

## *The MISSING NARRATIVE*

### *Differentiating "Reform" and "Innovation" in Education*

**Angela Engel**

Education has become the hottest battleground for political and economic interests. Two divisions are predominant in the current struggle for media attention, money and control. The debate over how to improve public education is best analyzed and distinguished between the two distinct paradigms - “reformers” and “innovators.”

Reformers tend to accept the traditional methodologies and underlying assumptions of education, and advocate for change that supports knowledge and skills imposed on students. They commonly assume that what can be measured has the most value. Their agenda includes high-stakes testing, performance pay, and a nationalized curriculum. The leaders include foundations such as Gates, Walton, and Broad: funders of Common Core; Michelle Rhee, CEO of Students First and proponent of teacher pay based on test scores; Wendy Kopp, CEO of Teach for America – a for-profit six week teacher training program, George W. Bush Jr. and No Child Left Behind; Pearson and McGraw Hill - top publishers of state standardized tests, curriculum and consulting services; and President Obama’s administration with the Race to the Top initiative.

Innovators tend to question the purposes and underlying assumptions of education that drive the current system. They seek answers to promoting all levels of diversity including diversity of ideas. They work to address the inequities and create equality in opportunity; they champion educator autonomy, student empowerment, and parent engagement; they promote learner-driven education and the un-measurable qualities of determination, creativity, imagination, and collaboration.

Innovators represent a varied assortment of perspectives, and while some have created alternatives in education, others have worked to reducing childhood poverty. The long history of innovation includes those well-known leaders recognized in the education world. They include Rudolf Steiner founder of Waldorf Education, Maria Montessori, founder of Montessori Schools; Lyndon B. Johnson led the War on Poverty and the original Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965; Sir Ken Robinson author and lecturer on creativity and innovation; Deborah Meier known for her leadership in democratically run public urban schools, Howard Gardner, for his theory of multiple intelligences, and Daniel Goleman and his work on Emotional Intelligence . In examining these differences, this analysis compares reformers and innovators across the following categories:

**Purpose** – Central motivation

**Values** – Underlying common beliefs

**Goals** – The desired result that validates their values and purpose

**Policies** – Legislative actions taken to achieve those goals

**Practices** – The application of the values, goals, and policies

The education of our children shapes society today and well into the future. Our responsibility as parents, teachers and citizens requires that we explore *who* is doing the shaping, for what *purpose*, and through what *means*. Education can lead a person in many paths and can transform a society in many directions.

<i>Education Purpose</i>	
<b>Reformers</b>	<b>Innovators</b>
<b>Educate to shape students to the world</b>	<b>Educate students to shape the world</b>

<i>Education Values</i>	
<b>Reformers</b>	<b>Innovators</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The desire to direct people’s ideas and behavior</li> <li>• Centralized - authority is concentrated</li> <li>• Hierarchical – power and responsibility is ranked and increases at the top</li> <li>• Conformity to (predetermined) expectations</li> <li>• Standardization</li> <li>• Market oriented perspective – institutional approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The desire to ensure freedom of thought and ideas</li> <li>• Decentralized - authority is dispersed</li> <li>• Egalitarian – power and responsibility is shared</li> <li>• Liberation from political, social, and economic constructs</li> <li>• Diversity</li> <li>• Human perspective – personalized (cognitive, psychomotor, social/emotional)</li> </ul>

