# From Rhetoric to Reality:
## Opportunity-to-Learn Standards and the Integrity of American Public School Reform

**By Gregory J. Fritzberg**

### Introduction:
#### *Recalling Equity Standards in an Era of Educational "Excellence"*

Many politically-minded educators remember the contentious, partisan debate surrounding the now defunct *Goals 2000: Educate America Act,* President Clinton's major public school reform initiative passed by Congress in March of 1994. While the basic idea of helping states develop common performance standards and assessment tools enjoyed widespread support, there was sharp disagreement about the inclusion and delineation of opportunity-to-learn (OTL) standards. OTL standards were promoted mainly by liberal Democrats who argued that it lacked integrity to hold students and schools accountable to new high stakes assessments without ensuring that all students had an authentic "opportunity to learn" the relevant material. In their view, equity standards addressing the "resources, practices, and conditions" available to America's schoolchildren needed to be as specific and measurable as the curricular standards they would support (Pub. L.

*Gregory J. Fritzberg is an assistant professor in the School of Education at Whitworth College, Spokane, Washington and author of In the Shadow of "Excellence": Recovering a Vision of Educational Opportunity for All (Caddo Gap Press, 1999).*

103-227, S. 3[7]). The majority of Republicans, in contrast, felt that gaining consensus on OTL standards would be much more cumbersome than on curriculum standards, and that states could construct delivery standards on their own. In the end, Clinton backed down; states were only required to present OTL "standards or strategies" along with their curriculum and performance standards. Reflecting on Clinton's education reform bill upon initial passage, Linda Darling-Hammond lamented the lost opportunity to promote firm equity standards across the nation: "Although the OTL debate has been raised, it has not succeeded in finding a firm foothold in the Goals 2000 legislation, where national certification of standards and tests provides teeth for one side of the equation while general exhortations for state and local development of OTL standards provide almost none for the other side, the side that would support children in their learning" (1994, p. 487).

Upon initial reauthorization in 1996, the language of OTL was washed out of *Goals 2000* entirely, and the bill itself was retired in 2000. The excellence movement continues, however, along with the rhetorical assurance that "all" children will be prepared to meet the new academic standards appearing in every state. But many educators share Darling Hammond's disappointment concerning OTL standards, which Lorraine M. McDonnell rightly describes as a rare "generative concept" that possesses unique potential to mobilize educational policy-making on behalf of socio-economically disadvantaged students and schools (1995, p. 304). The goal of this essay is to keep the concept of OTL standards alive so that policymakers at the state level might be encouraged to revisit it on moral and constitutional grounds, despite the loss of federal monetary inducements. I will construct a vision of "good practice" that works within the OTL parameters outlined in the original Goals 2000 legislation and is comprised of five policy recommendations. I will not address school funding equity here, but will assume that increased funding provides the resources with which poor districts can improve their services and that the more interesting questions concern how such dollars are most effectively spent.

The original *Goals 2000* legislation suggested that state-level policymakers consider the following in developing their OTL standards:

> (a) the quality and availability to all students of curricula, instructional materials, and technologies...; (b) the capability of teachers to provide high-quality instruction to meet diverse learning needs in each content area to all students; (c) the extent to which teachers, principals, and administrators have ready and continuing access to professional development...; (d) the extent to which curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments are aligned to voluntary national content standards; (e) the extent to which school facilities provide a safe and secure environment for learning and instruction and have the requisite libraries, laboratories, and other resources necessary to provide an opportunity-to-learn; [and] (f) the extent to which schools utilize policies, curricula, and instructional practices which ensure non-discrimination on the basis of gender. (quoted earlier, p. 112; 108 U.S. Statutes 144; quoted in Dougherty, 1996, p. 41)

The investments in physical capital items called for in items *a* and *e* of *Goals 2000's* OTL guidelines are inarguably important. The dilapidated conditions of facilities, worn-out instructional materials, and outdated technology in many poor districts has been widely recognized since James Bryant Conant's 1961 book, *Slums and Suburbs* (see Kozol, 1991 for more recent descriptions). However, my first four recommendations will focus on items *b* and *c*, which address teaching and learning specifically (*b* and *c* impact *d* and *f*, in turn). Since the time of the Coleman Report, scholars have understood that differences between schools on crude macro-variables such as the quality of facilities and curricular materials do not adequately explain what happens in classrooms that results in educational inequality, nor can they help us see what should be done to make things better (see Mehan, 1992). Fortunately, policy-makers are beginning to understand that improving the teaching and learning process itself is the key to successful education reform.

