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Walt Gardner

Main

Teachers Are Potted Palms in School Reform

By Walt Gardner on February 16, 2010 8:00 AM | [No Comments](#) | [No TrackBacks](#)

Today is the debut of **Walt Gardner's Reality Check**. I'd like to mark the occasion with a note for readers who are unfamiliar with my work.

For the past 17 years I've written about education for major newspapers and magazines around the globe. ([Google me for a small sample](#).) I did so because I felt that too much reportage and commentary about educational issues were confusing and/or incorrect. Based on the number of op-eds and letters that I've had published, editors apparently agreed with me.

But with school reform now a high priority in the Obama administration, I felt the time was right to expand my readership via a blog. My goal, however, has not changed. I'll continue to write as a popularizer in the belief that it's the most effective way to provide straightforward answers to questions about public education at this crossroads in history.

The Race to the Top initiative serves as a propitious starting point. It's an example of how to squander an unprecedented opportunity to provide a quality education for all students. With \$4.35 billion already committed for distribution to states that are willing to abide by the rules - and another \$1.35 billion expected to sweeten the deal - it is the largest single investment by the federal government in school reform. As a result, the plan has been in the limelight ever since it was first announced.

But little has been written about the authors of RTTT. They happen to be a triumvirate composed of business leaders, philanthropists and politicians. No one is saying that they are not entitled to voice their opinions. They pay taxes like everyone else to support public schools. But they have been given virtual carte blanche to advance their agendas, both overt and covert.

Teachers, in the meantime, have been marginalized when so much depends on their support to make reform work. Unless they are firmly on board, the viability of the movement is unavoidably jeopardized. This practice is nothing new to education reform. But it is a telling commentary about the status of teachers in this country that has been given short shrift by the media.

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It is a carryover from the Bush administration that is insulting at best, and self-defeating at worst. It says unambiguously that those who have never taught a day in public school - theoreticians - know better than classroom teachers - practitioners - what needs to be done to address the undeniable ills afflicting education in this country.

No other profession looks so widely outside its own ranks for solutions to problems. Doctors and lawyers, for example, are routinely consulted about plans that affect their work. But teachers are another story. That's a big mistake, with serious consequences down the road.

More about this in my next post.

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