Needed: Critics of Literacy Education with a More Inclusive Perspective

Dr. Joseph Sanacore *
Long Island University/C.W. Post Campus

Abstract

Journalists, book authors, and think tank members have been extremely critical of how literacy is presented in schools. Many of these critics who are inexperienced in literacy education believe that educators are inadequately teaching reading and writing. Those most critical of the "inadequate skills perspective" are usually experts in their respective fields, including neuroscience, speech-language pathology, and educational psychology. Not surprisingly, their fields of expertise are not fine-tuned in the field of literacy. These critics are more likely to promote balanced and constructive criticisms if they (a) hold graduate degrees in the areas in which they serve as critics, (b) collaborate with colleagues who believe in different points of view, (c) maintain rigorous peer-review standards before releasing research findings to the media, (d) have practical experience in schools, and (e) attend professional development sessions concerning big-picture perspectives and make observations in schools where these perspectives have been effectively implemented.

* Dr. Joseph Sanacore is a professor in the Department of Special Education and Literacy at the C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University, Brookville, NY. He also has been a consultant to school systems nationwide, and he has served as Literacy Program Director for the Annenberg and Rockfeller Foundations' Comprehensive School-Reform Collaboration among the C.W. Post School of Education, Yale University School Development Program, and Westbury (New York) School District. His major roles included working cooperatively with the key players—teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community—to promote highly successful literacy-learning environments. Dr. Sanacore's current interests include matching instructional practices with the strengths and needs of ethnic minority children, connecting caring relationships and literacy learning, and supporting optimal conditions for learning in heterogeneous settings. Dr. Sanacore can be contacted at joseph.sanacore@liu.edu

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The professional literature and the media are blitzed with publications that are critical of educational ideology, research, and practice. Many authors of these publications are concerned about basic skills in literacy which they perceive to be inadequately taught in schools. Some critics have even attempted to use functional magnetic resonance imagery to show connections between brain activity and learning to read, and this "brain glitch" perspective not only is questionable but also is being used to support ideological agendas (Coles, 2004). Moreover, corporations have developed self-serving partnerships with schools in an attempt to manipulate public opinion and to promote high-stakes standards and testing initiatives (Emery & Ohanian, 2004). Joining the bandwagon are philanthropists who can influence the agendas, dynamics, and politics of school reform as well as import a private-sector mindset concerning accountability, results, and rapid execution (Hess, 2005; Colvin, 2005). Although some criticism of school-based literacy practices is well-intentioned (and even necessary), much of it is still misguided probably because the critics are not trained in literacy education.

My perusal of the articles and books most critical of the "inadequate-skills perspective" indicates that many of the critics are experts in neuroscience, pediatrics, special education, speech-language pathology, educational psychology, or other areas. Critics are usually accomplished in their respective fields, and their insights can add to the ever-increasing body of knowledge about how children grow and develop. Their expertise, however, is not fined-tuned in the literacy field. Specifically, they have not been trained in advanced graduate work concerning the research, theory, and practice of helping children become literate. They also have not worked with struggling readers and writers in a supervised, graduate-level, clinical setting. Furthermore, they have not been classroom teachers and administrators for extended periods of time, working with real children in real schools.

Facing reality

I believe these critics should leave their safe think tanks and visit the world of practice. These visitations would serve as necessary reminders that classrooms are organized heterogeneously with a wide diversity of learning needs, ranging from students who are at risk of failure to students who are gifted, from learners who are reared in low-income homes to learners who are more advantaged, and from individuals who are English language learners to those who are fluent in American Standard English. In addition, these classrooms would consist of communities of learners, some who are "included" with learning disabilities or emotional problems, some who have health-related issues, and some who live with such conditions as attention deficit hyperactivity disorders and autism spectrum disorders.

Compounding this challenging, real-world context are the out-of-school demographic trends involving a steadily increasing divorce rate for both first and second marriages (50% to 60%, respectively), a rise in single-parent households, and an increase in the number of parents entering the workforce. Moreover, unsupervised homes after school are contributing to adolescents becoming involved with gangs, sex, alcohol, and drugs. Exacerbating this negative mix is the rising percentage of youth who have tried to commit suicide or have considered suicide, resulting from conflicts with friends, depression, family problems, difficulties with male-female relationships, and feelings of worthlessness (Sanacore, 2001; 2004). Although this stressful context is harmful to many children's emotional and intellectual development, children of ethnic minorities are most negatively impacted. For example, according to Barton (2003) of the Educational Testing Service, 17% of white children live in homes with their mothers only, compared with 25% of Hispanic children and 49% of African American children. The hardships imposed on ethnic minority students and their families are obvious.

