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Foreword

Robert Rueda has accomplished in this book what most educational scholars aspire to but seldom achieve: He has made educational theory practical! And in so doing he has served both his university colleagues and K–12 educators remarkably well. Higher education colleagues will benefit from both the “existence proof” that theory and research can be marshaled to address problems that plague our colleagues in K–12 education (not to mention the equally impressive existence of proof that change is possible within a graduate school of education). K–12 colleagues will benefit from a research-based model of educational reform that is itself driven by an impressive array of research-based principles about learning, pedagogy, culture, and school organization.

As would be the case with any honest model of educational change, Rueda’s embraces the complexities of schooling in a very complicated multicultural, multilingual society. Even so, his model of school reform is manageable because it comes packaged in a doubly triadic but accessible (it’s not simple but it is transparent and memorable) framework that allows all players in the educational improvement process to keep their wits about them. First is the triad of elements we use to define the primary *goal* of all of our efforts: student learning and performance inside the classroom; it is comprised of *expertise* (both knowledge and skill), *self-regulation* (the capacity to monitor and adjust one’s learning tools), and *engagement* (a combination of interest, self-efficacy, and stamina to stay the course in learning tasks). Second is the triad of resources we use as the *means* by which we achieve the learning goal, and not surprisingly, they are, at heart, professional knowledge resources: We are more effective at promoting our goal of student learning to the degree that we possess deep professional knowledge about learning processes, motivation, and organizational/institutional factors that influence our ability to improve teaching and learning. While it sits in the background, the most crucial factor in Rueda’s model is context: Both the goals (the learning triad) and the means (the resource triad) are situated within a set of social and cultural practices that permeate all of our activity as learners and teachers. To pretend that those contextual practices don’t matter is to guarantee our failure as educational reformers.

Each of these key elements in the two triads are systematically unpacked (chapter 2 for the goal, and chapters 3–5 for each element of professional knowledge) so that we come away with a nuanced understanding of the role each factor plays. In research-based accounts of practice nuance is often another name for complexity and obfuscation, but Rueda manages to avoid both by filtering the nuanced, research-based information provided through the frame of the double triad. As a result, the reader has a chance to develop deep, well organized knowledge of reform tools and processes rather than an ill-structured set of hunches or guesses.

With the knowledge components in place, the ideas all come together in chapter 6, with Rueda sharing vivid glimpses of how the fundamental approach to reform, a version of gap analysis borrowed from reform within the business community, and chapter 7, where he reminds us of what can happen to us when we are insensitive to the social and cultural practices that operate in particular community contexts. What is so impressive in chapter 6 is that we meet all of the basic ideas (the double triad) encountered early on in the book, but now instantiated in examples of real reform efforts, both in higher education and K–12 settings. Here is where we see the real value in an approach grounded in theory and research because we can easily imagine how these ideas might play out in our own institutions. In chapter 7, we learn a basic lesson about context: What we do as human actors trying to improve our collective lot is both cause and consequence of context. We shape and are shaped by the social and cultural practices that operate in the institutional and community contexts within which we work. In providing compelling examples of both success and failure, Rueda reminds me of Tip O’Neal’s famous quote about politics—“All politics is local.” In chapter 7, we learn that, policy makers’ protestations to the contrary, all school reform is local. The failure to make school reform local means that it will be met with resistance or deflected by mock compliance. So reformer beware!

If we put together the themes in Robert Rueda’s insightful and useful handbook on school improvement, we arrive at an interesting paradox: We should use a research-based, highly theoretical framework to shape our efforts, but we should implement them as if all that mattered was adapting it to the local context. Metaphorically, it’s a variation of the motto of the environmental movement: “Think globally, act locally.” And that paradox is, I think, exactly what Rueda wants us to take away from our encounter with his book. I would close by reminding readers that some paradoxes are meant to be embraced. This is one.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Overview

There are two interesting observations about schools over the last several decades. One is that the students who inhabit American classrooms are rapidly changing, resulting in much more heterogeneous classrooms. The second is that, by almost any objective indicator, there are long-standing and systematic differences in outcomes, especially related to ethnicity, race, language, and socioeconomic status. These characteristics form the backdrop for the current educational landscape, and are likewise important areas of focus in the remainder of this book. A brief look at these patterns is presented below.

