



Iota Lambda Sigma Journal for Workforce Education
Journal for Workforce Education (JWE_d)

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Volume 1, Issue 3

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The Iota Lambda Sigma Journal for Workforce Education, an official publication of *Iota Lambda Sigma*, an Honorary Professional Society in Workforce Development, is published two times a year. The purpose of the Journal is to stimulate research and development and the creation of new knowledge and ideas related to workforce education and training. Through the dissemination of this new knowledge and ideas to the public it is hoped that it will result in improved efficiency and effectiveness of individual and group productivity and quality.

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Introductory Issue

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The Relationship Between Dress and Perceptions of Socio-Economic Status

By Tiffany A. Machado and David L. Netherton

Abstract

Perceptions have a powerful effect on decision-making in the workplace. The impression made by how one dresses is one of the cues we use in forming perceptions about a person. This study focused on undergraduate students' perceptions of the effect of dress on one's classification of a person's particular socio-economic status. A survey of ninety-six students enrolled in a general education course was used to gather data that lead to the conclusions. It was concluded that Old Dominion University students and the panel of experts share the same opinions toward dress and socio-economics. Furthermore, this data revealed that Old Dominion University students and the panel of experts are equally conscious of generating preconceived notions regarding one's socio-economic status based upon their selection of attire. Also, it was found that the students and the panel of experts used dress as a non-verbal indicator of one's socio-economic status. No significance existed between these varying socio-economic classes and the panel of experts.

While this study focused on the perceptions of students and experts at Old Dominion University, it does confirm suspicions that people make judgments about people based on the way they dress. For professionals in the workplace, it is important that we be aware of this in our hiring and personnel management decisions. Dress is only one element that affects our perceptions. Other considerations are mannerisms, speech dialect, and gender. It is important that we do not allow these perceptions to be the major basis of our decisions.

Introduction

In the workplace, perceptions have a powerful effect on decision-making. Perceptions often have the immediate effect of creating an instantaneous conclusion about individuals or situations (Heffner, 2001). Many individuals' perceptions are processed into opinions impacting choices one makes concerning a corresponding situation (Godfrey, 2004). Perceptions de-

velop from two sources, factual conclusions or assumptions. Factual conclusions are developed from the interoperation of truths. Assumptions are drawn from prior knowledge and experiences. This study explores perceptions as they relate to dress and socio-economic classification.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to identify Old Dominion University undergraduate students' perceptions of the effect of dress on one's classification of a person's particular socio-economic status.

Research Goals

The following objectives guided the study.

- Identify the socio-economic status of students that attend Old Dominion University.
- Measure the opinion of Old Dominion University's students toward their selection of attire.
- Project the relationship between socio-economic status and favored dress.

Background and Significance

The Industrial Revolution gave way to various technological advancements that affected the manufacturing industry, including the fashion industry. During the height of the Industrial Revolution, a variety of machines were produced that increased the production rates of fibers, fabrics, and clothing. Consumer needs and the economy of production led to the mass production of various goods. The mass production of fashion garments amplified the production of prêt a port, known as ready to wear. Ready to wear was originally developed in France to meet fashion needs of sailors after returning from sea in the 17th century (Frings, 2005). With the advent of the Industrial Revolution ready-to-wear began to flourish in the late nineteenth century. The inventions of mail order catalogues by Aaron Montgomery Ward and further utilized by Sears, Roebuck and Company increased the accessibility and popularity of ready-to-wear clothing to more rural areas (Frings, 2005). Yet, it was not until the earlier part of the twentieth century when ready to wear became an item of widespread popularity.

In 1920, ready to wear started to become an item of demand for higher social classes. Designers like

Poiret, Chanel and Vionnet popularized ready to wear by producing their one-of-a-kind designs for the masses. The garments bore a designer label, which increased the demand for garments. With a nationwide expansion of department stores like Nordstrom, ready to wear became available for all social classes. The accessibility of a garment that bore brand names propelled the correlation between brand names and economic status.

As ready to wear evolved throughout the 20th century, designers began branding their names with staples in consumer wardrobes. Brand names like IZOD glorified the basic polo shirt into a name brand item. In the 1970s the popularity of jeans became a mainstream trend. Calvin Kline capitalized on the new infatuation and branded his name to jeans, creating the first designer jeans (Diamond & Diamond, 2002).