### *Education Goals*

<b>Reformers</b>	<b>Innovators</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create punishments and incentives that <u>enforce</u> compliance throughout the system, manage teachers, students, and parents</li>   <li>• Expand Federal involvement, grow U.S and state departments, grant Mayoral control; federal and state grant monies conditioned on adherence to federal and state requirements</li>   <li>• Reinforce predetermined common definitions of performance and growth, impose those criteria from policy to practice, adjust variables and demand equality in outcomes regardless of inequalities in resources and opportunities</li>   <li>• Narrow objectives to completely align instruction, curriculum, and assessments to the prescribed standards and common performance objectives of students and teachers in all subjects from preschool through college</li>   <li>• Identify deficits in achievement and address those gaps through expectations, uniform curriculum, standardized tests, performance evaluation tools, and punishments and incentives</li>   <li>• Capitalize on education market opportunities, create new product lines, expand new business, and increase revenues and profit margins for corporations and revenue generating non-profits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand student and parental rights, promote diversity, and engender personal reflection and responsibility</li>   <li>• Rely on proven scientifically valid research, reduce standardized testing, engage local communities, model critical thinking and create safe, trusting cultures for learners and professionals to experiment and take risks</li>   <li>• Think beyond the standard parameters-- promote wonder, question norms, imagine possibilities, experiment, solve problems, debate ideas, challenge solutions, create, reflect and refine</li>   <li>• Broad mission to expand and enrich the learning and educational <u>opportunities</u> of each child. Student learners are complex and unique: to optimize capabilities, education is personalized rather than standardized</li>   <li>• Build on student strengths. Mitigate barriers to advancement such as poverty by targeting state and federal resources towards prevention and early intervention</li>   <li>• Balance political, economic, and social trends with the rights of the individual and the interests of the community. Ensure public education dollars are spent for the benefit of the public</li> </ul>

**Education Policies**

<b>Reformers</b>	<b>Innovators</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Direct outcomes</b> – Increase tools for monitoring, scoring, rewarding, and punishing</li> <li>• <b>Centralized</b> - Education guided by politicians, evaluated by test publishers, enforced through government agencies and for the benefit of private corporations. (2002 NCLB, Race to the Top, Common Core)</li> <li>• <b>Hierarchical</b> - Top down decision making where accountability is imposed and responsibility assigned without authority. (Adequate Yearly Progress, (AYP), conditional waivers for NCLB, performance pay/merit pay for teachers, retention and exit exams for students. Hedge Fund charters and private Education Management Organizations (EMOs) takeover schools that serve low-income students.) Under the model of reform, students, educators and schools serve test corporations, and state and federal mandates</li> <li>• <b>Conformity</b> - Compliance is rewarded and non-conformity punished. Achievement objectives are prescribed, knowledge is defined, measurable indicators determined, and matters of consequence enforced. (High-stakes include turnaround, firing, pay freezes, lower learning tracks for students of color and low-income and higher learning tracks for students of privilege)</li> <li>• <b>Standardization and uniformity</b> - Impose a nationalized curriculum (Common Core) and mass standardized testing: state tests, MAPS, PISA, TIMMS, NAEP, SMARTER and PARCC. Revise standards, re-align curriculum and re-write the measurement and curriculum tools creating an education monopoly for corporate publishers. Utilize</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Promote Freedom</b> - Expand opportunities and resources with multiple pathways to success</li> <li>• <b>Decentralized</b> - Education guided by the individual student, their parents, and professional educators (1965, ESEA, staff development, library and media services, targeted resources to children at-risk.)</li> <li>• <b>Egalitarian</b> – Accountability is derived from within and carries both responsibility and authority. (Schools reflect a democratic system of governance, real-world assessments, family partnerships, citizen elected school boards/ community based decision making, accreditation, and individualized school improvement plans specific to their strengths and needs.) Under the model of innovation, state and federal agencies serve the individual student diverse communities and the public education trust</li> <li>• <b>Liberation</b> – Remove barriers to learning and advancement. Strong voice of parents, teachers, and students. (Desegregation, IDEA, Civil Rights Act of 1964, GI Bill, Pell Grant, Equal Protection Act, Increased access to higher education, scholarships, free and reduced lunch programs, public libraries, civic engagement, and counseling services)</li> <li>• <b>Diversity</b> - Protection of the differences of individuals and communities. Innovators work to eliminate practices of discrimination and exploitation and remove system inequities. Critically-thinking citizens engaged in leading, questioning, investigating, filtering and challenging systems ensure a vast culture of ideas,</li> </ul>

