

Education Policy Perils: Tackling the Tough Issues

Edited by Christopher H. Tienken and Carol A. Mullen

Reviewed by Yong Zhao

Yong Zhao, PhD
Professor
Presidential Chair and Director
Institute of Global and Online Education
Department of Educational Methodology, Policy, and Leadership
College of Education
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR

Local control is one of the traditional virtues of American public education credited for delivering the prosperity the nation has enjoyed for decades (Goldin, 2008). However this virtue has been eroded gradually over the years.

Today local education decisions are directly affected by policies and policy recommendations from the outside—at the state, national, and sometimes even international level.

As a result, education leaders live in a much more complex policy environment than ever before. They not only have to work with the local community but also must interpret and implement policies made beyond their control, which may or may not be consistent with the culture and traditions of their local communities.

Moreover, as guardians of the wellbeing of students in their schools, they may be compelled to take actions to fend off outside policies that may hurt their students. Furthermore, as a member of the education profession, they need to actively contribute to the development of healthy policies at the state and national levels.

These complex tasks require education leaders to have a clear understanding of policies and more importantly the politics and evidence behind them. Unfortunately, to have a clear understanding is not easy - not only are many of the policy issues complex in nature but also because of the politics in policy making.

Influenced by different interest groups, education policies in the U.S. are often the results of political compromises supported with

selective uses of evidence, biased interpretations of data, and wide spread myths (Hacsi, 2002); (Berliner, 1996); (Berliner, 2014); (Ravitch, 2013); (Ravitch, 2010). As such, education policies and their associated politics and evidence are as complicated and confusing as the U.S. tax laws.

Education Policy Perils: Tackling the Tough Issues, co-edited by Chris Tienken and Carol Mullen, offers excellent insights into some of the toughest issues in education with provocative but practical recommendations for education leaders to navigate the complex and complicated policy landscape.

Each of the seven chapters in the book, authored by accomplished researchers, is devoted to one significant and relevant issue in education: school choice and competition, corporate influence in public education, English language learners and social justice leadership, curriculum standardization and customization, international assessment and comparison, state level politics and curriculum policy, and standardized testing.

While these are not the only significant issues in education, they have been some of the major forces shaping the policy landscape in the United States.

These issues are tough because there are no easy and straightforward solutions that meet the needs and expectations of all stakeholders. They are tough also because there is no agreed upon definition of the outcomes of education. As a result, empirical evidence collected to support or reject certain proposed solutions can always be subject to questioning and reinterpretations based on ideology.

Furthermore, educational research has long suffered from methodological constraints in that it is not always possible to conduct truly

randomized trials like medical research. Thus, results of educational research, especially those pertaining to large policy issues, are often susceptible to reasonable doubts and deliberate manipulation.

Consequently, educational policies have often been made based not on evidence, however limited it may be, but more on ideology. The politically powerful are able to influence the development of policies that favor their ideology and market them as necessary for the benefit of all children. Such is the case of major education policies in the United States over the past few decades.

The ideology of narrowing and defining education outcomes as standardized test scores, privatization and marketization of public education, and curriculum standardization as education equity has dominated major policies at the national and state levels.

The authors of this book collectively challenge the dominant ideology and policies. Christopher Lubienski and P. S. Myers question the wisdom of choice and competition in education in their chapter *The Rhetoric and Reality of School Reform: Choice, Competition, and Organizational Incentives in Market-Oriented Education*. Carol Mullen challenges the proliferation of corporate networks in public education in her chapter *Corporate Networks and Their Grip on the Public School Sector and Education Policy*.

Mariela A. Rodríguez criticizes the traditional “subtractive programs” for immigrant children with limited English proficiency in her chapter *Leading in a Socially Just Manner: Preparing Principals with a Policy Perspective*. Tom Tramaglino and Christopher H. Tienken contest the one-size-fits call curriculum for all children, especially for students in high poverty schools in their

chapter *Customized Curriculum and High Achievement in High-Poverty Schools*.

Michael Marder protests the elimination of the requirement that all students take Algebra II in Texas. Svein Sjøberg takes the globally powerful PISA and OECD to task in his chapter *OECD, PISA, and Globalization: The Influence of the International Assessment Regime*. Finally, Christopher Tienken objects the use of standardized tests to drive education policy making in the last chapter of the book *Standardized Test Results Can Be Predicted, So Stop Using Them to Drive Education Policymaking*.