At the end of the seventies athletic wear became a popular choice of dress outside of sporting events. Nike, a popular athletic company from the seventies, began branding their apparel as athletic and casual wear (Steele, 2000). In the early to mid-1980s the hip-hop phenomenon further propelled the correlation of athletic apparel as casual wear. The introduction of MTV in 1983 featured hip-hop videos with DJs and musicians wearing Nike apparel as casual wear. As hip-hop progressed into a more aggressive form of music known as rap, the athletic movement faded. Yet, sneakers remained a staple in all forms of dress. Rappers of the late eighties and early nineties personified their rags to riches stories through their music. Rappers associated their Nikes and other brand name apparel with achieving a high socio-economic status. This fashion largely influenced African-American youth. The desire for a pair of \$120-\$230 sneakers created a wide spread distortion of consumers buying motives (Dixon, 1996). Clothing purchased by consumers of lower socio-economic status became driven by emotional motives. In 1992, youth in urban cities of lower socio-economic areas began killing for Nikes and other labeled apparel.

The following passage describes the extent of the crime occurring over Nike apparel.

In 1990, Jesse Jackson and the civil rights group Operation PUSH charged that Nike sold more than 40% of its shoes to members of the black and minority communities, yet little of that income remained in the communities. PUSH was outraged at reports of African-American youth killing each other to steal shoes that they could not afford, saying that Nike targets poor urban kids in its hard sell. Surveys show that 77% of teenage men in the US want to wear Nikes. More than half of all Nike's sales and 75% of its basketball

shoe sales are to people younger than 25 (Dixon, 1996, para. 12).

The relation of one's opinions of dress and perceptions of a socio-economical status is an important topic to a broad variety of subject areas. The systematic collection of data determined the general factors that impacted the relationship between these two variables, thus filling the gap of knowledge between the correlation of dress and perceptions. Furthermore, the generalization of this study will further advance the relationships between dress and socioeconomics. For example, this study can be generalized into the relationship between dress and first impressions. Which in turn, can be applied to research to discover optimal dress for varying job interviews.

Population

The population for this study was students attending Old Dominion University enrolled in five classes of OTS 110, Technology and Your World, in the 2006 Spring semester. The ninety-six students were enrolled in the course to fulfill a University general education requirement. The population consisted of male and female undergraduate students. Since this course met a general education requirement for all degree-seeking undergraduates, it provided a true sampling of Old Dominion University undergraduate student body.

Instrument Design

The instrument used to generate findings was an anonymous survey. It was structured using closed ended questions pertaining to a student's socio-economic status and his or her opinions of selected attire.

The first set of questions identified the participant's socio-economic classification, using a multiple-choice format. The remaining set of questions measured the student's opinion about selection of attire. These questions were developed using the Thurstone method of attitudinal assessment. First, the researchers used the information gathered during the literature review to generate questions that would measure the students' socio-economic status and collect data regarding their opinion of dress and socio-economics. The questions were then presented to a panel of experts in the subject areas of dress and socio-economics. The panel of experts reviewed the survey to establish validity of the statements and questions and then revisions were made as required.

Methods of Collection

The instructor distributed a survey packet envelope to each student at the beginning of the class session.

After completion the students returned the survey and answer sheet into the survey packet envelope and they were delivered them to the researcher, who analyzed them.

Findings

A survey was the tool used to gather data to address the research goals; it was developed using a Thurstone scale. The established research goals were employed to determine the direction of the research and composition of the survey. These goals were to determine Old Dominion University students' socio-economic status and opinion of analyzing dress. As a result the survey measured two key items: the students individual and collective socio-economic status and the relationship between the students and the panel of experts opinions of dress and socio-economics. The researcher used the findings from the administered survey to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

Conclusions

The research determined if there was a relationship between Old Dominion University students' opinions of dress and socio-economics with those of the experts. The data were used to draw conclusions for the following research goals.