Recently, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and KidsPeace conducted a study involving a survey of 1000 parents and caregivers with children under 18 years of age living at home. Harvard psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint helped to oversee the study.   Ninety-four percent of those surveyed indicated they were aware that the amount of meaningful time parents spend with children is related to how children handle such issues as discipline and substance abuse. The respondents' major complaint was that their work schedules resulted in their not having enough time to spend with their children. Specifically, 54 percent indicated that they had little or no time to be engaged with their children in physical activities, such as playing catch or taking a walk. In addition, 50 percent indicated they were unable to read to their children or guide them with homework or other related activities (Kerr, 2003).

As expected, many children return to less supervised homes each afternoon and do not become involved in activities that support school-based learning—homework, pleasure reading, and so forth. I often have dinner at restaurants (between 8:00 and 9:00 PM) and am surrounded by single parents and married parents who are eating and talking with their school-age children. I believe that most of these parents, although tired and stressed, are doing the best they can for their families. I also believe that when arriving at home after a long day, many of these parents do not have the energy to go through a daily ritual of reviewing homework assignments, supervising bath time, and reading aloud a favorite book. Children look forward to and benefit from this ritual, which supports a sense of security and structure.

With less consistent structure evident in many households, we should not be surprised when we read about educators implementing programs related to character education and etiquette, both of which were traditionally modeled and taught in homes.
Recently, a comprehensive article in *Newsday* focused on educators observing a decline in civility and, consequently, adding character and etiquette lessons to their curricula (Rhone, 2004). Supporting this direction is Packer's (1997) book *How Rude! The Teenagers' Guide to Good Manners, Proper Behavior, and Not Grossing People Out.* Because children and adults (including some teachers) emulate behaviors that are demonstrated for them, both benefit from reminders about avoiding bad behaviors. Packer noted ten rude things that students do to teachers, such as "talk while the teacher is trying to teach" and "use physical and verbal aggression to get their way." Included on the list of ten rude things that teachers do to students are "make fun of them in front of the whole class" and "play favorites." Although students learn bad manners from adults and peers in their lives, they also receive negative prompts from cartoons, sitcoms, movies, and musical videos that highlight rudeness as normal and even "cool."

Teaching is both emotional and academic work

Because students bring their real-world experiences to school, caring educators realize that they must respond to their students' learning needs in big-picture ways, considering both emotional and academic perspectives. Only uninformed or naïve critics would view teaching and learning as pure cognitive functions. More than a half-century ago, Highet (1950) viewed teaching as an art involving human values and emotions. Supporting this notion of teaching as an art form is Parini's (2005) poignant reflection, which considers the classroom to be a kind of theater with the teacher playing a variety of roles, including actor and dramatist. Moreover, the results of Winograd's (2003) research suggest that teaching is profoundly emotional work, involving such dimensions and observations as:

> (1) There are rules that govern teachers' emotional behavior in schools. (2) Teachers do emotion work, or emotional labor, in response to these emotion rules. (3) Teachers experience emotions that have functional uses; that is, the emotions alert teachers to problems in their work and then action to address these problems. (4) Teachers experience emotions that have dysfunctional uses; that is, the emotions lead to self-accusatory behavior by the teachers, or they lead to the blaming of others, such as students, parents, or administrators. pp. 1651-1652

Why do critics of literacy education seem oblivious to the emotional realities of school environments? Why do they take a strong stance suggesting that teachers should simply teach systematic skills in reading and writing and that the personal problems impacting on children will take care of themselves and will not negatively affect learning? Why do these same critics demonstrate disdain for using school time to respond to children's and teachers' emotional needs? At the very least, these critics should be aware of the extreme conditions that many children and teachers face each day. They also should be aware of the necessity of responding not only to children's academic needs but also to their emotional concerns. As whole people, children (and adults) are primarily emotional and secondarily intellectual, and they are more likely to learn effectively when their emotional needs are considered in the framework of their learning. "To neglect the social and emotional aspects of their development, to focus all our attention on measured academic performance, is to blind us to these youngsters' need to live a satisfying life" (Eisner, 2005, p.16). Lacking this inclusive perspective, some critics have relegated the teaching-learning process to a vacuous context in which children's brains are considered disconnected receptacles for acquiring systematic skills.