## Recommendation One:

### *Produce Teachers Who are "Multiculturally Literate"*

If the quality of teacher-student interactions in instructional settings is, as Geneva Gay (1997) says, "the ultimate test of educational quality" (p. 223), then the preparation and continued professional development of teachers is of paramount importance for raising the academic performance of non-mainstream students. More specifically, Gay understands the cultural incongruity that many non-mainstream students experience in school and recommends that America's teaching force be educated or "re-educated" so that they can deliver "culturally responsive" instruction to these students (p. 224). For Gay, this re-education should have four main emphases. First, she calls on teacher-training institutions to increase their charges' awareness about their own cultural identities—their assumptions, values, and communication styles—and to realize that their identities might predispose them to under-estimate the abilities of students from different cultural backgrounds. Second, she encourages teachers and prospective teachers to actively study the assumptions, values, and communication styles of the student populations they encounter in their classrooms, or expect to encounter in the near future. Third, teachers should study the different learning styles that are cultivated in non-mainstream cultures and how they might teach in ways that complement such styles, although there are great person-person variations within any particular culture. Finally, Gay advises that teachers become more proficient at public relations, particularly in regard to communicating with non-mainstream parents, whose cooperation is essential if their children are to thrive in the classroom.

In order to substantiate a recommendation that teachers become more multiculturally literate, it is important to provide evidence that such an approach would increase the academic achievement levels of non-mainstream students. This apparently has not been easy. Proponents of multicultural education have success-

fully argued that culturally responsive curriculum and instruction is imperative for any diverse society that aspires to democracy (see Gay, 1997; Campbell, 1996; Singer, 1992), but they have produced little empirical data concerning its effect on student-learning, at least as measured by standardized measures of academic achievement. One significant and encouraging exception to this gap in the literature is the longitudinal data from KEEP, the Kamehameha Early Education Project directed by Roland G. Tharp and his colleagues. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, participating private and public elementary school teachers learned how to teach in ways that were more compatible with the cultural backgrounds of native Hawaiian and Navajo children in Hawaii, California, and Arizona. For example, KEEP-trained teachers emphasized small-group activities over lecture methods for native Hawaiian children who come from kinship-oriented cultures that value collaboration among children and their collective independence from adult guidance. When they led discussions with Native Hawaiian children, they de-emphasized solitary turn-taking in favor of a more informal style where students felt free to interact, interrupt, and construct responses together. When working on reading comprehension with Navajo children, they quit dissecting stories and postponed discussion of them until the conclusion, in keeping with the Navajo tradition of story-telling and consistent with what they believe is a holistic versus an analytical learning style (Tharp, 1982, 1989). KEEP researchers discovered that the needs of native Hawaiian and Navajo children differed in some cases and called for different instructional strategies, but one consistent theme emerged. When teaching materials drew upon children's background knowledge and when teachers taught in ways that were familiar to them, both student populations prospered.

Internal (Tharp, 1982) and external (Calfee et al., 1981) evaluators have confirmed KEEP's effectiveness in terms of increasing non-mainstream students' reading skills in both private and public schools. Surely, reading is only one academic skill, but it is perhaps the most crucial one. What is especially encouraging is that the gains made by KEEP students in relation to their peers were stable over time. Even with substantial implementation problems in the early years and persistently high rates of student and teacher transience, a ten-year study of 3,345 children demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between years of participation in the program and academic achievement (Klein, 1988). However, after nearly two decades of significant private and public monetary investment in the KEEP experiment with culturally responsive instruction, a new generation of administrators in the Hawaii state department have determined that the program is too costly, a development which Tharp and his colleagues view as an unfortunate reflection of how hard it is to build the capacity for change into public education systems (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). As Miller (1995) notes, this resistance to change is especially regrettable given the fact that the proportion of non-white students in America's schools has increased dramatically in recent years and will continue to increase unabated. But Tharp and his colleagues continue to work, and, critical to

our purposes here, have developed a teacher-training program (Pre-Service Education for Teachers of Minorities, or PETOM) at the University of Hawaii that will complement their KEEP efforts (Dalton, Tharp, & Blaine, 1987). This is the kind of attention to the preparation of multi-culturally literate teachers that Gay recommends. The two decades of effort by Sharp and his colleagues have demonstrated that such an endeavor can be fruitful, not just for the self-esteem or happiness of non-mainstream students, but for their academic success as well.[1]

