

From the Editors

Taxes, Ideology, and Teaching Kids to Read

by Jay Hutchins and Barbara Ruben, EdD

Education Forum

This issue of *Oregon's Future* is the first in a series which will explore the conflicts of interest surrounding education policy in Oregon. Consultation with our advisors indicates that many people's attitudes toward funding education are influenced by ideology rather than an understanding about either budgets or education. We have also learned that, to a surprising degree, educators' positions on

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teaching methods are frequently framed by their individual ideologies rather than universally accepted research. The conflict over approaches is important because it affects funding, teachers' careers, and students' learning. So, in addition to articles on funding and taxation we decided to gather a series of articles on teaching methods and our authors' views on each other's pedagogical philosophies.

In the education forum we present a number of fascinating views on the tension between "traditional" and "progressive" ideas—labels that are attached to many permutations of education reform and may in fact be inaccurate or misleading.

Our first education article, *Reading First = Kids First*, is written by **Siegfried Engelmann**, one of the major academic players behind the development of the interventions sanctioned under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). **Engelmann** is the original developer of Direct Instruction (DI) and, it turns out, is from the University of Oregon—as are many professional educators in Oregon whose work supports DI as an effective approach to reading instruction. He describes why he believes that DI within the Reading First program is the most appropriate intervention for children who begin school without pre-reading skills. **Engelmann** also provides a short but surprising history lesson on a federally funded research project named Project Follow Through.

Joanne Yatvin offers an alternative view, in general, to **Engelmann's** approach in her article "*O Brave New World*". **Yatvin** served as a member of the National Reading Panel in 2001 and authored a minority report which criticized the Panel's decision to certify Direct Instruction/phonics based curricula as the only acceptable method to teach reading under NCLB. **Yatvin's** expert descriptions of both skills-based methods and an integrated approach flesh out the arguments

of other authors.

Rob Kremer, one of the founders of the Arthur Academy charter schools, shares his story in *Progressive Education: One Parent's Journey*, an account of experiences that led him to abandon progressive ideas and the child-centered approach to education. **Kremer's** disillusionment with the public school system inspired him to become the creator and primary advocate of the successful charter school bill in Oregon.

Kimberly Campbell responds to **Kremer's** criticism of progressive educators in *One Teacher's Journey: A Response to Rob Kremer*. **Campbell** was a founder and the first principal at Riverdale High School, whose philosophy is based on the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. While **Kremer** uses these principles as examples to explain why he became discouraged with progressive education, **Campbell** uses them to support her child-centered philosophy.

Barbara Ruben, the Guest Editor for this installment of the Education Forum, has written an article entitled *A Report from the Field: How One School Keeps Kids from Slipping Through the Cracks*. **Ruben** gives our readers a perspective from the point of view of an educator in the field, in this case the principal of Chief Joseph Elementary, Kathy Jaffe.

Taxation, Budgets, and Attitudes

The importance of getting results from the money we spend

is the reason we have linked articles on taxation with education reform and ideology. A key article bridging these topics is **Scott Bailey's** *Education Funding: How We Got into This Mess, and How to Get Out of It*. **Bailey** is president of Community & Parents for Public Schools, a grassroots organization working to improve the quality of education in Portland Public Schools. He provides a historical context to the current fiscal crisis in education supporting the idea that our suspicious attitude toward how our government spends money would be more useful if we were all better informed. This is a sentiment that everyone involved with the education forum wholeheartedly supports. In this spirit, **Bailey** tactfully offers The Chalkboard Project some constructive criticism about their presentation of the data they are collecting—and its President **Sue Hildick** responds. **Bailey** makes an important observation about how the Chalkboard literature does not define the term accountability—he points out that educators and policy makers also seldom define this word. We intend to further explore the topic of accountability in education funding as well as curricula in the next issue of *Oregon's Future*.