No Child Left Behind Act

A contributor to this limited viewpoint is the No Child Left Behind Act, which is not only an accountability law but also a vehicle for political manipulation. The Reading First component of the law requires the implementation of grades K-3 reading programs to ensure that children are reading on or above grade level by the end of third grade. This important goal has always been embraced by primary-level teachers and administrators, whose uphill efforts have been helping children, especially those in inner-cities, to make slow but steady progress toward becoming better readers and writers. NCLB, however, implies that reading programs rather than reading processes are necessary for promoting effective literacy learning. Although commercially produced programs are not required by NCLB, Congress has charged the U.S. Department of Education with interpreting and administering the law, which has resulted in portions of Reading First money being used for purchasing comprehensive programs (typically commercially manufactured reading programs). According to McGill-Franzen (2005):

> At the present time, given the mantra of "scientifically based reading instruction" among state and federal policymakers in the United States, I am incredulous that administrators and teachers in low-socioeconomic-status schools are forced to buy one of a dozen or so "core reading programs," all of which are poorly validated for the target population and none of which have demonstrated effectiveness with children most at risk—presumably those children who are the intended beneficiaries of Reading First. Poor children, especially low-achieving poor children, and their teachers are thrust into "forced choice" standardized curricula that, at worst, may limit opportunities to achieve at grade level. This situation represents an inappropriate "scale-up" of leviathan proportions that has not been adequately studied or evaluated. p. 366

Ironically, given this vitally important perspective, educators who work in eligible schools and who are interested in applying for Reading First funding must demonstrate in the application that they will use comprehensive reading programs that are supported by scientifically based research (quantitative), as specified in NCLB. (Recently, the phrase *evidence-based* is replacing the phrase *scientifically based*, used consistently in both NCLB and Reading Excellence Act. See Allington, 2005/2006.) Realistically, the Reading First grant applications that are approved for funding are the ones that highlight the types of programs that place a heavy emphasis on systematic phonics, even though literacy educators have known for decades that effective classrooms are based mostly on effective teachers who focus on children's individual needs rather than on any singular approach to teaching reading (e.g., Bond & Dykstra, 1997; Haycock, 1998; Stewart, 2004). While no responsible literacy educator would negate the importance of teaching skills, teachers are typically concerned with a variety

of related issues, including the intensity of skills instruction, the need for differentiated instruction, and the extent to which skills are connected to meaningful contexts. My observations nationwide suggest that school administrators and teachers are working steadfastly to match instructional practices with students' individual learning needs and, at the same time, are facing increasing pressure to implement a system of one size fits all. In fact, all children do not need the same skills instruction and the same instructional intensity. Instead, effective teachers are needed who teach students, not programs (Allington, 2002).

Although some commercial programs that are selected for Reading First funding might represent a reasonable mix of reading and writing processes and strategies, educators must critically analyze all programs before adoption. Such critical analysis is necessary because many of the programs are evaluated by the program developers, who have an obvious vested interest in demonstrating positive outcomes. These "entrepreneurs and corporations, not independent researchers, are bearing the weight of program evaluation and dissemination" and, not surprisingly, are reporting positive effect sizes (McGill-Franzen, 2005, p. 367). A related problem concerns "confirmation bias," in which program developers who conduct research on their own programs might unconsciously (or consciously) design and interpret their studies in favor of their desired outcomes (Mahoney & DeMonbreun, 1981; Wason, 1960; Willingham, 2005).

To prevent such questionable practices, teachers, administrators, and researchers must engage in critical reviews of instructional programs to determine their efficacy in meeting the literacy learning needs of children, in providing opportunities for modifying instruction to accommodate individual students, and in describing aspects of reading not only as stipulated in NCLB but also as broader aspects of the reading and writing processes. Educators also need to collect both qualitative and quantitative data concerning the value of literacy learning programs for children (Sanacore, 2005). For an excellent analysis of NCLB, its Reading First component, and its connection to early literacy instruction, see Stewart (2004).