## Recommendation Two:

### *Re-Assess Ability-Grouping and Tracking Practices*

Another problem that effects teaching and learning in K-12 classrooms is the common practice of ability-grouping, or tracking, as it is called at the secondary level. The researchers and educators who understand the problems that ability-grouping causes for non-mainstream students can be placed in two broad categories: moderates who believe that ability-grouping makes basic educational sense provided that certain restraints exist, and "radicals" who advocate the complete abolition of ability grouping, an approach that is often referred to as "de-tracking." The constraints that the moderates would place on ability-grouping practices are as follows: (1) ability-grouping should only occur in a few subjects like English and Mathematics; (2) the smaller number of groups, and the more heterogeneous they are, the better; (3) the same material should be covered in all groups so that all students have access to high-priority knowledge, even if the pace and depth of exposure vary; (4) mobility between groups should be as fluid as possible, so that students are never "stuck" in a group that does not fit them; (5) in the case of between-class grouping or tracking (rather than within-class grouping), the number of students in the higher groups should be as large as possible relative to the number of students in lower groups. For instance, it would be fine if 60 percent of high school sophomores were in a college-preparatory track; and (6) make sure that teachers working with the lower groups are excellent, rather than simply the ones who did not "earn" the privilege of teaching the high-achievers (recommendations 1-to-3 are from Braddock and McPartland, 1990; 4-to-5 are from Gamoran, 1992; recommendation 6 is from Hallinan, 1994; cited in Dougherty, 1996).

The more aggressive advocates of de-tracking believe that teachers can be trained to provide stimulating instruction to students of all ability-levels in heterogeneous classrooms, although they acknowledge that a great deal of new research and training will be required to implement this reform on a wide scale (Oakes, 1992, 1994, 1995; Oakes & Lipton, 1992; Wheelock, 1992). Proponents of heterogeneous grouping also understand that they face an uphill battle because the assumptions that undergird ability-grouping practices run very deep in the American psyche. Many educators still believe that human intelligence is a fixed attribute, relatively impervious to manipulations by teachers, and that it does not

take very long in school for teachers to disentangle a child's native ability from cultural factors related to race or socio-economic class. Moreover, middle and upper-class parents often strenuously resist de-tracking efforts for fear that their children will be educationally shortchanged by being grouped with inferior students, and that their educational futures are being put at risk for the sake of rigid egalitarian ends (Wells & Oakes, 1996). These fears are not entirely without empirical basis. Some studies on the effectiveness of homogeneous versus heterogeneous grouping practices for high-ability students have concluded that these students are slightly better served in homogeneous groups (Brewer et al., 1995; Hoffer, 1992; Kerckhoff, 1986). Even if this is true, however, proponents of de-tracking believe that this phenomenon would evaporate if teachers were trained to teach better. More specifically, Oakes and Lipton (1992) train teachers in heterogeneous classrooms to integrate disciplines rather than teaching subject by subject, to teach by projects rather than always out of a book, and to implement authentic assessment techniques rather than pencil and paper tests alone.

While Oakes' and her colleagues' motivations are admirable and their attention to improving teachers' instruction is valuable, I recommend the moderate approach to reforming ability-grouping practices in public schools. Educators should be very cautious about ability-grouping in the elementary years because students have had little time to display their native abilities apart from social background influences. However, if students are only separated for short periods each day, in basic skills subjects where the range of student abilities is very high, and if students' placements are continuously re-assessed, it might be defensible. Robert Slavin (1991, 1987) seems to have it about right. Although Slavin is not opposed to highly fluid, within-class ability-grouping for Reading, he criticizes more comprehensive separation practices and specializes in training teachers to use cooperative learning groups more effectively, where peer-teaching can occur and the teacher is not the sole possessor of the "answers." I do not include gifted and talented children in my recommendations, however. According to Kulik and Kulik (1987, 1982), they suffer in heterogeneous classrooms and deserve separate instruction throughout the day. I agree, so long as we are talking about a few children on the far right end of the "bell curve" and not using this term as a euphemism for a broad spectrum of socially advantaged children. Finally, I do not think that separate vocational and academic programs in high schools would be problematic if ability-grouping practices were more cautiously used before that time, and if instructional quality and ease of movement between programs were closely monitored.