Robert Sahr is a well known tax scholar and currently an associate professor of Political Science at Oregon State University. **Sahr's** article *The Tax Tug of War: Ideology, Self Interest, and Accurate Information* focuses on a surprisingly eye-opening topic: people's perceptions of their self

interest in tax matters. **Sahr** uncovers a connection between these perceptions and our knowledge about taxes. You'll find that he dispels some popular misconceptions about changing our tax system.

Steve Novick is the Communications Director at Citizen's for Oregon's Future, a non-profit not related to this publication, whose mission is to "raise the level of discussion about taxes and budgets in Oregon." Their work and presentation of data are clear and nonpartisan and we recommend their website to Oregonians of all stripes who want to become more informed about the state budget—www.fororegon.org. We also recommend the League of Women Voters website—www.lwv.org.

Novick presents essential information about the state budget in his article What's Truth Got to Do with It? We believe these three articles on taxation present a comprehensive picture of the attitudes, facts, and general history that influence education funding in Oregon.

More on Ideology

One of our economic advisors recently mentioned in an email that science is not bullet-proof when it comes to

ideology. Two of the books we recommend for more information about the history of ideology and teaching reform in the US represent both ends of the political spectrum. The first is *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976) by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis. This book is a Marxist view of the history of the interaction between education reformers and the labor market. One interesting passage conveys Senator Horace Mann's negative attitude in the mid-1800s toward teaching the alphabet. Mann believed in teaching reading by drilling students on whole words. Mann became the Secretary of Education for the state of Massachusetts when a prominent industrialist convinced the governor that the post was too important to give to an educator. During Mann's tenure he advocated mandatory education and a free school system in which large populations of children would be grouped according to age and proficiency, rather than assembled in a single room. During this time he also promoted a feminization of the teaching profession, which reduced teacher's pay. Mann's views on the alphabet and whole words show that the contemporary disagreements over the best way to teach reading began long before NCLB came to Oregon.

Diane Ravitch's book *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reform* (2000) is influenced by a more traditional point of view than Bowles and Gintis. Ravitch, considered an arch-conservative by some of our advisors in education, served in the US Department of Education as Assistant Secretary of Research. She now holds the Brown Chair in Education Studies at the Brookings Institute. Her history of education reform covers the twentieth century and does

indeed have a conservative orientation. Her description of the sometimes blurry lines separating progressives' and traditionalists' beliefs—as well as their influence over ten decades of seesawing reforms—helped us further appreciate how ideology has come to complicate education policy in Oregon and the United States. This scholarly book should be fascinating reading for anyone who really wants to understand the intellectual basis for the conservative point of view in education.

Another valuable resource is *Research on Educational Innovations* by Arthur K. Ellis. It includes an interesting description of the types of research that evaluate approaches to teaching basic subjects in the public school system.

The Scope of the Ongoing Education Forum

The role of ideology in education reform and the research that supports it is integral to our ongoing probe of the issues that influence education policy. In future installments, the education forum will also explore the challenge of reworking NCLB to better suit disenfranchised students and teachers. We will continue to examine funding as well as investigate the consequences of having only 25 percent of the voting public with children in the public school system. Our authors will discuss choice including choice within the public schools system, charter schools, vouchers, and private alternative schools. We will tackle the concepts of standardized tests, standards, accountability, and scrutinize the small schools initiatives—a currently fashionable reform for high schools around both our state and the nation.

We think Oregonians should understand exactly what they are

buying with their tax money and what the state, congress, those providing supplemental services under NCLB, and the universities are selling when they train teachers and administrators. With this in mind we introduce the first installment of our published forum on education.



Barbara Ruben is a graduate of Portland Public Schools. After receiving a B.S. in Environmental Studies from University of California in Santa Cruz, Barbara returned to Oregon to attend Lewis and Clark College for teacher education. In 1980, she started teaching in Portland Public Schools grades K-8. She received a masters of arts in education from Portland State University in 1985 along with a K-12 reading endorsement. At various times she worked as a math specialist and science specialist. In 1994 she received her Education Administration license from Lewis and Clark College. In 1999 she joined the faculty of Portland State University's Graduate School of Education teaching in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. She received her doctorate in education in spring 2004.