- The first research goal of the study was to identify the socio-economic status of students that attend Old Dominion University. The students' socio-economic status was measured from the mean of three factors: income, education, and occupation. The mean of these factors concluded the following to be true about Old Dominion University students. Their average family income level was in the bracket of \$30,00-\$80,000 with a mean score of 4.09, the highest education level achieved was a bachelors degree with a mean score of 6.09, and the majority of students were from a white collared working family with a mean score of 7.54 for occupation. The combined mean score of this data was a 6.29, which determined that Old Dominion University students' socio-economic status was the upper-middle status. This data were determined from one through nine scales.
- The second research goal was to measure the opinion of Old Dominion University students toward their selection of attire. A t-test was administered to determine the significance difference between the students and the panel of experts' opinions toward selected attire. The t-test measured students and panel of experts' opinions toward selected dress in the categories of Business Attire, Street Attire, Punk Rock Attire, and Leisure

Attire based upon three socio-economic factors of education, income, and occupation. The t value for this data was measured at the .05 level of significance. The students and the panel of experts' t values for the selected images of Business Attire were the following: 0.02761 for education, 0.2877 for income, and 0.3826 for occupation. The t value measuring the relationship between the students and the panel of experts' opinions of selected images of Street Attire were the following: 0.07376 for education, -0.1718 for income, and -0.7953 for occupation. The students and the panel of experts t values measuring the relationship between their opinions of the selected image for Punk Rock attire were the following: -0.6009 for education, -0.1367 for occupation, and -0.8909 for income. The determined t values that measured the students and panel of experts' opinions of the chosen images of Leisure Attire were the following: 0.0484 for education, -1.2179 for income, and -1.3260 for occupation. The t values from the set of t-test determined that there were no significance difference in the relationship between students and panel of experts' opinion toward dress.

- As a result, it was concluded that Old Dominion University students and the panel of experts share the same opinions toward dress and socio-economics. Furthermore, this data revealed that Old Dominion University students and the panel of experts are equally conscious of generating preconceived notions regarding ones socio-economic status based upon their selection of attire. The researcher further concluded that the students and the panel of experts used dress as a non-verbal indicator of ones socio-economic status.
- The third research goal was to project the relationship between socio-economic status and favored dress. The researcher drew upon the findings that determined if a significant relationship existed between students of low, middle, and high socio-economic status and the panel of experts' opinions of dress and socio-economics. The following results were extracted from the t-tests measuring the relationship between these various socio-economic statuses and their opinion of dress.
- The first series of t-tests were conducted to measure the significance in the relationship between students of low socio-economic status and the panel of experts' opinions of ones socio-economic status based upon dress. The students and panel of experts measured selected images representing the education, income, and occupation levels within four dress categories of: Business Attire, Street Attire, Punk Rock Attire, and Leisure Attire (I find the wording to be misleading or maybe out

of order). The t values were measured at the .05 level. The first t-test measured the students and the panel of experts' opinion of the selected images of Business Attire, the t values were the following: 2.1170 for education, 0.8819 for income, and 1.1025 for occupation. The second t test measured the students' and panel of experts' opinions of selected images of Street Attire, the t values were the following: 0.9681 for education, 0.9860 for income, and -7.4685 for occupation. The students' and panel of experts' t values were found for the selected images of Punk Rock Attire, the t values were the following: 0.5435 for education, 1.3332 for income, and 0.4524 for occupation. The last t-test in the series measured the students and panel of experts' opinions of the selected images for Leisure Attire, the t values were the following: 1.0916 for education, 0.0000 for income, and -0.3600 for occupation. The t value determined that there were no significance difference in the relationship between students of low socio-economic status and the panel of experts' opinion toward selected attire.

- The second series of t-test were conducted to measure the significance in the relationship between students of middle socio-economic status and the panel of experts' opinions of ones socio-economic status based upon dress. The students and panel of experts measured the same representative images as was done in the first series of t-tests. The t values were measured at the .05 level. The first t-test measured students of middle socio-economic standing and the panel of experts opinions of the selected images dress for Business Attire, the t values were the following: 0.5356 for education, 0.6579 for income, and 0.1061 for occupation. The next t-test that measured the students of middle socio-economic status and the panel of experts opinions of the selected images of Street Attire, the t values were the following: 0.5019 for education, -0.3435 for income, and -1.0679 for occupation. The third t-test measured the students of middle socio-economic status and panel of experts opinions of the selected images of Punk Rock attire, the t values were the following: -0.9398 for education, -0.3921 for income, and -1.1770 for occupation. The last t-test t measured the students of middle socio-economic status and panel of experts' opinions of the selected images of leisure attire, the t values were the following: -0.1136 for education, -1.3341 for income, and -1.2521 for occupation. The t values that measured the students of middle socio-economic status and the panel of experts' opinions of dress determined that there was no significant relationship between opinions of dress and socio-economics.

