.
- ³¹ Teaching guided by developmental idealism is not only ineffective, it is impractical. "In the end, teachers are saddled with an unattainable expectation. They, their employers, and the public are encouraged to believe that if a teacher is sufficiently creative and ingenious in harnessing each individual student's potentialities, expected learning outcomes will emerge in a way that the student will experience as spontaneous, natural, and comfortable. It is an ideal founded wholly on developmentalist supposition but it has come to define good teaching." Stone, J.E. (1996). Developmentalism: An obscure but pervasive restriction on educational improvement. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 4(8), p. 16. Online: <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/631>
- ³² "In effect, developmentalism discourages teachers and parents from asserting expectations or otherwise acting to induce more mature behavior." Stone, J. E. (1996). Developmentalism: An obscure but pervasive restriction on educational improvement. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 4(8), p. 15. Online: <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/631>
- ³³ *State Profiles*. U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences. National Center for Education Statistics. Online: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/>
- ³⁴ Education Consumers Foundation. (n.d.). *Are states reporting the truth about student achievement?* Arlington, VA: Author. Online: <http://education-consumers.org/states-reporting-truth-student-achievement/>
- ³⁵ Education Consumers Foundation. (n.d.). *How well does your school teach children to read?* Arlington, VA: Author. Online: <http://education-consumers.org/school-performance-nationally/>
- ³⁶ See Bredekamp, S. (Ed.) 1987. *Developmentally appropriate practice*; NAEYC). (2009). *Position statement on developmentally appropriate practice*. Online: <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/position%20statement%20Web.pdf>
- ³⁷ Fiester, L. (2013). *Early warning confirmed: A research update on third-grade reading*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Online: <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-EarlyWarningConfirmed-2013.pdf>
- ³⁸ ACT. (2014). *ACT national and state scores*. Iowa City, IA: Author. Online: <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2014/profilereports.html>
- ³⁹ Education Consumers Foundation. (n.d.). *Reading failure is costing us our future: Here are the numbers for your school or district*. Arlington, VA: Author. Online: <http://education-consumers.org/research-areas/consumer-tools/efc-cost-calculator/>
- ⁴⁰ Fielding, L., Kerr, N., & Rosier, P. (2007). *Annual growth for all students, catch-up growth for those who are behind*. Kennewick, WA: The New Foundation Press, Inc.
- ⁴¹ Stone, J. E. (2000). Aligning teacher training with public policy. *The State Education Standard*, 1(1), 35-38. Online: <http://education-consumers.org/issues-public-education-research-analysis/aligning-teacher-training-public-policy/aligning-teacher-training-public-policy-article/>; See also Stone, J. E. (1998). 'Different drummers' and teacher training: A disharmony that impairs schooling. *Education Week*. Online: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1998/02/04/21stone.h17.html?qs=Disharmony+that+impairs+schooling>
- ⁴² Stone, J. E. (1999). National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education: Whose standards? In Chester E. Finn, Jr. & Marci Kanstoroom (Eds.), *Better Teachers, Better Schools*. Online: <http://education-consumers.org/national-council-accreditation-teacher-education-whose-standards/>
- ⁴³ Clinchy, Evans (1998). 'Different drummers' and teacher training: Who is out of step with whom. *Education Week*. Online: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1998/02/04/21clinch.h17.html>
- ⁴⁴ DeMonte, J. (2013). *Who is in charge of teacher preparation?* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 17 June. Online: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2013/06/17/66753/who-is-in-charge-of-teacher-preparation/>; See also Stone, J. E. (2002). Teacher training and pedagogical methods. In L. T. Izumi & W. M. Evers (Eds.), *Teacher quality* (pp. 33-54). Stanford, CA: Hoover Press. Online: <http://www.hooverpress.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=955>; See also Stone, J. E. (1999). National Council for the

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