Considering the complexities of becoming literate, I often question the motives of certain critics who apparently have "bought into" the simplistic ideology of not only   promoting commercial instructional programs that emphasize systematic phonics but also   supporting commercial high-stakes assessments that are often poorly aligned to standards and to quality instruction (Herman, 2003; Mathis, 2004). Of equal concern are some of these reform initiatives generated by corporate players and education policymakers that pretentiously have supported standards and accountability but realistically have resulted in self-serving partnerships (e.g., converting school administration to business management models). With a well-coordinated and sustained attack on public schools, a number of corporations and other organizations have developed a strong network that supports high-stakes standards and assessments (Emery & Ohanian, 2004). Such dark forces behind this aggressive version of school reform suggest that certain corporations might have conceptualized and engineered a reliance on testing.

> For example, Standard & Poors, the financial rating service, has lately been offering to evaluate and publish the performance, based largely on test scores, of every school district in a given state—a bit of number crunching that Michigan and Pennsylvania purchased for at least $10 million each, and other states may soon follow. The explicit findings of these reports concern whether this district is doing better than that one. But the tacit message—the hidden curriculum, if you will—is that test scores are a useful and appropriate marker of school quality. Who would have an incentive to convince people of that conclusion? Well, it turns out that Standard & Poors is owned by McGraw-Hill, one of the largest manufacturers of standardized tests. (Kohn, 2002, pp. 113-114)

Are critics unaware of the hidden agendas behind some of the standards and testing initiatives? Do these critics really believe in the efficacy of these initiatives, or do their criticisms reflect incentives resulting in book royalties, expanded newspaper sales, and television appearances? From my way of thinking, the major beneficiaries of these initiatives are the companies that produce the programs and assessments that support NCLB requirements. Moreover, in responding to a question concerning the testing requirements of No Child Left Behind, Jonathan Kozol said, "The kind of testing we're doing in school today is sociopathic in its repetitive and punitive nature. Its driving motive is to highlight failure in inner-city schools as dramatically as possible in order to create a ground swell of support for private vouchers or other privatizing schemes" (Kozol, cited in Solomon, 2005, 14).

I have come to expect politicians to have hidden agendas as they engage in shallow, "apple-pie" rhetoric about standards, testing, and accountability. I am dismayed, however, when learned people emulate a dangerously narrow view about how children
grow and develop as learners. While issues related to the utility (Noddings, 2005a), legality (McColl, 2005), and clarity (Erpenbach, Forte-Fast, & Potts, 2003) of No Child Left Behind are being debated, its requirements are being considered for implementation in U.S. high schools (Henriquez, 2005). According to The White House website, the President's Fiscal Year 2006 budget will provide $1.5 billion for the new High School Initiative, and "$250 million will be used for state assessments to ensure that high school diplomas are truly meaningful with required state assessments in high school" (The White House, 2005).

The impact of high-stakes testing

Such a narrow stance of requiring all students to fulfill the same high standards and testing requirements for a high school diploma increases the probability of generating disproportionately higher dropout rates among students at risk of failure, especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds (Orfield, 2004) and those with disabilities (Allbritten, Mainzer, & Ziegler, 2004). Not surprisingly, this narrow view has already demonstrated negative outcomes in the form of higher retention and dropout rates. For instance, the National Board of Educational Testing and Public Policy at Boston College examined the effects of high-stakes assessments on dropout rates and high school completion rates. The National Board focused on evidence that is mainly correlational, and it concluded that high-stakes assessments are related to decreased rates of high school completion. "The strands of evidence reviewed here indicate that high-stakes graduation testing, together with grade retention practices that may be affected, both directly and indirectly, is associated with decreased rates of high school completion" (Clark, Haney, Madaus, 2000).

This conclusion should be taken seriously because high school graduation rates nationwide are dismally embarrassing. Consider some of the outcomes of the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. Only an estimated 68% of U.S. students who enter ninth grade actually graduate with a regular diploma in twelfth grade. Not surprisingly, the national graduation rates are worse for students of ethnic minorities and boys (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004), whose legacy is to be unemployed or to work in menial jobs for the rest of their lives. Although the Civil Rights Project did not focus on high-stakes testing in the context of graduation rates, the potential for decreased rates of high school completion is apparent, especially for minority students. Moreover, the negative consequences for these students and their families are obvious because "in the landscape of the economy, these dropouts are often lost travelers without a map" (Barton, 2006, p. 16).