THE CHANGING FACE OF AMERICAN CLASSROOMS

There have been significant changes in the students who attend American schools. For example, the percentage of racially/ethnically diverse students enrolled in the nation's public schools increased from 22% in 1972 to 31% in 1986, and to 43% in 2006. This increase in diverse enrollment largely reflects the growth in the percentage of students who were Latino(a).¹ In 2006, Hispanic students represented 20% of public school enrollment, up from 6% in 1972 and 11% in 1986. Between 1979 and 2006, the number of school-age children (ages 5–17) who spoke a language other than English at home increased from 3.8 to 10.8 million, or from 9% to 20% of the population in this age range. Among these children, the percentage who spoke English with difficulty increased from 3% to 6% between 1979 and 2000 (Planty et al., 2008).

The increase in the number of English Learners is especially notable. According to the 2000 census, nearly one in five Americans

Long-standing and systematic differences in outcomes, especially related to ethnicity, race, language, and socioeconomic status, form the backdrop for the current educational landscape.

speaks a language other than English at home, an increase of nearly 50% from the previous decade (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). This increase, not surprisingly, has been mirrored in the classroom. In 1992, 15% of U.S. teachers were estimated to have at least one English Learner (EL) in their respective classrooms. Ten years later, in 2002, the percentage of U.S. teachers who had at least one EL student in their classroom was 43% (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Most EL students in the United States (79%) speak Spanish as their primary language (Gandara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003). In 2003–2004, EL services were provided to 3.8 million students (11% of all students). California and Texas had the largest reported number of students receiving EL services. In California, there were 1.6 million students (26% of all students) who received EL services, while in Texas the number was 0.7 million (16% of all students) (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Diversity in American classrooms should not be taken as a negative development. In fact, in many ways, it can be seen as resource (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). However, despite the fact that diversity by itself is not a reason for concern, the fact that it is related to systematic differences in education outcomes should definitely be a source of concern. A look at some of these patterns related to achievement is presented below.

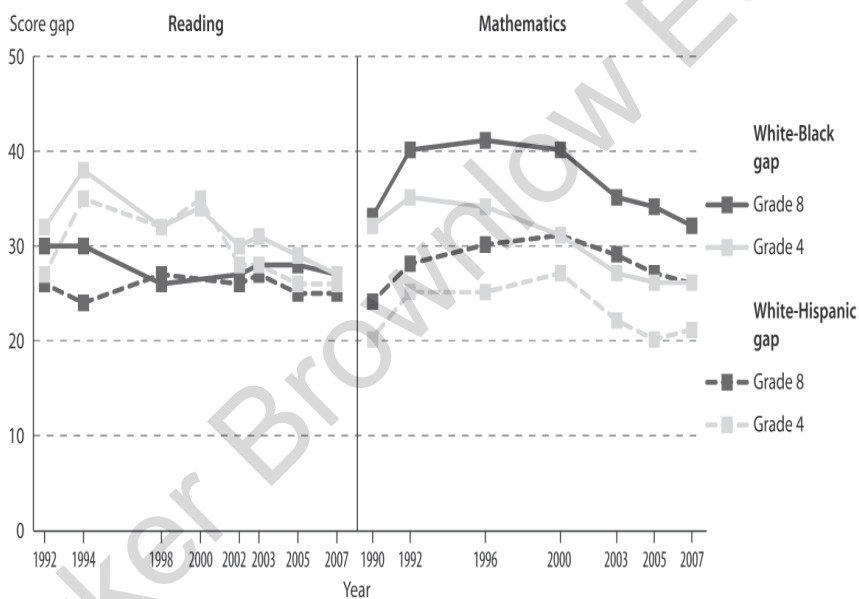
VARIATION IN EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

