

# ECF Education Briefs

Issues in Public Education: Research and Analysis  
from the Education Consumers Foundation

January 2001 • v1n1

## Aligning Teacher Training with Public Policy

By J. E. Stone

*The State Education Standard, Winter 2000, pp. 34-38.*

Found online at [http://education-consumers.org/research/briefs\\_0101.htm](http://education-consumers.org/research/briefs_0101.htm)



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# Aligning Teacher Training with Public Policy

*J. E. Stone*

John Q. Public is alarmed by continuing reports of failing schools. Lester R. Legislator is concerned, too, with ever-increasing school funding and little progress. Everyone feels cheated.

Why is that? Surprisingly, it's not the teachers' fault. It goes deeper. To paraphrase Shakespeare, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in the stars but in our teachers' colleges." Education professors simply disagree with the public and with the legislators. They train teachers to put other goals ahead of student achievement.

Teachers cannot graduate, cannot be certified and cannot teach unless they agree with their professors and their professors' priorities. The professors believe student attainment of basic academic knowledge and skills is secondary to the enjoyment of learning.

Everyone agrees that kids should enjoy school -- but not at the expense of learning. Many surveys have shown that.

Sorry, the professors just don't agree. They believe in "learner-centered" education where the teacher "facilitates" and students supposedly learn on their own. They insist that students must explore topics rather than learn directly from their teacher.

With their approach:

- Objectives are fuzzy
- Academic achievement is not the top priority
- Objective tests are a dubious measure of progress.
- Competition is discouraged
- Even getting the right answer is unimportant

Let us hope their students don't become Boeing engineers.

Professor Stone details this disagreement in “Aligning Teacher Training With Public Policy.” His article is in response to a call for improved teacher training by the American Council of Education--a group representing colleges and universities. Of course, they and businesses must carry the burden of undereducated k-12 graduates.

Stone tells college presidents, legislators, and other policymakers that teacher training must be redirected, not just improved. He says it should serve the public’s aims, not the aims decided by education professors.

Nothing less than a complete redirection will reverse the year-after-year disgrace of America’s students placing near the last in international academic comparisons. Blurring the differences and blending the aims has been tried and failed. The public’s objectives must supersede those of the professors.

Stone points out that professors may seem to accept the public’s view but, in truth, they don’t speak the same language. They talk about teachers using “best practice.” When average citizens hear the term, they think it means the teacher is using the most effective method of increasing student academic achievement. Not really.

What professors mean by “best practice” is “learner-centered” teaching--a new phrase for what used to be called “progressive education.” For most of the last century “progressive” techniques have been tried and failed, repackaged, and tried again. The “progressive education” folks seem to be slow learners.

Serious research has shown that “learner centered” teaching promises much more than it yields. Teacher-led direct instruction is far more effective. It’s that simple.

But the professors have their own agenda. They believe in a more free-spirited education that is less demanding academically. They believe students should feel good about school even if they aren’t really learning.

And since the professors and their colleagues in state agencies set the standards for school accrediting and teacher licensing, they are in control.

College presidents and policymakers must become aware that the 20th century agenda of the teachers’ colleges is a failure and that it falls on the leaders to change them for the 21st century.

Change will require a new respect for the public's expectations. It will also require value-added assessment of teaching effectiveness. Value-added assessment is a fair and accurate way of measuring yearly gain in students' academic achievement. It can be used to qualify teachers for licensure and for advanced certification.

It would also show whether recently trained teachers have been trained to accomplish what the public wants.

It's about time.

*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*