The challenges are well presented, logically argued, grounded in research literature, and backed up with good data. Intended as a challenge to conventional beliefs, this book is provocative. It provides a voice of opposition to what have been the dominant

policies. As such, it is an invitation for contention and controversy. It can lead to gut-reaction dismissal or whole-hearted embrace of the ideas, arguments, and data presented in the book.

Thus to get the most out of this book requires patience, critical self-examination, and an open mind. It is perhaps best to use the book to start a community-wide discussion about the tough issues in education, to examine the evidence, to argue over the reasoning, and to debate the theories and ideologies.

This is where I find the book also falls short. For the purpose of debate and discussion, I wish the book included a commentary accompanying each chapter that counters the main arguments. But even without the counter points, *Education Policy Perils: Tackling the Tough Issues* is an excellent navigation guide of the bewildering education policy terrain.

Reviewer Biography

Yong Zhao currently serves as the Presidential Chair and Director of the Institute for Global and Online Education in the College of Education at the University of Oregon in Eugene. He is also a professor in the department of educational measurement, policy and leadership at the university. Further, Zhao is a professorial fellow at Victoria University's Mitchell Institute for Health and Education Policy in Australia. His work focuses on the implication of globalization and technology on education. He is the author of *World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students*; *Catching Up or Leading the Way: American Education in the Age of Globalization*; and *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Dragon: Why China Has the Best (and Worst) Education in the World*.
E-mail: yongzhao.uo@gmail.com

References

- Berliner, D. C., & Biddle, B. J. (1996). *The manufactured crisis: Myths, fraud, and the attack on America's public schools*. New York: Persues Books.
- Berliner, D. C., & Glass, G. V. (2014). *50 myths & lies that threaten America's public schools: The real crisis in education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Goldin, C., & Katz, L. F. (2008). *The race between education and technology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hacsi, T. A. (2002). *Children as pawns: The politics of educational reform*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ravitch, D. (2013). *Reign of error: The hoax of the privatization Mmovement and the danger to America's public schools*. New York: Knopf.

Education Policy Perils: Tackling the Tough Issues is written by Christopher H. Tienken and Carol A. Mullen, New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2015; 212 pages, paperback, \$41.95.

Mission and Scope, Copyright, Privacy, Ethics, Upcoming Themes, Author Guidelines, Submissions, Publication Rates & Publication Timeline

The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* is a refereed, blind-reviewed, quarterly journal with a focus on research and evidence-based practice that advance the profession of education administration.

Mission and Scope

The **mission** of the Journal is to provide peer-reviewed, user-friendly, and methodologically sound research that practicing school and district administrations can use to take action and that higher education faculty can use to prepare future school and district administrators. The Journal publishes accepted manuscripts in the following categories: (1) Evidence-based Practice, (2) Original Research, (3) Research-informed Commentary, and (4) Book Reviews.

The **scope** for submissions focus on the intersection of five factors of school and district administration: (a) administrators, (b) teachers, (c) students, (d) subject matter, and (e) settings. The Journal encourages submissions that focus on the intersection of factors a-e. The Journal discourages submissions that focus only on personal reflections and opinions.

Copyright

Articles published by AASA, The School Superintendents Association (AASA) in the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* fall under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license policy (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). Please refer to the policy for rules about republishing, distribution, etc. In most cases our readers can copy, post, and distribute articles that appear in the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*, but the works must be attributed to the author(s) and the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*. Works can only be distributed for non-commercial/non-monetary purposes. Alteration to the appearance or content of any articles used is not allowed. Readers who are unsure whether their intended uses might violate the policy should get permission from the author or the editor of the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*.

Authors please note: By submitting a manuscript the author/s acknowledge that the submitted manuscript is not under review by any other publisher or society, and the manuscript represents original work completed by the authors and not previously published as per professional ethics based on APA guidelines, most recent edition. By submitting a manuscript, authors agree to transfer without charge the following rights to AASA, its publications, and especially the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* upon acceptance of the manuscript. The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* is indexed by several services and is also a member of the Directory of Open Access Journals. This means there is worldwide access to all content. Authors must agree to first worldwide serial publication rights and the right for the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* and AASA to grant permissions for use of works as the editors judge appropriate for the redistribution, repackaging, and/or marketing of all works and any metadata associated with the works in professional indexing and reference services. Any revenues received by AASA and the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* from redistribution are used to support the continued marketing, publication, and distribution of articles.