## Recommendation Three:

### *Reduce K-3 Class Size and Elementary and Secondary School Size*

We already place extraordinary demands on teachers in our society, and asking them to transcend their mainstream pedagogical styles while simultaneously

moving toward heterogeneous instruction requires reciprocal efforts on the part of policy-makers to make these changes manageable. Unfortunately, the most commonsense solution to easing the burden on teachers, reducing class size, is among the most expensive. This disincentive is exacerbated by the fact that the research concerning the effects of reductions in class size on student achievement has been ambiguous until recently. Like student-grouping practices, the achievement effects of alternative class sizes have been studied throughout the century. While early studies (for reviews of the early literature, see Blake, 1954; NEA, 1968) generally favored small class sizes, more recent studies have been more specific about when these effects are most significant, or indeed significant at all. A major meta-analysis of existing research on class size by Glass and Smith (1978) demonstrated that student numbers needed to dip below twenty before there was any appreciable difference in academic achievement, which would require a major infusion of funding for urban districts that often average over thirty students per teacher (Odden, 1990). In a descriptive review of the previous literature, Robinson and Wittebols (1986) found a positive relationship between reduced class size and student achievement in the primary grades, but that this relationship becomes progressively weaker as students advance through school.

Those who believe that smaller class sizes cannot help but increase student performance over time have found hope in Tennessee's Project STAR (Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio; Word, et al., 1990, 1994), a recent study that Frederick Mosteller (et al., 1996) recently hailed as "one of the great experiments in education in U.S. history" (p. 814). Following the studies described above and financially supported by the Tennessee State Legislature, STAR investigators focused their study on grades K-3 and reduced the size of the experimental group classes significantly, from 23 students to 15. In each of 79 inner-city, urban, suburban, and rural schools across the state, K-3 teachers and students were randomly assigned to "large" or "small" classes, or "large" classes with an instructional aide. With more than 6,500 students and 330 teachers participating, the randomization technique assured that the treatment groups were relatively similar prior to the experiment, and the four-year duration of what they called Phase One (1985-1989) provided ample time for class-size differences to have their effects. The fact that the experiment involved different types of communities eliminated the possibility of confounding effects caused by demographic and cultural factors. At the end of grade three, the experimental group outperformed the control group by an average of 7 percentile points on the Stanford Achievement Test, which is a significant, if not a huge amount (Word, et al., 1990).

Moreover, Phase Two (1989-present) of Project STAR, called the Lasting Benefits Study, demonstrated that students who experienced small classes in grades K-3 retained their advantages in the fourth and fifth grades (Achilles et al., 1993). In other words, the benefits of small K-3 classes did not quickly fade away after these students returned to regular sized classes, which is often the case in educational

experiments. Phase Three (1989-present) of the study, Project Challenge, is even more encouraging, especially in regard to our concern with non-mainstream students. Enthused about the positive findings of Phase One, but working with limited financial resources, the Tennessee State Legislature decided to direct its assistance to the seventeen poorest districts in the state, which not surprisingly experienced the highest drop-out rates. After four years of smaller K-3 class sizes, the grade two test scores in these seventeen states had moved up an average of 21 ranks in Reading and 29 ranks in Mathematics as compared with 138 other districts across the state. In 1993, the seventeen poorest districts in Tennessee performed above the state average in Mathematics achievement and slightly below the average in Reading achievement, both significant improvements over their 1990 rankings. This finding is consistent with Robinson's and Wittebols' (1986) conclusion that poor and minority students benefit disproportionately from smaller class sizes. Since improving the academic achievement of non-mainstream students is a primary concern of this essay, the importance of Tennessee's experiment with smaller class sizes should not be overlooked. Finally, President Clinton should be commended for having forwarded to Congress the "Class-Size Reduction and Teacher Quality Act" in May of 1998, which proposed a federal initiative to reduce the average primary-level class size across the nation to 18 students.