While large-scale standardized tests are often criticized regarding their immediate usefulness in informing instructional practices, as well as for other reasons (Moss, Girard, & Haniford, 2006), they do offer one source of information regarding educational outcomes, especially from a longitudinal perspective. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), for example, has assessed student reading and mathematics performance since the early 1990s. NAEP thus provides a picture of the extent to which student performance in each subject has changed over time, including the achievement gaps between White and Black and between White and Hispanic students.

NAEP data indicate that long-standing differences continue to characterize educational outcomes. For example, in the area of reading, the gap between White and Hispanic 4th-graders did not change measurably in 2007 compared with 1992. Comparing 2007 educational outcomes for White, Hispanic, and Black students at the 4th-grade level, Blacks scored, on average, 27 points lower than Whites (on a 0–500 point scale), and

Hispanics scored, on average, 26 points lower than Whites. At 8th grade, there was no measurable change in the White-Black or White-Hispanic reading achievement gaps in 2007 when compared with 1992 or 2005. In 2007, at the 8th-grade level, Blacks scored, on average, 27 points lower on the reading assessment than Whites, and Hispanics scored, on average, 25 points lower than Whites (Planty et al., 2008). A graphic representation of these patterns is provided in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1. Achievement gap differences in White-Black and White-Hispanic 4th- and 8th-grade average reading and mathematics scale scores: 1990–2007



Note: NAEP scores are calculated on a 0 to 500 point scale. Student assessments are not designed to permit comparisons across subjects or grades. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. The score gap is determined by subtracting the average Black and Hispanic score, respectively, from the average White score. Testing accommodations (e.g., extended time, small-group testing) for children with disabilities and limited-English-proficient students were not permitted from 1990 through 1994. Beginning in 2002, the NAEP national sample for grades 4 and 8 was obtained by aggregating samples from each state, rather than by obtaining an independently selected national sample. See supplemental note 4 for more information on NAEP. *Source:* Planty et al., 2008, p. 26

Similarly, in the area of mathematics, the achievement gap between White and Black 4th-graders was lower in 2007 than in 1990 (26 vs. 32 points), but there was no measurable change over the last 2 years. The gap between White and Hispanic 4th-graders increased in the 1990s before decreasing in the first half of the 2000s, but the gap in 2007 (21 points) was not measurably different from that in 1990. Among 8th-graders, a similar trend existed in both the White-Black and White-Hispanic score gaps: Increases occurred in the 1990s before decreasing to the current levels, which are not measurably different from those in 1990. The White-Black 8th-grade mathematics gap was lower in 2007 than in 2005, but there was no measurable change in the White-Hispanic gap. In 2007, among 8th-graders, the White-Black mathematics gap was 32 points, and the White-Hispanic gap was 26 points (Planty et al., 2008).

In addition, the results of NAEP data from 2005 indicate that nearly half (46%) of 4th-grade students in the EL category scored “below basic” in mathematics—the lowest possible level; with nearly three-quarters (73%) scoring below basic in reading. Middle school achievement in mathematics and reading were also very low, with more than two-thirds (71%) of 8th-grade ELs scoring below basic in math and an equal percentage of these students scoring below basic in reading (Fry, 2007).

