
Dona Matthews
Hunter College, CUNY

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/giftedchildren
Part of the Gifted Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/giftedchildren/vol1/iss1/4

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the CC BY-NC-ND license.
We don’t often see economic policy advisors cited in gifted education journals, but I’d like to draw your attention to the work of Richard Rothstein. He is a research associate of the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, and currently a visiting professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. From 1999 to 2002 he was the national education columnist of The New York Times. He is the author of Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap (Teachers College Press, 2004). He is also the author of The Way We Were? Myths and Realities of America’s Student Achievement. (1998). Other recent books include The Charter School Dust-Up: Examining the Evidence on Enrollment and Achievement (co-authored in 2005), and All Else Equal. Are Public and Private Schools Different? (co-authored in 2003).

Rothstein recently gave a talk at Hunter College about his perspective on the current government’s promise to close the achievement gap in education by focusing on school reform. He argued that this promise is dreadfully unfair to educators, that the government has made a dangerous and unrealistic promise that cannot be kept, that there are too many other factors affecting children’s opportunities to learn, factors that start long before children get to school, and that continue through the elementary and later years. He stated that we are offering false hope and setting up expectations that educators alone can not meet. If we really want to close the education gap between Blacks and Hispanics and Whites, he argued, we have to make sure that early and ongoing opportunities to thrive and to learn are equalized. We will not be able to close the achievement gap unless we do something about the poverty, stressors, access to health and dental care, available resources, early learning experiences, family structure, and cultural attitudes that underlie the achievement gap.


Although he described Equity and Excellence in American Higher Education as “important,” he had some serious criticisms of it, particularly that they emphasize the importance of school reform, while underplaying the prior necessity of socioeconomic reform, “reinforcing the flawed conventional view that schools, if only run properly, could generate classless outcomes even when students come from highly stratified backgrounds.” Rothstein makes another point that is usually not mentioned in education at all, or applied to gifted education, and that is political dynamite: “Mobility must have losers as well as winners,” he states. “Expanding the number of low-income students attending elite colleges requires displacing some high-income students who currently get those spaces. Without a system that makes it politically, socially, and economically acceptable for affluent children to lose in this competition, it is hard to see how a ‘thumb on the scale’ for poor children can overcome middle-class resistance or sabotage.” This is a serious factor to consider for those of us in gifted education who care about diversity and equity. When gifted education is conceived as a zero-sum game, involving a limited number of spots in a limited number of programs, we can predict that there will be loud and powerful opposition to increasing diversity and equity. ❖