Lessons drawn from recent "effective schools" research and corresponding restructuring efforts have raised another size issue to prominence: elementary and secondary school size. Many researchers have questioned the traditional notion that large "comprehensive" high schools help students excel because more types of courses are offered and teachers can specialize in specific aspects of their fields (see Conant, 1967, for the traditional view). The majority of recent studies have contradicted the traditional assumption that there is a positive relationship between school size and student achievement, but these studies are divided on the question of whether or not the relationship is actually negative, or, as Valerie Lee put it: "smaller is better" (et al., 1997, p. 208; for diverse interpretations of the literature, see Howley, 1989; Plecki, 1991; Fowler, 1992). When one looks at the academic performance of disadvantaged students specifically, however, the evidence consistently supports smaller elementary and secondary schools (Summers & Wolfe, 1975; Friedkin & Necochea, 1988; McGiverin, Gillman, & Tillitski, 1989; Plecki, 1991; Huang & Howley, 1993; Howley, 1996; Lee & Smith, 1997). More specifically, the ideal size for schools serving large numbers of disadvantaged students seems to be around 200-250 for elementary schools and 600-900 for high schools. Many rural schools already operate within these constraints for obvious demographic reasons, but many urban schools are three or more times larger than is ideal (Miller, 1995). Deborah Meier (1995), founder of the Central Park East Secondary and Elementary Schools that average 450 and 250 students respectively, has articulated the fairly straightforward reasons why small schools serve non-mainstream students better. She mentions a variety of advantages that small schools have

over large schools when serving non-mainstream students, but the crux of her argument concerns issues of intimacy and accessibility:

> Every child is entitled to be in a school small enough that he or she can be known by name to every faculty member in the school and well known by at least a few of them, a school so small that family can easily come in and see the responsible adults, and the responsible adults can easily and quickly see each other. What size is that exactly? It can't be too small, but surely it can't be larger than a few hundred! If that strikes us as shocking, we might for a moment look at the size of the average elite independent private school and wonder why we haven't learned this lesson until now. (p. 40)

## Recommendation Four:

### *Expand and Improve Federal Compensatory Education Programs*

Along with reduced class and school size, teachers working in high-poverty schools deserve additional instructional assistance. Despite the fact that some "strings" always come with governmental funds, it is difficult to argue that federal assistance for high-poverty schools violates the constitutional authority of states. In fact, federal assistance targeted at disadvantaged students is perhaps the most valuable function of the Department of Education. Since the time of Lyndon Johnson, Title One of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Head Start have been the core of federal efforts to better educate disadvantaged students (Stickney & Marcus, 1985). I believe that both of these programs, the popularity of which ebbs and flows in correspondence with political power cycles in Washington, should be expanded. I will address Title One first. Title One is the largest compensatory education program funded by the federal government, accounting for more than one-fifth of the Department of Education's budget (Natriello, 1990). While there is some diversity of practice among schools that receive Title One funds, the most common intervention strategy is to "pull-out" under-achieving elementary school children from regular classrooms for small-group tutoring sessions run by specially trained teachers (Birman et al., 1987; Carter, 1984). The impact of traditional Title One programs on disadvantaged students' academic achievement has been disappointing. The Sustaining Effects Study (SES), the "largest and most comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of Title One ever undertaken" (Carter, 1984, p. 6), concluded that "Title One was effective for students who were only moderately disadvantaged but it did not improve the relative achievement of the most disadvantaged part of the school population" (quoted in Carter, p. 7). The conclusions of the SES study were consistent with other evaluations of the time (see Levine and Havighurst, 1984, for a synthesis) and have been confirmed by more recent research as well (Stringfield & Yoder, 1992; Puma, et al., 1993).