<p>virtual and online products to educate a faster and cheaper monoculture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Market oriented perspective</b> - Free market principles such as privatization and profit models are expected to improve the system. Examples include revenue generating alternative teacher training programs (TFA), for-profit online education, virtual learning, text book and testing monopolies, and consulting industries</li> </ul>	<p>values, expression, experience, leadership, and innovation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Human perspective</b> - Allows each student an opportunity to realize his or her talents, interests, and dreams. Social/emotional development, art, music, PE, vocational experiences, apprenticeships, and mentoring. Educational investments ensure public dollars remain in public schools with public oversight for the benefit of students</li> </ul>
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<i>Education Practices</i>	
<b>Reformers</b>	<b>Innovators</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power and control is concentrated on those with current power and control – government and corporations</li> <li>• Knowledge is prescribed and intended outcomes are pre-determined. Districts, schools and administrators align curriculum, instruction, tests, report cards, parent communication and school policies to meet federal, state and district reporting and accountability mandates. Reformers define education in terms of "what students know"</li> <li>• Standards-based: rigid and uniform approach to instruction. Content is divided into subjects and learning activities are tied to short term measured outcomes. Students are sorted by age and address. Students develop in the same way at the same time along grade level tracks</li> <li>• One-size fits all - Every school, classroom, teacher and student designed to look the same: school ratings/labels, compulsory testing, exit exams, educators evaluated and compensated based on test performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choice, opportunity, and decision-making are directed by educators, families, and students collaboratively</li> <li>• Knowledge is expanded – students are constantly introduced to real world experiences, scrutinizing information, altering beliefs, refining behaviors, and creating new knowledge. Innovators define education in terms of "what students become" and recognize wisdom cannot be prescribed and real learning is not pre-determined</li> <li>• Learner-centered: personalized, eclectic, flexible, intuitive, integrated and multi-sensory approach to instruction, curriculum and assessment – borrowing the best from a variety rather than being limited under one model. Students develop independently and uniquely</li> <li>• Many sizes for many students - Increase opportunities and expand resources. Varied education alternatives create multiple pathways for individual triumph and social advancement beyond existing institutional barriers. Special attention given to addressing poverty and system inequities</li> </ul>

## Further Comparisons

### Reformers

The fixation on measurement, tracking, sorting, and reporting is understood as a function of management and efficiency. Reformers means are dependent on factors of competition and comparison that have very little to do with learning and nothing to do with children. The best way to distinguish a Reformer from an Innovator is whether the solution is tied to a price tag, product, sales or service. Reformers advocate for online for-profit schools, external school management companies, virtual learning, consultants, data systems, bubble tests, curricula, standards, and product lines that fall somewhere in the alignment equation. They define human success in terms of compliance, rewarding the top and punishing those who do not, or can not conform with narrower options and barriers to future education and advancement. Corporate executives with the Business Roundtable, lobbyists, and policy leaders such as the National Governor's Association, and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) comprise the reform leadership. Education reform, although opponents argue ineffective by all measures, has proven to be a profitable endeavor. Schools have less money, corporations more money and children are left with empty bubbles instead of educational resources and opportunities for advancement.

### Innovators

Innovators view education not as a function of management and efficiency but as a function of culture and experience. Innovators share the philosophy that the public education system should emphasize not "what to think," but instead nurture the innate human quality of "how we think." Innovators respect human individuality and the differences in the way we learn, the varied talents with which we are endowed, and the unique ways in which individuals experience and express life and learning. They define human success in terms of curiosity, creativity, initiative, and social contribution. They direct their attention to building trusting relationships, enriching experiences, shrinking inequalities, growing opportunity, personalizing practices, improving conditions, expanding resources, nurturing inspiration, prevention and intervention, and supporting people -- factors often beyond the measurable, yet essential to learning and children.

### Understanding the Differences

The back to school night activity conducted at The Washington Park Early Learning Center in Denver, Colorado best illustrates the difference between Reform and Innovation. Teacher, Christina DeVarona, broke parents into two groups for a pumpkin-creating activity. Group one was given prescribed instructions with common outcomes. The outline of the pumpkin was drawn and the shapes already cut. Group two was directed to a table with a variety of materials – construction paper, beads, paints, feathers, glitter, ribbons, etc.