Privacy

The names and e-mail addresses entered in this journal site will be used exclusively for the stated purposes of this journal and will not be made available for any other purpose or to any other party. Please note that the journal is available, via the Internet at no cost, to audiences around the world. Authors' names and e-mail addresses are posted for each article. Authors who agree to have their manuscripts published in the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* agree to have their names and e-mail addresses posted on their articles for public viewing.

Ethics

The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* uses a double-blind peer-review process to maintain scientific integrity of its published materials. Peer-reviewed articles are one hallmark of the scientific method and the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* believes in the importance of maintaining the integrity of the scientific process in order to bring high quality literature to the education leadership community. We expect our authors to follow the same ethical guidelines. We refer readers to the latest edition of the APA Style Guide to review the ethical expectations for publication in a scholarly journal.

Upcoming Themes and Topics of Interest

Below are themes and areas of interest for publication cycles.

1. Governance, Funding, and Control of Public Education
2. Federal Education Policy and the Future of Public Education
3. Federal, State, and Local Governmental Relationships
4. Teacher Quality (e.g., hiring, assessment, evaluation, development, and compensation of teachers)
5. School Administrator Quality (e.g., hiring, preparation, assessment, evaluation, development, and compensation of principals and other school administrators)
6. Data and Information Systems (for both summative and formative evaluative purposes)
7. Charter Schools and Other Alternatives to Public Schools
8. Turning Around Low-Performing Schools and Districts
9. Large scale assessment policy and programs
10. Curriculum and instruction
11. School reform policies
12. Financial Issues

Submissions

Length of manuscripts should be as follows: Research and evidence-based practice articles between 2,800 and 4,800 words; commentaries between 1,600 and 3,800 words; book and media reviews between 400 and 800 words. Articles, commentaries, book and media reviews, citations and references are to follow the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, latest edition. Permission to use previously copyrighted materials is the responsibility of the author, not the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*.

Potential contributors should include in a cover sheet that contains (a) the title of the article, (b) contributor's name, (c) terminal degree, (d) academic rank, (e) department and affiliation (for inclusion on the title page and in the author note), (f) address, (g) telephone and fax numbers, and (h) e-mail

address. Authors must also provide a 120-word abstract that conforms to APA style and a 40-word biographical sketch. The contributor must indicate whether the submission is to be considered original research, evidence-based practice article, commentary, or book or media review. The type of submission must be indicated on the cover sheet in order to be considered. Articles are to be submitted to the editor by e-mail as an electronic attachment in Microsoft Word.

Acceptance Rates

The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* maintains of record of acceptance rates for each of the quarterly issues published annually. The percentage of acceptance rates since 2010 is as follows:

- 2011: 16%
- 2012: 22%
- 2013: 15%
- 2014: 20%
- 2015: 22%

Book Review Guidelines

Book review guidelines should adhere to the author guidelines as found above. The format of the book review is to include the following:

- Full title of book
- Author
- City, state: publisher, year; page; price
- Name and affiliation of reviewer
- Contact information for reviewer: address, country, zip or postal code, e-mail address, telephone and fax
- Date of submission

Publication Timeline

Issue	Deadline to Submit Articles	Notification to Authors of Editorial Review Board Decisions	To AASA for Formatting and Editing	Issue Available on AASA website
Spring	October 1	January 1	February 15	April 1
Summer	February 1	April 1	May 15	July 1
Fall	May 1	July 1	August 15	October 1
Winter	August 1	October 1	November 15	January 15

Additional Information

Contributors will be notified of editorial board decisions within eight weeks of receipt of papers at the editorial office. Articles to be returned must be accompanied by a postage-paid, self-addressed envelope.

The *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* reserves the right to make minor editorial changes without seeking approval from contributors.

Materials published in the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* do not constitute endorsement of the content or conclusions presented.

The Journal is listed in Cabell's Directory of Publishing Opportunities. Articles are also archived in the ERIC collection.

Editor

Kenneth Mitchell, EdD

AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice

Submit articles electronically: kenneth.mitchell@mville.edu

To contact by postal mail:

Dr. Ken Mitchell

Associate Professor

School of Education

Manhattanville College

2900 Purchase Street

Purchase, NY 10577