

Rigor: The Talent Whisper Principle  
(My candidate pledge was to promote "Rigor" )

I have been very blessed in my life. One of those blessings has been seeing students who, by most standards, were not suppose to learn, not only learn but learn at high levels. One may naturally conclude that I am talking about low income, minority and/or special needs students. Yes, I saw that too mainly because over the years I have had some of the most phenomenal teachers "on the planet." They were what I would like to call "Talent Whispers." They had the gift of planting deep in the hearts of students what Dr. Jeff Howard calls "Efficacy" or "the belief that they could *achieve anything* in life. But there is another group of students that have what I call the "Potential Gap." These are students who are satisfied with a score of 400 on the Standards of Learning but have the ability to score in the advance range of 500 or a perfect score if they knew that it was the bar of acceptance. Let me say up front, scores on a test do not mean everything and that they are representative of one and only one element of of a child's work. Rigor for me is when your student *performance* is aligned with the *potential* of students. If you haven't heard it yet, the United States has a long way to go to achieve this goal. It is a goal that we must meet if we want our country to be competitive in this ever changing global economy.

The first time I saw this thing called efficacy in my career was in the early seventies at Washington-Reid School. I was a Title I Supervisor at that time. A young boy interrupted an early morning conference I had with a teacher, said " I think I deserve to be moved to a higher reading group." Holstered in his arm were the books he was willing to demonstrate that he could read. The second most memorable event was during my principal-ship. It took place during an assembly of third, fourth and fifth graders. The teachers and I had conducted goal-setting conferences with the students but were not sure it had taken hold. We had pep rally and attending were special guests from central office. We wanted to impress them. I stood before the students and asked, "How many of you plan to score 400 and pass the SOLs?" Initially was stunned and embarrassed when no one raised his or her hand. Then it occurred to me that I had asked the wrong question. I changed the question and asked how many planned to score at the advanced level and the hands flew up. Some students still refused to raise their hand and asked "What about a perfect score?"

That year my school and several other schools in the county saw what the researchers call the "J-Curve." You push the bell to the right of mid-section and establish a higher norm for kids. If we want rigor we have to expand our thinking about the capabilities of our children. We have all accepted the "bell curve" as an expectation when we must understand and embrace what researchers call the J-curve thinking model. In order for this to happen we must change how we test and how we teach. Our children must adopt what a researcher called Carol Dweck calls "Yet" thinking. In other words when children said they could not do the work, she responded "You can't do it...YET! Sometimes Children need to have the gentle push of being "Yettered" if we want them to reach their potential. Dr. Dweck found that there are two sets of beliefs that you can embrace, "Fixed or Growth Intelligence."

Some of us believe that you are born smart while the research says that intelligence is malleable. Research is finding that systematic practice is more important than we once thought it was (David Shenk). Another of my favorite authors was introduced to you earlier in this article. Dr. Howard's motto at his Efficacy Institute is "Smart is *not* what you are...smart is what you become." A simple statement of belief intertwined with high expectations will achieve this. I learned that a statement as simple as "I am expecting great things...or what Quincy Jones told Oprah "Your future is so bright that it hurts my eyes" changed the belief system of children.

"Our goal for students is *not* for them to be  
doctors, scientists, businesspersons, teachers or lawyers...  
But rather doctors, scientists, businessmen, teachers or lawyers  
*Who will change the world!"*

The above is the paraphrased Equity Commitments statement in the hall of Stults Elementary School in Richardson, Texas

The world is changing at a rapid pace. Other countries are out-performing us in the academic arena. Sometimes as Americans we make excuses not because we are arrogant but because we are so used to being number one that we find it ludicrous and downright insulting to believe that other countries perform at a higher level than us. We just cannot make the paradigm shift. I cannot tell you how many people remind me that Shanghai's high academic performance is a fluke. The bigger problem is that other countries are improving rapidly while we are standing still. We must stop making excuses or dismissing what the data is telling us. The most recent example of not accepting our current reality was during the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. Our long track speed skaters had the worst Winter Olympics in history. I can still recall Shani Davis', the number one speed skater in the world response when it was announced that they were going to return to his original suit since the newly designed one may have impeded his performance in maintaining his number one ranking... he said with a high level of certainty, "It has to be the suit because it is *definitely* not me!" The suits were changed but it did not enhance his performance. Perhaps his assessment was wrong; maybe it was *him*. The Olympic committee is now looking at the type of training as the problem such as the need for more sea level preparation. At the end of the day, even Shani acknowledged the Netherlands and other countries outperformed us and that in all probability it was not based on the type of suit the Americans were wearing. Maybe it is not something other countries are doing to us, maybe it is what we are not doing in our classrooms. Establishing a sense of urgency about changing our instructional strategies requires our first accepting our need to increase the rigor in our curriculum.