As the two groups worked, DeVarona took notes recording their conversations. Group one was disengaged and had to be continuously re-directed. Group two worked enthusiastically, collaborating, discussing earlier experiences and sharing ideas. At the end of the exercise, the pumpkins were lined up on the front wall. As she pointed to the elaborate and original pumpkins from group two, she emphasized how unique we are as individuals and how human capacity is unlimited. She looked at Group one's pumpkins and pointed out the obvious – they had duplicated her pumpkin.

The factory analogy describes the reform pedagogy - identical materials (inputs) are uniformly processed through a quality-controlled system and result in identical outcomes or outputs. The aluminum can is one example - metals are combined, the can is shaped, labels are painted, cans are washed and the product is packaged for filling and distribution. The factory model emphasizes

lower operating costs, increased production, faster processing, and higher revenues. Reformers consider the "business approach" efficient and cost-effective. Control is easier to exercise centrally through a uniform system designed with the singular goal of counting, quantifying progress, and measuring the outputs of learners. Improvement is determined by making the process faster with less money and time.

Innovators believe the factory model does not apply to human beings. Materials (learners) are never identical, the learning process is not uniform, and the output is always completely original, despite manipulations. Differences in economics, talents, interests, experiences, culture, genetics, chemistry, and living environments render comparisons irrelevant and competition counter to the needs for collaboration and cooperation. Knowledge is not packaged, learning cannot be prescribed, and human development is a goal, not a measurement.

The concern on the part of Innovators is that manipulating the nature of something often leads to the destruction of that nature. Children are natural learners and innovators promote education policies and practices that honor a student's individual ways of learning and knowing without imposing theirs. Unlike reformers, Innovators are neither the "shaper" nor the "shape." They facilitate learning through experience, exploration and critical analysis that fosters natural development and unique outcomes.

## **Editorial**

The parents of the preschool children in Christina DeVerona's class learned more in that one pumpkin exercise than education reformers have learned in three decades of failed mandates - children and human beings cannot be mechanized, industrialized, and standardized. As Yong Zhao, distinguished professor at Michigan State University, writes in his book, *Catching Up or Leading the Way*, China in its pursuit of innovation, creativity, and cooperation is trying to model its education system after America at the same time we are using standards and tests to demolish ours. Most devastated by Reform initiatives have been poor and minority students. Since the passage of No Child Left Behind poverty has increased by 9%. In the decade following the War on Poverty and the Original 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act poverty dropped by 6%. The achievement gap between rich and poor has widened; college tuition rates have increased faster than at any other time in history; the need for remediation has risen dramatically; and every school that has closed has been in a low-income community. Reformers have sought to maintain dominance by defining knowledge and controlling education opportunity as to fulfill their own ideals and increase their capital.

In his article titled, "[Gated Intellectuals and Ignorance in Political Life: Toward a Borderless Pedagogy in the Occupy Movement](#)," Henry Giroux writes:

*"A gated or border pedagogy is one that establishes boundaries to protect the rich; isolates citizens from each other; excludes those populations considered disposable; and renders invisible young people, especially poor youth of color, along with others marginalized by class and race ... The gated intellectual works hard to make thinking an act of stupidity, turn lies into truths, build a moat around oppositional ideas so they cannot be accessed and destroy those institutions and social protections that serve the common good.."*

In the words of Jonathon Kozol, The prevailing "Reform" paradigm has led to racial isolation and a narrowing of civic virtue. The majority of today's high school graduates know learning in terms of what can be measured on a standardized test. Their experience of achievement is realized only in their comparisons with others and only in the context of prescribed benchmarks. These young students are denied the opportunity to think critically, create solutions to the most

challenging problems and build something worthwhile. Their education is being hijacked for purposes besides their own. As opportunities for college, employment, self-sufficiency, and the pursuit of happiness continue to diminish, students are recognizing that they are giving something for nothing. Parents are discovering increased demands and declining budgets have led to overworked, underpaid teachers in overcrowded and underfunded classrooms. Attempts from Reformers to maintain and sustain power and control through all means necessary have dehumanized classrooms, fractured communities, trivialized the American education system, and corporatized the public trust.