High-stakes testing also seems to negatively impact on students with disabilities. According to Advocates for Children of New York, high school students with special needs in New York City public schools earn Regents or local diplomas at a rate substantially below their peers who are not disabled. The requirements for both diplomas include successfully completing a specified number of credits and

passing state examinations. Thus far, only about 12 percent of students with disabilities graduated with Regents or local diplomas, and approximately 12 percent of students with severe disabilities earned IEP diplomas. Regrettably, individualized-education-program diplomas do not confer the same benefits of the Regents or local diplomas (Advocates for Children of New York, 2005; Samuels, 2005).

Interestingly, some of the periodic gains in high-stakes testing in inner-city elementary schools should also cause thoughtful educators and critics to reflect on these temporary testing gains, which are probably the result of test-preparation regimens, and to realize their minimal impact on secondary schools. Realistically, the gains are not authentic and substantive, or else they would transfer to middle schools and high schools. According to Kozol (2005b),

> Children who know how to read—and read with comprehension—do not suddenly become nonreaders and hopelessly disabled writers when they enter secondary school. False gains evaporate; real gains endure. Yet hundreds of thousands of the inner-city children who have made what many districts claim to be dramatic gains in elementary school, and whose principals and teachers have adjusted almost every aspect of their school days and school calendars, forfeiting recess, canceling or cutting back on all the so-called frills (art, music, even social sciences) in order to comply with state standards—those students, now in secondary school, are sitting in subject-matter classes where they cannot comprehend the texts and cannot set down their ideas in the kind of sentences expected of fourth- and fifth-grade students in the suburbs. Students in this painful situation, not surprisingly, tend to be most likely to drop out of school. p.54

Indeed, using substantial time for test preparation in inner-city elementary schools is questionable because of limited transfer outcomes to secondary schools, curricular fragmentation for students, and extreme pressures on the stakeholders—children, teachers, and administrators (Kozol, 2005a). Ironically, teaching to the test supports an anti-educational stance. "The whole direction of education in the United States, with rigid testing of students and … teachers, seems woefully misdirected, and ruinous to learning" (Parini, 2005, p. 10).

Although high-stakes testing is sustaining its momentum for national accountability and international comparisons, Gardner (2005) thoughtfully reminds us that we must avoid the herd mentality because improving test performance is a dreadful goal for any education system. "A transient numerical result, due to any number of reasons, becomes the raison d'etre for the whole educational process. What a depressing prospect" (p. 44). Instead, we should focus our efforts on cultivating the minds we truly need in the future, including a disciplined mind, a synthesizing mind, a creative mind, a respectful mind, and an ethical mind (Gardner, 2005). Furthermore, we should not forget the vitally important role of imagination and its connection to the growth and development of the human mind in both children and adults (Sanacore, 2006). We need to nurture playful environments that encourage imagination and provide the groundwork for the advancement of knowledge into adulthood (Kane & Carpenter, 2003). This big-picture perspective is substantially different from the teach-to-the-test regimen, which at best will result in temporary achievement gains and at worse will dissuade children from the lifetime love of learning.

Promoting more balanced criticisms of schools

What can we do to promote more balanced criticisms of schools and, as a positive side effect, better learning opportunities for all children? Because critics have immense power in molding public opinion, their published views can have a substantial impact on the key players, including politicians, policymakers, education professors, administrators, teachers, and parents. Critics, therefore, have the clout to influence the power elite who, in turn, can pressure schools to adopt certain approaches to

teaching and learning. While not a panacea, the following suggestions are intended to promote more balanced criticisms of schools:

➢ Members of think tanks should be required to hold advanced graduate degrees, with related training and internships, in the specific areas in which they serve as researchers and critics.
➢ Members of think tanks, who typically maintain a conservative ideology, should pursue research findings and evaluative feedback from colleagues with other points of view. Surveys, symposia, conferences, peer-reviewed journals, and other sources of information can help develop "big-picture" perspectives when these sources consider a variety of windows into how children grow and develop as literacy learners. Implicit in this view is that conservatives, liberals, progressives, and moderates have the capacity to question their own assumptions about literacy education and to engage in intensive, collaborative conversations about how children become literate. With no naïvete intended, I realistically understand how messy and volatile these initial conversations can be, especially with respect to ideological agendas and political leanings. As caring people, however, if we truly persevere and focus on children's needs, then we increase the chances that our efforts will be better aligned with children's needs.