- The last series of t-tests were conducted to measure students of high socio-economic status and the panel of experts' opinions of ones' socio-economic status based upon dress. The students and panel of experts measured the same representative images as was done in the first series of t-tests. The t values were measured at the .05 level. The t values that measured the students of high socio-economic status and the panel of experts' opinions of the selected image of business attire were -0.1568 for education, 0.1392 for income, and 0.6794 for occupation. The determined t values that concluded the relationship between the students of high socio-economic status and the panel of experts' opinions of the images of street attire were 1.0160 for education, -0.13620 for income, and -0.5796 for occupation. The t values established that measured the students of high socio-economic status and the panel of experts opinions of chosen images of punk rock attire were -0.4067 for education, -0.0361 for income, and -0.7516 for occupation. The t value that measured the students of high socio-economic status and the panel of experts' opinions of the chosen leisure attire images were 0.08555 education, -1.2432 for income, and -1.5124 for occupation. The t values for the students of high socio-economic status and the panel of experts determined that there was no significance in the relationship of their opinions of dress and socio-economics.
- From the findings the researcher concluded that no significance existed between these varying socio-economic classes and the panel of experts. From the findings the researcher further concluded that ones socio-economic status does not indicate their selection of favored attire.

While this study focused on the perceptions of students and experts at Old Dominion University, it does confirm suspicions that people make judgments about people based on the way they dress. For professionals in the workplace, it is important that we be aware of this in our hiring and personnel management decisions. Dress is only one element that affects our perceptions. Other considerations are mannerisms, speech, dialect, and gender. It is important that we do not allow these perceptions to be the major basis of our decisions.

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Book Review of:
Empowering Online Learning: 100+ Activities for Reading, Reflecting, Displaying, & Doing

By Bonk, J.B., & Zhang, K. (2008). San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

Reviewed by Jeffrey Allen Burlison

Introduction

The purpose of *Empowering Online Learning: 100+ Activities for Reading, Reflecting, Displaying, & Doing* is to empower online learners and online instructors through the use of the R2D2 model, (Reading, Reflecting, Displaying, & Doing). This model helps instructors effectively implement web-based activities of various types in order to better meet the needs of the online learner.

About the Authors

The authors of *Empowering Online Learning: 100+ Activities for Reading, Reflecting, Displaying, & Doing*, Curtis J. Bonk, PhD and Ke Zhang PhD, possess exceptional credentials and experience. Dr. Curtis J. Bonk received his master's and PhD degrees in educational psychology from the University of Wisconsin. Dr. Bonk has served in various professional capacities including the role of a faculty member at West Virginia University as well as Indiana University as a professor of educational psychology. Dr. Bonk is currently in the Instructional Systems Technology Department at Indiana University and serves as adjunct faculty in the Indiana University School of Informatics (Bonk & Zhang, 2008).

Dr. Zhang received her master's of science and PhD in instructional systems from Pennsylvania State University with a minor in business administration. Dr. Zhang served as a faculty member at Texas Tech University for 3 years and currently serves as an assistant professor at Wayne State University (Bonk & Zhang, 2008).

Overview

Empowering Online Learning: 100+ Activities for Reading, Reflecting, Displaying, & Doing provides online instructors the opportunity to learn about strategies and activities that will help them implement more innovative, engaging, and exciting pedagogy in their web-based courses. The authors provide more than 100 examples of learning activities that will help online instructors begin developing new and creative activities for their web-based courses. These activities are divided into 4 phases and learner types that make up the R2D2 Model. The phases are: 1) Read: Auditory

and verbal learners; 2) Reflect: Reflective and observational learners; 3) Display: Visual learners; 4) Do: Tactile and kinesthetic learners. The authors include learning preferences, activities and sample technology resources that relate to each of the 4 phases and learner types. For example, included in the Read Phase the authors state, "Auditory and verbal learners prefer words, sounds and spoken or written explanations." The authors list podcasts, online PDF documents, sound or audio files, PowerPoint presentations, online portals, course announcements, help systems FAQs, Web-Quests, online newsletters, e-books, and online journals as sample technology resources and tools for activities that meet this type of learners needs. The authors provide a simple and understandable definition of this nature for each phase and learning style. This is especially beneficial for course developers and for readers who are not familiar with learning styles.

