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Editor's Corner

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Editor's Corner:

Anyone familiar with the history of American education can offer ample evidence to support the statement that schooling is an arena of privilege. Results of the lofty but questionable political declarations such as No Child Left Behind, America 2000, and Goals 2000 do not preclude the reality that those who have economic advantages continue to be more successful in schools—regardless of how success is defined.

There are educational advantages for some financially fortunate students at every turn. A small college offers a literacy tutoring program for a fee with a few scholarships that might be given to “deserving” students. The qualifier “deserving” implies that some economically poor children are not worthy enough to have help with their reading difficulties. There are businesses and professional tutors that, according to a Bloomberg.com report, charge \$800 per hour (or a package deal for \$8,400) for SAT tutoring (Steverman, 2011). A New York City area tutoring firm is mulling over whether or not to offer edTPA prep sessions for a tidy sum.

Some members of IRA have said that a good teacher can make up for economic hardships. I can report, from having taught in low-income schools, that even a top-notch teacher cannot compensate for empty stomachs, untreated illnesses, lack of dental care, violent neighborhoods, or homelessness. Schools are different places from a few decades ago. There are the ever-changing mandates that seem to overlook what takes place in some children's daily lives and what they must face when they leave the school doors.

Fear now permeates what many educators do—fear of a less-than-stellar evaluation from an administrator because of low test scores, fear at the university level at accreditation time or fear of speaking out against standards and practices that education professors know do not have longitudinal evidence to support their worthiness. There seems to be a sense of resignation that nothing can be improved because the self-appointed experts and politicians—often one and the same—have spoken. Some are quick to blame publishers, but publishing is a business whose directors, ever aware of profits for survival, presumably do what the field dictates.

I have been told that IRA is not a political group. Then why do our dues support a director of government relations? Why are some visible members pushing for more standards whose implementation is causing financial stress for low-income school districts that are

lacking in basic instructional materials and habitable schoolrooms? It used to seem like a more socially conscious field. We used to fight for racial integration and the poor. IRA president Dale D. Johnson welcomed Coretta Scott King as the featured speaker at the annual conference. Materials were gathered from publishers after the exhibits closed to be sent to homeless shelters. We used to teach and speak as if it were common sense that economically disadvantaged children do not have the same start in school as children of privilege and therefore need additional resources—especially human resources. We used to acknowledge sets of standards for what they are—guidelines—not the miracle fix just around the corner. We did not hide our knowledge that test results should be used to inform not punish. There has been little push-back on imposed regulations. It cannot be ignorance. Perhaps it is fear of speaking out against “experts” who have not taught or taught decades ago for a year or two in comfortable environments, or fear of losing lucrative publishing offers and speaking gigs for there is money to be made. Whatever it is, it is a sorry state. In 1999 David Imig, an AACTE president asked, “Why can't schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDEs) be valued and loved and respected like other professional schools? What is it about teacher education that makes SCDEs a pariah on so many campuses?” (p. 369). We don't need to look too far or too hard for answers to Imig's questions.

I am honored to be the editor of this edition of *The Reading Professor*. I have been a proud member of PRTE for many fulfilling years. It is the goodness and caring of the members that keep this SIG vibrant. You are those who understand the consequences of sweeping actions on those least able to fight back.

Bonnie Johnson, Ph. D.
February, 2014

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