Because of many critics' emphasis on teaching systematic skills, one probable outcome of these conversations is to explore research concerning different approaches to word study (Stewart, 2004). For example, Treiman's (1985) findings suggest that breaking a word into its rime and onset is easier than breaking a word into its individual letters and sounds. Thus, the word *mask* is easier to break into its rime *ask* and its onset *m* than *m-a-s-k* or *ma-sk*. This conversation could lead the think tank members to discover Wylie and Durrell's (1970) work in which 37 high-frequency phonograms, or rimes, were identified. They also might learn that children can use some of the words they know in reading and in spelling to unlock new words (Goswami & Bryant, 1990). Thus, in using this spelling by analogy, the known word *bank* might help to unlock *sank* or *blank.*

In addition to word study, think tank members could talk about some of the other pillars of effective reading instruction. Allington's (2005) thoughtful synthesis includes (a) a daily balance of whole-class, small-group, and individual lessons (Taylor & Pearson, 2005); (b) differentiated instruction of texts and tasks so that children are matched with appropriate resources and activities (International Reading Association, 2000); (c) easy access to a variety of interesting reading materials, freedom of choice in what to read, and opportunity to share with peers during reading (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004); (d) support of the reciprocal relationship of reading and writing (Tierney & Shanahan, 1991); and (e) expert tutoring (D'Agostino & Murphy, 2004). These five pillars complement the five key areas identified by the National Reading Panel (2000): phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In retrospect, all ten areas (as well as other instructional priorities) represent an important foundation for young readers.

Furthermore, think tank members could extend this conversation into adolescent literacy as they explore different literacy programs and processes and become increasingly aware that "no one program or approach….will meet the needs of all adolescent readers" (Darwin & Fleischman, 2005, p. 85). Instead, adolescents' diverse literacy needs benefit from a comprehensive approach encompassing a variety of strategies (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004).

Discussions of this type convey a growing affirmation that skills and strategies are extremely important and that they can be learned and applied effectively in a variety of ways. An essential part of this flexible perspective is an increasing awareness that children, in general, and ethnic minority students, in particular, benefit from a learning environment that supports

their strengths. Thus, what children **can do**, based on what they bring to school, is valued as a foundation for academic success (Sanacore, 2004, 2005). This perspective represents a major paradigm shift from focusing on children's weaknesses to emphasizing children's less formal skills and knowledge and their connections to school learning (King, 2005).

➢ Before releasing their research findings to the media, members of think tanks should submit their completed research to academic journals, known for their rigorous peer-review process. Although this process does not guarantee high-quality research outcomes, peer reviewers are usually more objective than in-house researchers and reviewers; thus, the peer-review process reduces the risk of releasing research findings that are based in ideology and politics. As mentioned previously, a related concern is "confirmation bias," in which researchers design and interpret their studies with an inclination toward desired outcomes (Mahoney & DeMonbreun, 1981; Wason, 1960). "That's why having [blind] impartial, expert reviewers is vital to research" (Willingham, 2005, p. 35).

   Sometimes, however, suitable outlets for high-quality research are unavailable because certain journals might not consider the topic, length, etc. of the research manuscript. This lack of suitable outlets might decrease the flow of important information. If so, then think tank researchers should be required to have their research critiqued by in-house reviewers. Then, the research should be critiqued by board members and outside experts. This approach, of course, is not as rigorous (or as honest) as the "blind-review" process in which both researcher and reviewer do not know each other's identities. For a discussion of when to release research findings, see Viadero (2005).