## **Two choices**

In the most distilled sense, Innovators stand for freedom - freedom *of* thought, emotions, faith, speech, and freedom *from* fear, oppression, discrimination and exploitation. Innovators recognize that freedom is inextricably tied to equity. In Finland, where there are no private schools or colleges, the main driver of education policy has reflected the commitment to equity. Safe and healthy schools are the objective and free school meals, easy access to health care, psychological counseling, and individualized student guidance are provided to every student. Since 1980 when the Finnish addressed social inequity through their education system, Finland has emerged as a premier model in education.

Data centered, profit motivated reforms have done extreme damage to American education leaving traditional industrial school models near collapse. What has resulted is an opening for Innovators to create learning communities truly reflective of a democratic society, committed to the development of each human being, representative of validated research and professional integrity, safe, equitable, affirming and invigorating examples of possibility and innovation. Ultimately it is our money and these are our children and the future of education is still to be decided. We can continue with the current reforms of standardization and high-stakes testing leaving student's malleable and complacent enough to conform to the world around them. Or we can revolutionize the education system; inviting students to question the systems and assert their rights as learners and future citizens in order to create a world we have yet to see.

<i><b>Educational Leaders and Organizations</b></i>	
<b>Reformers</b>	<b>Innovators</b>
<p><a href="#">ALEC</a> (American Legislative Exchange Council)</p> <p><a href="#">McGraw Hill</a> (Curriculum and test publishers)</p> <p><a href="#">Pearson</a> (Curriculum and test publishers)</p> <p><a href="#">Democrats for Education Reform</a>, (DFER)</p> <p><a href="#">The Walton Foundation</a></p> <p><a href="#">Common Core National Standards</a></p> <p><a href="#">Foundation for Excellence in Education</a></p> <p><a href="#">KIPP Schools and Foundation</a></p> <p><a href="#">National Governors Association</a></p> <p><a href="#">Stand for Children</a></p> <p><a href="#">Students First</a></p> <p><a href="#">Americans for Prosperity</a></p> <p><a href="#">Teach for America</a></p> <p><a href="#">Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation</a></p> <p><a href="#">The New Teacher Project</a></p> <p><a href="#">New Leaders for New Schools</a></p> <p><a href="#">Edison Schools</a></p> <p><a href="#">Institute for Justice</a></p> <p><a href="#">In Bloom</a></p> <p>Reformers represent members from both the secular and non-secular community. Individuals from both the Republican and Democratic party identify as reformers. Most are corporate executives while others work in the political arena. None have originated from the classroom.</p>	<p><a href="#">National Education Policy Center</a></p> <p><a href="#">Uniting4Kids</a></p> <p><a href="#">Rethinking Schools</a></p> <p><a href="#">Parents Across America</a></p> <p><a href="#">Fund Education Now</a></p> <p><a href="#">Economic Policy Institute</a></p> <p><a href="#">Fair Test</a></p> <p><a href="#">National At Risk Education Network</a> (NAREN)</p> <p><a href="#">Save Our Schools</a></p> <p><a href="#">Alternative Education Resource Org</a> (AERO)</p> <p><a href="#">Coalition for Better Education</a></p> <p><a href="#">Leadership Center for the Common Good</a></p> <p><a href="#">United Opt Out</a></p> <p><a href="#">Coalition of Essential Schools</a></p> <p>Innovators also include members from both political parties and represent both secular and non-secular beliefs. The shared commonality among Innovators is marked by their experience in education. Innovators are school founders, administrators, scholars, researchers, professors, parents and educators.</p>

**Angela Engel** is the Co-Founder, and Executive Director of *Uniting 4 Kids*. She is the acclaimed Author of *Seeds of Tomorrow: Solutions for Improving our Children's Education.*, Angela earned a masters degree in curriculum and instruction and has spent the past twenty years in teaching and administration. In 2008 she led the *Children's Action Agenda*, organizing children's advocacy groups from around Colorado on a common legislative platform. Most recently she designed the "50 State Resolution" to end No Child Left Behind and authored legislation to reduce high-stakes testing, protect parental rights, and improve prevention and early intervention services for low-income children. She is a veteran

facilitator for the Family Leadership Training Institute. Prior to teaching, she founded a mentoring and tutoring program for at-risk children and lives in Colorado with her two daughters Grace, 15, and Sophie, 13.

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