There have been some encouraging developments in the Title One story, however. The Hawkins-Stafford Amendments of 1988 made Title One legislation concerning the use of funds more flexible than it had been before that time. Consistent with the general reform emphasis of recent times, some process regula-

tions were softened in favor of an emphasis on outcomes. Taking immediate advantage of this increased flexibility, Slavin and his colleagues developed a model Title One program called Success for All (SFA) in 1988, which modifies the traditional approach in significant ways (Slavin, 1991). In essence, the SFA strategy focuses on preventing school failure by making non-mainstream students' earliest experiences in kindergarten and primary school more productive, rather then remediating the problems of students who have already struggled and are often demoralized. SFA teachers pay special attention to Reading because reading skills are foundational to academic success. While all other subjects are taught in heterogeneous classrooms, Reading is taught in homogeneous but multi-age classrooms, which is an important difference between SFA and traditional single-grade grouping practices. Within these roughly homogeneous groups, students engage in highly structured cooperative learning experiences that emphasize both individual and group accountability. Reading assessments are administered bi-monthly and struggling students receive short one-on-one tutoring sessions while their peers are studying social studies. These tutoring sessions are aligned with the regular Reading curriculum, which is meant to alleviate a major problem with traditional Title One programs: lack of coordination between classroom teachers and Title One tutors. Whether Title One teachers tutor small groups or teach in separate classrooms, they often deliver basic-skill instruction that does not complement the instruction that students' receive during the remainder of the day (Madden, et al., 1991; Ross, et al., 1997). This amounts to de facto tracking, with all of the student morale problems that come with it.

A common criticism of SFA is that the focus on improving regular classroom instruction means that the most disadvantaged students are not the only students being served, whereas in traditional Title One programs they are isolated so that this is the case. I think that Slavin is correct when he replies that if the academic achievement of the most disadvantaged students can improve through modifying the instruction that they receive in regular classrooms, then criticizing SFA because other students happen to benefit from these improvements is perverse. And both internal and external evaluators have concluded that SFA is modestly improving the educational success-rates of its target population in cities such as Baltimore, Memphis, and Fort Wayne, Indiana. Synthesizing SFA effect-level studies conducted between 1988 and 1994, Slavin concludes that the "average" fifth-grader who has been served throughout her elementary school career by SFA would occupy the 70th percentile for reading achievement in one of their control schools (Slavin et al., 1996). Also, an external evaluation of the Fort Wayne program shows that African-American students are disproportionately benefiting in relation to their Caucasian peers (Ross, Smith, & Casey, 1995). Even modestly positive results are encouraging because SFA is a Title One model, meaning that it can be operated within these funding constraints, which were about $500 per student each year during the late 1980s. As L. Scott Miller (1995) points out, the results of a program

like SFA would clearly be more dramatic if our society chose to invest greater resources into compensatory education.

Head Start is the pre-school complement to Title One services. The founders of Head Start in 1965 had unrealistic hopes about changing children's academic futures by providing them with one summer-long pre-school experience (Zigler, 1983). Actually, Head Start children do make significant academic progress as a result of the program, but these newfound advantages over their non-participating peers do not last long, as the disappointing results of the well-known Westinghouse evaluation (Cicirelli, 1969) made clear and more recent evaluations have confirmed (Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, 1983; McKey, et al., 1985; Woodhead, 1988; Haskins, 1989). There are two lines of defense against the prominent "fading effects" criticism of Head Start. First, academic development is only one goal of the program, which simultaneously seeks to promote physical and mental health, social responsibility and competence, and better family environments for disadvantaged children (the fact that Head Start serves disadvantaged parents as well as their children is often overlooked). Regarding these non-academic goals, the research on Head Start's effectiveness is much more positive (see McKey, et al., 1985; Copple, Cline, & Smith, 1987), although this research has been over-shadowed by the famous long-term studies of the High/Scope Perry Pre-school Program, which have now followed its graduates to age twenty-seven, documented their disproportionately positive social and occupational outcomes, and actually calculated a cost-benefit ratio for society of 6 to 1 (see Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993). Second, even if we do focus on the cognitive outcomes of Head Start, it is silly to hold a pre-school program accountable for fade-out effects that occur while children are in elementary school. Head Start is a school readiness program, and if children's academic skills are enhanced as a result of enrollment, then it is serving its function regardless of the elementary school system's inability to sustain these gains (see Zigler, 1994). Surely, Head Start can be improved, particularly in the area of teacher training and remuneration. It is difficult to attract and retain high quality teachers when the average annual salary is $15,000 per year. It is a valuable program, however, and it needs to reach more than the 30 percent of eligible children it served as of the early 1990s (Committee For Economic Development, 1991).