Organization

The authors divide *Empowering Online Learning: 100+ Activities for Reading, Reflecting, Displaying, & Doing* into 10 chapters including:

1. The R2D2 Model, Read, Reflect, Display, and Do
2. Phase 1 of the R2D2 Model: Verbal and Auditory Learners
3. Activities for Phase 1: Verbal and Auditory Learners
4. Phase 2 of the R2D2 Model: Reflective and Observational Learners
5. Activities for Phase 2: Reflective and Observational Learners
6. Phase 3 of the R2D2 Model: Visual Learners
7. Activities for Phase 3: Visual Learners
8. Phase 4 of the R2D2 Model: Hands-on Learners
9. Activities for Phase 4: Hands-on Learners
10. Integrating R2D2 and Final Reflections on the Web of Learning

In chapter 1 the authors provide an introduction to the R2D2 Model that clearly explains the importance of designing models and frameworks that can simplify the web-based course development process. The authors continue with a description of the four phases of the R2D2 model. Included in the description is a table that describes the learning styles and their corresponding

learning preferences, activities, sample technology resources and tools that can be used to support learners and their specific learning styles. The authors conclude chapter 1 by clarifying that this model and its contents are not prescriptions, yet they are templates or guides that can, with creative application, enhance web-based instruction.

In chapters 2, 4, 6, and 8 the authors provide an overview of emerging technologies and how they may be used to support the particular learning style associated with each phase. As well, chapters 3, 5, 7, and 9 provide skills and objectives focused on the corresponding phase along with suggested activities for the learning style/s associated with each phase. By alternating each chapter by phase and activities, the authors not only made this book an easy read but also very user-friendly resource.

Style and Wording

The authors wording makes this book easy to read and easy to understand on the first reading. Chapter headings are clear and sub-headings and paragraphs are well labeled and appropriately divided. The authors clearly labeled figures and charts. While they were few in number the author made good use of figures and charts for clarification and illustration purposes.

The authors made good use of supporting evidence for both the thesis and secondary points of this book. The authors used reliable citations from sources including ASTD, EDUCAUSE, and Merlot as well as numerous peer reviewed journal articles, books, and web pages. The sources are used to effectively support the contents of this publication by supporting key elements regarding learning styles, usability of web-based activities, as well as foundational research on online teaching strategies.

All activities were clearly labeled and defined and included the following components: 1) Description and Purpose of Activity; 2) Skills and Objectives; 3) Advice and Ideas; 4) Variations and Extensions; and 5) Key Instructional Considerations. By including these items, the authors provide online instructors with the basic information needed to create pedagogically and/or andragogically sound web-based learning objects and learning units.

On pages 264-283, the authors include a large collection of web-links, examples of activities, and resources. This collection is also divided by learning style and provides the online instructor with many useful resources that can be used to create quality web-based activities.

Conclusion

By publishing *Empowering online learning: 100+ activities for reading, reflecting, displaying, & doing*, the authors do not provide ground breaking innovations nor do they provide an answer to any significant unanswered questions. However, through this book the authors provide both beginner and experienced online instructors with an easy to read, well-organized collection of creative and educationally sound activities that can easily be implemented in the online learning environment. The authors have provided supporting evidence that adds to the credibility of this book and in turn substantiates the validity of the division of these activities by learning style as well as the validity of the activities themselves.

This book will make an excellent addition to the libraries and resources of web-based instructors, instructional technologists, and educational organizations currently engaged in online learning as well as those just beginning to develop an online presence. The authors have accomplished their goal of empowering online learners and instructors by providing a polished and well developed resource of web-based activities that relate directly to specific learning styles.

Jeffrey Allen Burlison is Director of E-Learning Lincoln Memorial University and a Ph.D. student at Old Dominion University.

Book Review of:

Tough Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce

National Center on Education and the Economy. (2007). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Reviewed by Mickey Kosloski

Tough Choices or Tough Times offers recommendations for overhauling our current educational system so that the United States can become the foremost system in the world. One look at the members of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce—the authors of the plan—provides the reader with a veritable “Who’s Who” of educators and CEOs, making the recommendations difficult to discount. The New Commission has it all figured out: how to motivate students, how to attract and retain better teachers, and how to fund the plan. While the plan does illustrate “outside of the box” thinking, these ambitious suggestions are suspect on many levels, and the authors fall short on providing support for several of their key suggestions. To begin, the new system is predicated on the fact that, once implemented, it will increase student self-motivation. Will it? Another key component of the plan is that the United States can attract and retain a better caliber of teacher. Can it? And finally, the New Commission has determined that the system will fund itself, providing surplus educational revenues of \$67 billion. Will it? On all three accounts, this review addresses why the proposed system, if implemented, will fail.

