

Why Were my Last Four Books Necessary?

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Talk to Friday Morning Group, Lexington, MA, August 9, 2019

In the past decade, I have published four books with Rowman & Littlefield. The first, published in 2012, addressed construction of a secondary English/reading curriculum. The second, in 2015, addressed teacher preparation programs and licensure tests. The third, in 2018, addressed low achievement in K-12 and the fourth, in 2019, addressed the roots of low achievement. In [Attachment A](#), readers will find a short description of each book. In this short article I explain why I wrote these four books.

I was in the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education from 1999 to 2003 in charge of revising or developing most of the state's K-12 standards, teachers' and school administrators' licensure requirements and tests, and the criteria for professional development credits for our educators. In essence, I was in charge of most academic matters relating to the state's K-12 standards and educators.

To judge from the results in the 2000s of (1) our original state tests, (2) national tests (National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP), and (3) international tests (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study or TIMSS), all demographic groups in the state improved. The goal of the state's 1993 Education Reform Act, which I was addressing, was to strengthen public education—a very different goal from the goal of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which was “to close gaps.” Despite attempts from outside and within the department to sabotage my staff's efforts to write first-rate standards and teacher/administrator licensure requirements, the state's students on average were close to the top, at the top, or tied for first place in almost everything they participated in—called the Massachusetts “education miracle.”

I couldn't have been more surprised than my professional friends were when in 2010 the state board of education under Maura Banta (appointed by then-Governor Patrick) voted to dump our first-rate standards in reading, English, and mathematics and to adopt the Common Core standards. I had managed to get myself appointed to Common Core's Validation Committee. It was a political battle to get appointed to this committee, I discovered, and I quickly learned this committee of less than 30 people had been intended mostly as a rubber stamp. But, five of us did not sign off on Common Core's standards as research-based, rigorous, and comparable to the best standards in the world.

I was also surprised that almost no one had ever been interested in my views on what made for effective standards or strengthened public education, from anyone at Harvard's graduate school of education (from which I had received my doctoral degree) to education researchers, most philanthropists, civil rights activists, policy makers at the USED, and Common Core's advocates. It seemed to me that they wanted only to close “gaps” in whatever way they could manage to eliminate the academic differences between “whites” or “white males” and groups listed for affirmative action purposes. Asian Americans hadn't followed the script, and to this day their average academic performance attests to Common Core's failure to reduce the achievement of all high-achieving non-blacks/Hispanics. (Keep in mind that Common Core's goal seemed to be closing gaps and getting low

achievers into college.) I was never paranoid about being ignored as an effective academic bureaucrat after the “miracle” happened, just puzzled.

From 2010 to 2015, I was invited to testify or speak to state legislators, boards of education, and parents or the general public everywhere on the falsity of Common Core’s promises. But I couldn’t counter the determination of an educationally ignorant but very rich couple whose own children were safely being educated in a non-Common Cored private school but who were convinced that gap-closing was all that mattered in public schools. How were they able to seduce educational officials, the media, and most journal editors into thinking the Gates’ had found the “silver bullet” (that certain standards and tests based on them would turn low achievers into higher achievers and close the gaps if teachers were held accountable for the results)? We still don’t know. And we are unlikely to find out because who wants to admit they were fooled by educationally ignorant people? Who would admit that closing gaps was not that important to low achievers or their families? There was never any evidence it was.

So, I began to write books. The first two were about ways to strengthen the K-12 curriculum and K-12 teachers. A few people paid attention because it was clear that the average high school graduate couldn’t read above the grade 6 level but was expected to go to college and graduate. I then wrote two more books highlighting the fact that we were wasting billions on our schools trying to turn low achievers (or children of low-income families) into higher achievers. Not only did it not work; the schools were not even the right institution to try to do it. Two comprehensive reports in 1965 and 1966 by eminent sociologists (James Coleman and Daniel Moynihan) both found that “family background” was more important for school achievement than students’ teachers or schools. In other words, we had been spending our money since 1965 (the first passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or ESEA) on ineffective educational programs and policies even though policy makers and education researchers knew these policies would likely not make a difference in educational outcome.

So, did educators, researchers, philanthropists, and policy makers now pay attention to me? Not at all. I may even be considered a racist because I am suggesting that Congress and state legislators stop funding educational policies and programs focusing on low achievers or low-income students, and use that money to strengthen the K-12 curriculum and K-12 teachers for all students, and to explore policies that strengthen students’ “civic identity” or “family background,” such as policies incentivizing the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. But it’s hard to get the average politician or bureaucrat to understand that a dysfunctional school system can’t educate any student. Only a stronger K-12 curriculum and stronger teachers for all students may help low achievers, as the Bay State showed in the 2000s.

[YouTube video interview about book #4](#)

[Attachment A](#)