If Head Start were to receive full funding, as Clinton gestured toward early in his tenure, it would represent a significant step in the direction of equality of educational opportunity. While I am not confident that our society will muster the moral and political will to address inequality of opportunity in such a substantial way, the cause must continually be argued, and Head Start is an important rallying point for two reasons. First, Head Start is about young children, and long-term social and educational reform strategies should focus on those whose school careers are ahead of them so that undesirable social outcomes can be prevented rather than merely alleviated after they occur. Second, Head Start's focus on the "whole child"—her physical and mental health, her social and emotional well-being, her

parents' capacity to provide for her—makes good common sense. It might be argued that this is the role of family alone and does not require public support, but this is to ignore the crushing realities of joblessness, isolation, and violence that inner-city families face. Indeed, Ruby Takanishi and Patrick H. DeLeon (1994), upon reflecting on Head Start's future in the next quarter-century, point out that economic and social conditions have worsened markedly in the inner-cities since Head Start began, making public assistance even more necessary than before. Given this reality, Head Start services should be as comprehensive as possible, not simply aimed at raising the "I.Q.'s" of poor and minority children, but preparing them physically, mentally, and emotionally to enter elementary schools. Project Follow Through was established in 1967 to aid Head Start children in this transition, continuing support services until they reached the third grade. Project Follow Through never became a stable program, but the idea of transition services arose again with Senator Edward Kennedy's (1993) introduction of the Head Start Transition Project, which has been piloted in more than thirty demonstration sites (see Doernberger & Zigler, 1993). I recommend that we give these efforts our full support.

## Recommendation Five:

### *Incorporate School Reform Into Broader Social Reform*

This brings me to my final recommendation, which is less directly related to teaching and learning than the previous four, but is a critical pre-condition of equal educational opportunity: education reform must be complemented by broader social and economic reform. The most well-known articulation of this reminder is Henry J. Perkinson's book, *The Imperfect Panacea: American Faith in Education 1865-1965* (1968). As the title of Perkinson's book implies, Americans have always placed too much faith in the capacity of public schooling to equalize opportunities in the absence of other social policies that meet the basic human needs of poor children, such as good health care, nutrition, shelter, and clothing. We cannot expect the 21 percent of America's children who live in poverty, much less the 100,000 children who are without homes, to perform very well in school without meeting their basic needs (Kassebaum, 1994). This combination of unrealistic expectations and neglect of the pre-conditions of equal educational opportunity has produced in Americans a schizophrenic attitude regarding their schools. We grossly over-estimate their potential (in the current context) and then blame them for failing us. Lyndon Johnson's educational strategy during the Great Society campaign provides a classic example. Head Start and Title One were arguably the centerpieces of his "war on poverty." However, Johnson's very advocacy of education reform was a political strategy that allowed him to avoid considering a more expensive commitment to broader income-redistribution programs (Kantor & Lowe, 1995). When poverty problems that were left unaddressed sabotaged

educational interventions for the poor, it was the educational interventions themselves that were criticized for not solving a problem they did not create and could never solve alone.

In *An American Imperative: Accelerating Minority Educational Advancement* (1995), L. Scott Miller presents a comprehensive strategy for improving educational and occupational opportunities for disadvantaged children. Besides offering a number of education-specific strategies for realizing authentic equality of opportunity in American society, Miller advances a broader strategy of "social policy mobilization" that addresses areas such as job creation, health care, and the provision of an adequate "safety net" in terms of food, clothing, and housing (p. 342). A complete discussion of Miller's proposed social policies is beyond my purposes here, but I do wish to connect the task of general social reform to my concern with opportunity-to-learn standards. As Kevin Dougherty (1996) rightly observes, the definitions of OTL standards included in reform documents such as *Goals 2000*, even before Republicans engineered their removal, did not sufficiently attend to those "extra-school" inequalities that affect students' readiness to profit from schooling (p. 48). It would be wonderful if some individual state chose to take the lead in authentic education reform by constructing a specific (but not necessarily lengthy or overly intrusive) set of OTL standards that takes broader social stratification issues into account, and aligns educational strategies with other human capital-oriented services such as those that provide medical, social, and legal services for children who need them. An authentically meritocratic educational system must address both inequities within the school system and those deeper socio-structural and economic inequalities that skew the educational "race" from the outset.