Student Self-Motivation

Increasing student self-motivation is a foundational premise of the suggested structure. The Commission is to be commended on their approach to motivation, in that they addressed it head-on without resorting to the state of society. It was addressed without blaming families, societal structures, and other deep-seeded issues that would take decades to rectify. According to the Commission, like many other countries around the world, students will become eager to learn in an effort to expedite and promote their own career opportunities. Under the suggested plan, Public schools—now controlled by the states in a joint venture with independent contractors—have established a series of examinations taken by most students at the conclusion of their tenth grade year. Students who pass the exam then qualify to move on to a two-year or four-year institution, with those scoring the highest to have the option of moving onward and upward to a select academic school. The motivation for students? They will have the opportunity to leave high school as much as

two years earlier in their lives, with the ability to select which track they choose to take, pending their examination scores. Because no student can move forward without completing the core examination in the tenth grade, students will not only be motivated to begin postsecondary education, but will also be cognizant of the fact that until the core examinations have been completed, no career doors will be open to them. Students who do not pass the exam on the first try will have an unlimited number of attempts at completing the core examination. The Commission suggests that this will increase our graduation rate to approximately 95%.

There are two fundamental flaws in this premise, the first being the examination itself. The Commission report identifies examinations that are developed to measure abstract, creative, and innovative thinking, whereby students demonstrate not only their ability to think in an abstract fashion, but also their ability to transfer this learning into more specific situations, applying their newfound knowledge and skills to a limitless number of situations. While these examinations have not yet been developed, I do believe that they can be. The Commission identifies no such examinations that closely parallel those described, but I am convinced that the United States has the ability to do so. The issue here is in assuming that by 16 years of age—or at *any* age—that 95% of our student population can be developed into abstract, creative, and innovative thinkers. The goal of our new system is to produce young people who will “learn large volumes of highly abstract material easily and quickly” (p. 59). People come in all shapes and sizes. Some are visionary, abstract thinkers, while others are linear thinkers. There is no shame in being a one-dimensional, linear thinker, and our country needs people like this in our workforce. Some students simply do not think that way, nor can they be trained to. If we were to set our sights on making everyone in the country musically talented, we would most certainly fail, as all people do not share the same inherent talents and intelligences. Abstract thinking and creativity is no different. Can we increase our levels of creativity and innovation? Most assuredly. But at the risk of sounding cynical, to believe that we can develop these talents at a professional level in all people is unrealistic, at best. There is

a place in our society for linear thinkers, and there always will be. That is not to say that setting a goal of having all citizens becoming abstract thinkers is not an admirable goal. It is. But let us not kick the linear thinkers to the curb.

The second issue surrounding student motivation is the high school dropout rate. The Commission states that the current high school graduation rate is approximately 70%. While the numbers may vary based on which organization is presenting them, this rate is consistent with most independent reports. The new system proposes to increase graduation rates to 95% based on the fact that students will be eager to get on with their postsecondary education earlier in life, and with the fear that no career opportunities will be at their disposal until the core examinations have been passed. However, if one were to analyze our current system, could it not be said that we, as a nation, are already doing this? Approximately 30% of our existing students drop out of high school with a complete understanding that their career opportunities are vastly limited without at least a high school diploma. Yet despite the known consequences, they do it anyway for a variety of reasons. Some of our youth simply dislike school; others prefer to work full-time, and discover later in life that full-time work, in and of itself, can have significant limitations without adequate education. What makes this “carrot at the end of the stick” any different from what our educational system provides now? It appears to me that the new system offers no real motivation for our already unmotivated students, and it is suspected that the results will not differ until we get to the core of the dropout situation.