Reducing class size, is a major issue for our school system. It is important but it is equally important that we demonstrate that we can walk and chew gum at the same time and not lose our focus on other critical issues. Virginia has decided to opt out of the Common Core standards 45 other states endorsed. This means that our

commonwealth is now responsible for providing teachers with the tools needed to create the rigorous curriculum needed for our students to acquire the career readiness skills needed to access the twenty first century labor force. This is important because we are considered to be the silicon valley of the east. More important is the fact that our children will not always live in Virginia and will compete with others world countries in the future. In other countries, teaching is considered a valued profession because they get this. Teachers are highly compensated and are required but provided on-going training so that they do not fall behind in an ever-evolving technological culture. Training students to become self-assessors, goals setters, participate in project-based learning and reflect on their learning is critical. You saw some of this in students earlier in this article. This is a profession where some believe student uniforms are the answer to higher learning. In reality, as we found in Sochi, is not the *suit* children are wearing, it is what is what we put inside the heads, hearts and minds of students and teachers in our schools. It is who we tell them that they are that matters most. Talent whisperers can be found everywhere. If we can convince our children that they are just not smart because of their birth, surely we can apply the same convincing strategy when it comes to their giftedness. Remember, "All means all!"

Two powerful stories Land of opportunity- Work hard and you can become anything you want. 2. Generational Advancement through hard work each generation of parents can assure a better life and better education –for their children....it animated the hopes and dreams of people her at home.

- Reading not much gap narrowing since 1988
- Math-1990
- No matter how we cut the data our students aren't doing wll compared with their peers in other countries...
- Of 34 OECD Countries USA rabjs 17<sup>th</sup> in reading (2012 PISA )
- 20<sup>th</sup> in science
- 27<sup>th</sup> in math literacy

About one in five met the minimum standard to necessary to enlist in the army

We can't keep up with the pace of change, let alone get ahead of it.

Our greatest influence parents first and teachers second

1970 only 28% require post secondary ed. 2015-67%

Post secondary is no longer just the preferred pathway to middle class it is the only pathway

20 vs 21<sup>st</sup> century learning- illiterates were those who could not read

21<sup>st</sup> century illiterates will be those who have not learn how to learn. Or continue their learning beyond the k-12 system

the education system that served our nation well in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is not serving us well in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We dropped from the first in the world in percentage of high school graduates to 22<sup>nd</sup> out of 27 advanced economies (The Broad Foundation, 2013).

We dropped from first in the world in percentage of young (25-34) workers with college degrees to second in 1995 to 14<sup>th</sup> in 2012 (OECD, 2011)

For the first time in American history, we have a higher percentage of 55-65 year-olds with college degree than 25-35 year-old (College Board, 2008)

30% drop out

predictions as early as first grade and identified with accuracy by 3<sup>rd</sup>. (Sparks, 2013 Amer. Psychol. Assoc. 2012)

more than one /3 need remediation

34% drop out the first year. (ACR, 2012)

36% earn a BA in five years.

Students who fail school will earn 33 cents for every dollar a college graduate earns (U.S. census bureau, 2006 and OECD 2009)

On average, each high school dropout costs taxpayer 292,000 over his or her lifetime (Breslow, 2012) or \$8 billion annual. High school dropouts earn 10,000 less than workers with diplomas.

[can surpass the competition](#)” on any level playing field. Even the United States Chamber of Commerce — not always a worker’s best friend — asserts that, along with the nation’s entrepreneurs and companies, America’s workers “[are the best in the world.](#)” Fact is, they are not. The report is based on assessments of literacy, math skills and problem-solving using information technology that were performed on about 160,000 people age 16 to 65 in 22 advanced nations of the O.E.C.D., plus Russia and Cyprus. Five thousand Americans were assessed. The results are disheartening.

Though we possess average literacy skills, we are far below the top performers.

Twenty-two percent of Japanese adults scored in the top two of six rungs on the literacy test. Fewer than 12 percent of Americans did. We are also about average in terms of problem-solving with computers. Paradoxically, our biggest deficits are in math, the most highly valued skill in the work force. Only Italians and Spaniards performed worse.

Some 34 percent of adult Americans scored in the top three rungs of the assessment for numeracy, 12.5 percentage points less than the average across all countries.

Twenty-nine percent of Americans scored in the lowest two rungs — 10 percentage points more than the average. By percentage, more than twice as many Finns as Americans scored in the top two.

But it pretty forcefully supports the case that this deficit is an albatross around the economy’s neck.

Since late 2009, the curve has shifted outward. That means that even if the job market is not exactly booming, there are more vacancies out there than the unemployment rate alone would have predicted a few years ago.

The million-dollar question is: Why?

There are probably a few forces at work.

One is skills mismatch — that is, the workers who are pounding the pavement do not have the skills that employers actually want. Nationwide, about 4 million job openings are going unfilled, but 10 million people are unemployed, according to Labor Department statistics. Hill is banking on a local approach to create a skilled workforce, in which companies partner more closely with tech schools. **Sepicalm-S**: this compound is one of the most powerful anti-pigment and anti-inflammatory agents on the market- perfect for reducing acne scarring

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