## Can Schooling Make a Difference?

The consistent findings of the "schools don't make a difference" research of the 1960s and early 1970s (see Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks et al., 1972; Averch et al., 1972) demonstrated that American public schooling, as traditionally practiced, does little to narrow the cognitive achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers. Moreover, increasing the levels of large-scale "inputs" such as improved facilities, instructional materials, and teacher salaries does not alleviate the problem apart from significant changes in the conduct of teaching and learning. I have not attempted to re-assess these empirical findings here. Rather, following the logic, if not always the actual recommendations, of the effective schools movement, I have tried to identify specific practices that have shown empirical promise for poor and ethnic-minority students. I believe that the recommendations advanced above can make a positive difference in these students' academic achievement, and their subsequent academic attainment and occupational performance as well. I also wish to point out that just because the recommen-

dations above were justified solely in terms of achievement effects does not mean that they are not justifiable on other grounds, such as self-esteem, enjoyment of schooling, and future aspirations. There is a substantial empirical literature that addresses non-cognitive outcomes, which are obviously important even if they are slightly less central to the conduct of schooling than are learning outcomes.

Finally, in concluding this recommendations section, I want to relate some remarks that Daniel Levine (1990) made upon completing a substantial review of the school effectiveness literature. After citing a list of conditions and practices that characterize schools that produce unusual levels of student-achievement, Levine turned to the affective attributes of successful reformers. To summarize briefly, Levine encouraged educators to be insistent on positive learning outcomes for all students, persistent in doing what must be done to obtain these outcomes, resilient in moving forward when problems emerge, and consistent in providing coordinated and coherent instructional programs. Levine's focus has been on raising academic achievement for all students as opposed to concentrating on disadvantaged students specifically, but I think his more general advice is fitting.

## Next Steps: From Rhetoric to Reality

I have presented in the preceding pages what amounts to a "starter list" of issues to consider if certain scholars and state-level policymakers become persuaded to politically resurrect the concept of opportunity-to-learn in the context of standards-based reform. A policymaking effort such as this would be comprised of two essential tasks. First, specific and measurable goals and standards should be developed that operationalize each of the five broad recommendations: producing multiculturally literate teachers, refining ability-grouping practices to eliminate unnecessary stratification effects, reducing class and school size, expanding and improving compensatory education programs (also addressing their unnecessary stratification effects), and pursuing broader socio-economic reforms aimed at reducing the number of children in poverty. Second, accountability structures should be developed that make it clear who is responsible for what, by what time, and what are the rewards for success and the sanctions for lack of success or effort. Clearly, states themselves are constitutionally responsible for the overall equitableness of the public school system. Indeed, the fear of constitutionally-based lawsuits are a main reason why many state policymakers feel it is foolish to put specific OTL commitments into print. More specifically, recommendations three, four, and five are primarily matters of state provision and supervision, while recommendations one and two are best addressed by teacher educators, teacher unions, and local districts working collaboratively. Obviously, the mere mentioning of such tasks is much easier than accomplishing them, and the division of responsibility is not nearly so clean-cut as implied above. The development of satisfactory OTL standards to accompany content and performance standards would require a great

deal of time, expertise, and cooperation, and this essay is only intended to provide a spark. But all great fires start with sparks. Perhaps the metaphor sounds negative, but in terms of equality of opportunity we must admit that our present public school system is hardly a pristine forest.

## Note

1. I must acknowledge that Tharp's experiments with culturally responsive instruction have taken place in contexts in which the receiving audiences, while not of mainstream identity, are homogeneous. Clearly, teachers in a culturally heterogeneous environment cannot tailor their instruction to any single ethnic group, but must balance the needs of different ethnic groups. However, Tharp has identified two principles for teaching non-mainstream children in general: immerse them in oral and written language as extensively and creatively as possible, and contextualize instruction so that it relates to their personal experiences. Obviously, the latter requirement is not possible for all children at all times, but any move away from a mainstream ethno-centric approach is positive.

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