These patterns are also associated with poverty. For example, in 2005, the average NAEP score on the 4th-grade mathematics assessment decreased as the percentage of students in the school who were eligible for the school lunch program increased. Students in the highest poverty public schools (those with more than 75% of students eligible for the school lunch program) had an average score of 221, compared with an average score of 255 for students in public schools with the lowest percentage of students in poverty (those with 10% or less of students eligible) (Lutkus, Grigg, & Donohue, 2007). In addition, poverty is related to factors such as race, ethnicity, and access to resources, which translate into opportunity to learn. Comparing schools with different concentrations of poverty reveals that the highest-poverty public schools in 2005 differed from other public schools in terms of particular student characteristics. For example, they had the lowest percentage of White students, the highest percentage of Black and Hispanic students, and the highest percentage of students who reported always speaking a language other than English at home. They also had the highest percentage of 4th-graders who were taught by a teacher with less than 5 years of teaching experience (Lutkus, Grigg, & Donohue, 2007).

EFFORTS TO ADDRESS LOW ACHIEVEMENT

Understandably, educators and the public in general are greatly concerned by these data. There have been a number of approaches that have been developed and implemented in order to change educational outcomes. A brief and nonexhaustive list includes:

- *Increased accountability*—This is best exemplified by the federal education law, No Child Left Behind, which holds states, districts, and schools accountable for student achievement based on standardized test scores (Linn, 2000, 2003), although individual states have implemented their own parallel systems.
- *Professionalization of teachers*—A strong argument has been made that one way to close the achievement gap is to bolster and professionalize the teaching force. It has been argued that there is a close association between teacher quality and student outcomes, and that the most needy students are those who often have the least access to the most qualified teachers (Agarao-Fernandez & de Guzman, 2006; Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003).
- *Instructional innovations and research-based interventions*—This is exemplified by the magnitude of approaches to improving instruction that have been developed over the past few decades, especially in the areas of reading, mathematics, and science (see, for example, Dobb, 2004; Lee, 2005). In addition, a major focus of recent federal education policy has been on encouraging approaches that are research-based, with the assumption that many school practices are based on untested or ineffective approaches. Federal funding—Reading First legislation, for example—exemplified this approach to reducing achievement gaps, as do specific instructional interventions, such as Response to Intervention (RTI) and other approaches aimed specifically at language learning issues (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008) or designed to address cultural issues and low school achievement (Lee, 2005, 2007).
- *Standardization of curriculum and/or teaching practice*—This approach is based on the notion that lack of consistency and coordination of curriculum leads to lower achievement. One approach has been to mandate the nature of either curriculum or teaching approaches (Horn, 2007). For example, in some school districts

such as Los Angeles, low-achieving schools were mandated to use a particular commercial reading program, with an emphasis on fidelity of implementation.

- *Financial incentives*—Financial incentives, for example in the form of teacher bonuses or pay-for-performance programs for students have been seen as a useful strategy in some settings (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Steele, Murnane, & Willet, 2009).
- *Privatization*—One approach to narrowing the achievement gap, often with a business-oriented perspective on education, is to provide alternatives to public schools, most clearly seen in the growth of charter schools (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2006), initiatives such as Race to the Top (RTT) funding of innovative programs and schools, and the growth of private educational systems through vouchers or other systems (Boyles, 2005; Levin, 2001).
- *Legislation*—Partly fueled by public mistrust of the education bureaucracy, there is some support for deciding important educational policy issues through popular vote. In some cases, this has resulted in the decisionmaking authority being removed from the educational establishment altogether. For example, in California, the controversy over bilingual instruction in public schools was developed into a ballot initiative, which let voters decide which language instructional approach would be allowed in public schools. Proposition 227 in California, passed by voters in 1998, as well as related initiatives in Arizona and Massachusetts, are examples of this approach (Gandara & Gomez, 2009), as are legislative efforts aimed at reduced class size (Stecher, McCaffrey, & Bugliari, 2003).
- *School restructuring/reform*—There are a wide range of both local and national efforts that try to bring about change through modifying structural or organizational features of schools, including:
 - Changing the governance structure of the school either to diminish school-based management and decisionmaking or to increase control, monitoring, and oversight by the Local Education Agency (LEA);
 - Closing the school and reopening it as a focus or theme school, with new staff or staff skilled in the focus area;
 - Reconstituting the school into smaller autonomous learning communities;