Recruiting and Retaining Better Quality Teachers

Attractive Salaries

The Commission makes the statement that most public school teachers are recruited from the bottom third of college graduates, thereby leaving education with less than the most desirable candidates in teaching positions. While there are exceptions to every rule, and while many teachers follow their “calling” and seek the intrinsic rewards afforded by teaching, one would be hard-pressed to argue against this assumption. As a result, the Commission has recommended that our schools recruit the “best and the brightest” to become our teachers of the future. While not a novel concept, they suggest that we do this by increasing teachers’ salaries, again, not a novel concept. However, what is novel about the proposal is that they suggest we do this by taking teachers’ back-end benefits, such as health insurance and retirement, and giving it to them up front as salary. They purport that large companies do not offer benefit packages as sizable as our public schools, and “the best and the brightest” do not mandate sizable benefits packages to be recruited. The concept presumes that by providing more money in

salaries and lower benefits packages, more college graduates (and existing industry professionals) will be drawn to the teaching profession. At one point, the authors state that teachers were attracted “because the increased cash compensation was very attractive...., and they were prepared to give up what they might otherwise have gotten in retirement benefits” (p. 61). On average, the Commission reports that this increase in salary equates to approximately \$10,000 per year per teacher, adjusted by locality. The range of salaries proposed by the Commission starts at \$45,000, and the pay scale has top performing teachers with many years of experience topping out at approximately \$109,000, again, adjusted by locality.

Supply and demand is applicable here, and if starting salaries increase by \$10,000 per year, it stands to reason that more college graduates and industry professionals will be drawn to teaching. However, \$10,000 per year is not a significant increase relative to what the “best and brightest” can earn on the open market in industry. The average medical doctor earns \$143,000 during their first year (<http://www.residency.valuemd.com/physiciansalary.htm>), the average attorney earns \$77,421 (http://www.payscale.com/research/US/Country=United_States/Salary), and the average mechanical engineer has an average starting salary of \$59,463 (http://www.payscale.com/research/US/Job=Mechanical_Engineer/Salary). In addition to these starting points, salaries increase exponentially through years of experience relative to teaching salaries. If the “best and the brightest” are entering these and similar career paths, what makes us think that we can attract the same candidates away from these professions for a \$45,000 per year starting salary—with fewer benefits—that caps out at \$109,000? Like it or not, many people are attracted to higher salary positions, and starting (and subsequent) salaries are a significant factor in determining career choices. Many college students do not genuinely know what career path they want to pursue for a lifetime, and salary is a definite determining factor. As long as teaching salaries are lower than competing career choices, the teaching profession will continue to attract those drawn to benefits, convenient schedules, and those who seek the intrinsic rewards that teaching has to offer.

Pay for Performance

As noted above, the top salary for teachers caps out at \$109,000 adjusted by locality in 2006 dollars. While this may be considered a relatively healthy and livable salary by many standards, it is important to keep in mind that this is still significantly less than the potential earnings that the “best and the brightest” might receive in industry. Let us assume for a moment that teachers nearing or reaching the salary threshold are attracted by this potential, and everything else about the Commission’s new system works as stated. The Commission describes the teacher recruitment incentives as

follows: first, the “best and the brightest” of our candidates are recruited into the teaching profession, but they necessarily must be productive. Just as in industry, those who are productive are rewarded, and those who are not high performers are supplanted and replaced by new teachers. Gradually high performers are financially rewarded with performance pay, and those who are not high performers are replaced, over time, by more new teachers who are attracted not only to teaching, but also to the financial rewards that teaching has to offer. Eventually, in a theoretical world, all bad teachers are “weeded out,” and all existing teachers are high performers earning the maximum allocated salaries. In other words, all teachers are high performers, and all teachers are earning high salaries. Our free enterprise system works effectively this way. Why shouldn’t we use the same principles in education?

There is a fundamental difference between education and industry. In virtually any free enterprise, high performance leads to either reduced costs or increased revenues. The result is that high performance can be directly related to an organization’s bottom line. However, what the Commission’s system fails to acknowledge is that *education is not a revenue generating industry*. If high performance in education equates to higher salaries but no additional revenue, where will the additional funding come from to pay for the increased salaries? In fact, if teacher performance did continuously increase, and teachers’ salaries did continuously increase, then the highest performing schools with the highest percentage of excellent teachers would also incur a continuously growing debt. While attracting and retaining “the best and the brightest” would indeed be a very positive thing for education, it would also necessitate the need for additional revenues that will not exist. As a result, the motivation to attract these dream teachers needs to include—at least in part—an incentive other than financial rewards.