➢ Members of think tanks should be required to spend time in schools. Although these scholars are extremely busy, they need some practical experience for understanding the classroom context, the out-of-school experiences that students bring to school, the stresses encountered and generated by parents and community, and the district-level politics. Think tank members and critics benefit from some experience in collaborating with teachers and administrators, in observing classroom interactions, and even in planning and teaching lessons. Interestingly, one of the recommendations of a panel of the National Academy of Education is that preservice teachers should be engaged in a minimum of 30 weeks of clinical practice, preferably in schools that foster professional development and that provide support from skilled veterans (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Keller, 2005). Although critics and think tank members do not have the time for this type of comprehensive clinical practice, they still need some experience in real schools to develop a better understanding of the many dimensions of responding to learners' needs.

➢ Theoreticians, researchers, classroom practitioners, school administrators, and journalists should attend professional development sessions related to big-picture perspectives and to visit schools in which these perspectives have been effectively carried out. As with the previous suggestion, such experiences will help critics to realize the complexities of helping students become successful and then to demonstrate this broad-based awareness when writing responsible criticisms. Among the big-picture efforts is the School Development Program, developed by Dr. James Comer and his colleagues at the Yale University School of Medicine's Child Study Center (Comer, 2004, 2005; Comer, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 2004; Yale Child Study Center, n.d.). The framework of this effective program values students' total development as being essential for success in school and in life. While highlighting total development, the framework involves six important developmental pathways, which are psycho-emotional, social-interactive, physical, linguistic, cognitive, and ethical. This caring and comprehensive context receives broad support from the School Planning and Management Team (teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents), the Student and Staff Support Team (principal, psychologists, social workers,

counselors, nurses, and others with expertise in mental health), and the Parent Team. Through dedicated efforts, the key players engage in genuine collaboration aimed at all aspects that contribute to children's learning. This broad-based focus on nurturing children's total development substantially increases the chances that children will fulfill their powerful learning potential (Comer, 2004). Such a commitment also complements the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's Position Statement on the Whole Child. The ASCD statement includes contributions of what communities should provide (e.g., civic, government, and business support and resources), what schools should provide (e.g., a climate that supports strong relationships between adults and students), and what teachers should provide (e.g., demonstrations of healthy behaviors) (ASCD, 2005). "This stance takes us well beyond the current emphasis on academic achievement and assessment, which are only small components of student learning and development, and educational accountability" (Freeley, 2005, p. 6). Exposure to the School Development Program, the ASCD Position Statement, and other important big-picture perspectives (Kilgore, 2005) will help critics realize that becoming a successful student requires more than learning systematic skills in isolation and being prepped for high-stakes assessments, both of which are often separated from interesting, meaningful learning.

Reflections

In retrospect, all professional fields, including literacy education, benefit from criticisms that are voiced by responsible professionals who are genuinely knowledgeable, objective, and balanced in their criticisms. I respect such critical analyses, especially when they are aimed at innovations and commercial programs that are costly and fluffy and that do not result in students' total development and literacy growth. Educating whole people to be successful, however, involves more than supporting their proficiency in reading and mathematics. Children also need practice in dealing effectively with real-world problems and issues that they encounter both in and out of school. Among the many ways of providing such support is to address, with sensitivity and respect, the emotional, social, aesthetic, and moral questions that arise across the curriculum (Noddings, 2005b; Simon, 2001). Complementing this perspective is the need to revive a progressive vision of education that pays attention to the whole child. For example, educators can (a) recognize and nurture the talents of individual children; (b) focus on how students respond to instruction, not only cognitively but also imaginatively, socially, and emotionally; (c) use forms of assessments that create a better awareness of how to nourish the developing child; and (d) consider the emotional and social lives of children as much a priority as academic achievement (Eisner, 2005). Progressive education should also include A Learner's Bill of Rights, which "all educators should embrace and protect" (Rathbone, 2005, p. 471). Among these rights are the right to choose, the right to remain engaged, the right to wallow, the right to err, and the right to take learning personally. Supporting children's total development is vitally important because it will help them deal more effectively with today's demographic realities and will increase their chances of success in the academic arena (Haynes, 1998; Sanacore, 2000). Throughout my career as a teacher, administrator, and professor, I have learned that the more we support big-picture perspectives in children's lives, the more likely we are to help them realize the many ways of knowing their personal and academic worlds. I also have learned that to have a substantive impact on education, we must reflect on and critically analyze our work while considering inclusive perspectives that represent the best of educational research, theory, and practice. Otherwise, our reflections and criticisms will result in fragmented outcomes and will be remembered as just another fad.

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