

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

ALYSON LEIGH LAVIGNE & THOMAS L. GOOD. *Teacher and Student Evaluation: Moving Beyond the Failure of School Reform*. New York, NY: Routledge. (2014). 216 pp. \$55.45 (Paperback). (ISBN 978-0415810531)

The quality of education continues to be questioned daily in the media and society. Numerous educational reforms aiming to improve students' achievement have been implemented, such as in the United States, where standards-based reforms have led to outcomes being increasingly measured by student performance on standardized assessments. It remains true that there is a strong need to redefine what "success" means, both academically and in the broader context of society at large. Yet, how can we measure "success" by means of high stakes standardized tests alone? After the failure of "No Child Left Behind," the US Department of Education created the "Race to the Top" (RTT) program, a \$4.35 billion contest to spur innovation and reforms in K-12 education. Following these major school reforms, teachers and students were increasingly evaluated through performance-based high-stakes standardized tests. Although our Canadian situation is vastly different from the American one (by international standards, Canadian education is ranked among the world's best), still, it remains to be seen whether the conversation in the U.S. will have any lasting impact on the ongoing Canadian discourse about deep educational transformation. *Teacher and Student Evaluation: Moving Beyond the Failure of School Reform* is a timely research study in educational reform. The book explores the historical roots and modern development of accountability discourses and practices in education as well as current models of teacher evaluation in American education. In addition, it provides possible solutions that inform current and future systems of evaluation for various stakeholders.

The book consists of six chapters. In Chapter 1, Lavigne and Good discuss the increasing pressure for accountability on schools, teachers, and students and state that accountability has focused primarily upon student performance. Chapter 2 provides an overview of educational reform history in the American context, and reviews several major reforms that led to significant improvement, disastrous failure, or even stagnation. These two well-structured chapters note

that historical experience has shown us a way out of educational reform mired in a lack of connection between theory and practice due to overly ambitious goals and incomplete implementation.

The authors continue in chapter 3 by drawing a comprehensive picture of research studies on teaching from a historical perspective. They investigate what is known about teachers' impact on student learning and explore how this knowledge has been used to improve student learning in the past few decades. However, the discussion is somewhat disappointing because the book is missing a crucial time period: the 1990s to the beginning of the new century.

Chapter 4 turns to contemporary research of evaluation activities in schools. The authors address the recent evaluation trends under the RTT and examine the principal methods of teacher evaluation in different states. In Chapter 5, Lavigne and Good highlight two popular measures of teacher effectiveness: observation and student achievement data. These two chapters provide a very comprehensive and readable analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative measures used to assess student and teacher performance. The last chapter, Chapter 6, assesses the role of particular stakeholders, the teachers, in the movement to hold teachers accountable for student learning. After reaching the conclusion that these contemporary evaluation practices are flawed, the authors offer some solutions to improve upon the present situation. Other realistic and useful suggestions for related stakeholders (e.g., policy makers, parents, and teacher educators) could have also been furnished so as to provide a more complete picture of how educational reform can respond to teacher and student evaluation demands in high-stakes accountability systems.

In general, the authors make several significant contributions. First of all, by examining the background information of a series of education reforms and the history of empirical research on teaching from the 1940s to modern time, Lavigne and Good demonstrate how we can learn from history as we move toward new efforts to improve teaching and learning. Without the historical background of these reforms and the research data in the U.S. context, we could not understand where we are and how we got there, and where we should go and how to move forward. Secondly, the authors place a strong emphasis on teacher education, believing that teacher education is one of the greatest opportunities for enhancing teaching and learning in public schools. It is clear that "simple and one-size-fits-all solutions that simultaneously de-skill the teacher workforce" (p. 162) are not the best approaches for teacher education to respond to the RTT reform. Instead, the authors suggest both global and specific alternatives to address the accountability issue. Last but not least, the authors provide an overview of what has been learned thus far from evaluating teachers, highlighting a numbers of management strategies that various stakeholders can use under new education evaluation trends in

this challenging era. This does not minimize the current focus on standardized tests, but helps develop a more rigorous understanding and rationale for the ways in which measurement methods can be used to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

In summary, the book is well-structured, informative, and easy to engage with. It tells us why “carrot and stick approaches have proven to be unsuccessful in improving the complex problem of educational quality” (p. 97) and guides us from the past toward the future in a meaningful, proactive manner. This book will prove to be a valuable resource for school administrators, teachers, and school counselors who are involved in RTT education reform to design more balanced, multifaceted systems of evaluation for their schools. It provides critiques of proposed reforms with a variety of research-based ammunition so as to successfully refute many of the unsupported claims being made by policymakers and their influencers; this kind of information is essential for stakeholders who might otherwise buy into the reforms without doing the requisite homework. As other researchers have noted, “without capable, high quality teachers in America’s classrooms, no educational reform effort can possibly succeed” (Stronge & Tucker, 2003, p. 3). Teacher evaluations ensure the quality of teachers, which, in turn, will benefit student learning and classroom results. If we can succeed in supporting, evaluating, and keeping qualified and capable teachers, we will go a great distance in ameliorating the learning outcomes of students / student learning.

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REFERENCES

Stronge, J. H., & Tucker, P. D. (2003). *Handbook on teacher evaluation: Assessing and improving performance*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