Fiscal Responsibilities

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the Commission’s proposed structure is financial. In addition to the billions of dollars of increases in teachers’ salaries as noted above, there are many other expenses built into the system that have not been adequately accounted for. The Commission suggests that if we can motivate all of our students to learn, and increase our graduation rate to 95% as suggested, then our economy will flourish, all people will be working in high paying jobs, and our tax base will dramatically increase, thereby funding the increased costs of education. The financial savings touted by the Commission is \$67 billion nationally. This is a significant assumption, but for the sake of discussion, let us assume that these savings can be realized. The Commission proposes that we spend \$18 billion on each of the three elements of the new structure. First, we spend \$18 billion on in-

creased teacher salaries, \$18 billion on educating disadvantaged children, and another \$18 billion on early childhood education, similar to our current Head Start programs with more “teeth.”

The Commission, in an attempt to make the finances reconcile, have addressed many of the major financial issues, making the assumption that everything noted above will go as planned. However, there are many financial aspects of this plan that are *not* addressed at all. To begin, one foundational concept of the new structure is that we not only need to overhaul our educational system for our youth, but also for our adult workers who want to better themselves. The report states that “every adult worker is entitled to an education.” They also comment that this needs to be done at the expense of the federal government. This would be an overwhelming expense. However, in reviewing the Commission’s calculations, this is not accounted for. This would result in billions of dollars in government funded adult education. Also part of the plan is that the federal government “provide a cushion for people put out of work by outsourcing, offshoring, and the relentless automation of jobs” (p. 94). However, there is no mention of how many billions of dollars this will cost, nor is this expense accounted for in their financial calculations.

The Commission calls for Personal Competitive Accounts (PCA) to be established by the federal government for every individual at birth in the amount of \$2000 per person. The PCA can then be used by individuals to attend postsecondary education after they have passed their core examination. In addition to the overwhelming \$31 billion expense associated with establishing PCAs, individuals are able to contribute to their own PCAs throughout their (or their child’s) lifetime, and the federal government will again match individual PCA contributions. Nowhere is there a dollar amount attached to these governmental contributions, and nowhere has this exorbitant expense been accounted for in the financial calculations. While the Commission has accounted for most of the fundamental financial elements of the proposal, they have omitted accounting for many key elements.

Summary

There are several additional facets of the system that simply do not add up financially. However, the single greatest flaw with the Commission’s proposed system is that the plan is extremely nebulous as to how this will be paid for during our nation’s transition to the new system. While this may sound like a short-term problem, let us examine what would happen during the first twenty years of implementation. The result would be the financial ruin our country.

Transitioning our entire nation to a new educational

system would take years, but let us assume that we could completely implement a new educational structure in only five years. While that might sound incredibly ambitious—and I believe it is—we will make this assumption. As a result, the first student who would complete the new system—from start to finish—would be sixteen years from now. Those students would then go on to either two or four additional years of schooling at a minimum before they would be launched into the workforce. That means that it would take *twenty-three years*—five transition years, sixteen years of core schooling, and a minimum of two years of postsecondary education—before the first student would realize all of the benefits of the new system. If savings were to actually occur, it would be twenty-three years before those savings were realized. Meanwhile, that is hundreds of billions of dollars in expenses over the course of twenty-three years whereby the government is fully funding the system. With a current national deficit in the trillions, and higher than ever before in our history, how might we pay for this system? Even if everything were to work as planned, how could the United States afford to spend trillions of dollars that it does not have? It would be a recipe for financial disaster. The financial success of the system is based on the fact that educational savings are being reinvested in the system, but with at least two decades of unrealized savings, the system could never be launched.

While the Commission's system does think outside of the box and does take an innovative approach, it is not functional in its currently proposed state. There are several other issues that have not been addressed here, such as what happens to the five percent (or more) of students that are never able to successfully complete the core examination? Nowhere in this report is this addressed. What happens to the retired teachers that never took responsibility for funding their own pension? This could potentially be a societal issue that leads to large-scale impoverishment, but again, nowhere was this addressed. However, there were some positive aspects of the Commission's proposed structure. For example, just *thinking about* the problem of student motivation is a step in the right direction. The Commission makes the statement, "We do not have a choice," but we do. Go back to the drawing board. Take the positive elements of the system and build on them. Education, just like any other discipline, should be in a state of constant improvement and evolution. We simply need to take an approach that is logical and sensible.

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