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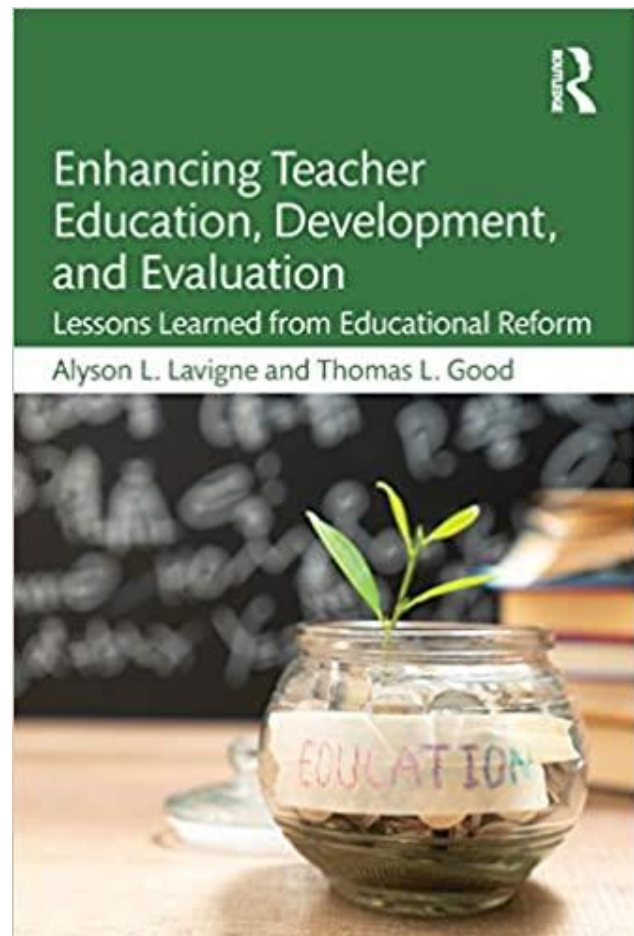
Lavigne, A. L., & Good, T. L. (2019). *Enhancing teacher education, development, and evaluation: Lessons learned from educational reform*. Routledge.

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Many people acknowledge that a useful definition of insanity is to repeat the same behaviors over and over in hopes that different results will materialize “the next time,” perhaps after this tiny detail is fiddled with or that other detail is fine-tuned. Although the definition has been misattributed to both Albert Einstein and Benjamin Franklin (see, for example, Pruitt, 2018), it best captures the overall essence of *Enhancing Teacher Education, Development, And Evaluation: Lessons Learned from Educational Reform*—the most recent of three books on educational reform authored by Alyson Lavigne, Assistant Professor at Utah State University, and Thomas Good, Professor Emeritus at the University of Arizona. Throughout this book, “the same behaviors” are defined as U.S. education policies that have continuously (i.e., “over and over again” for the last 40 years) been fixed on large-scale, sweeping, standards- and test-based accountability reform. “The different results” perpetually anticipated are the significant upsurges in student achievement that are to result post policy, for



the lack of a better catchphrase, to *Make America's Educational System Great Again*. And that being “fiddled with” or “fine-tuned” are the particular units of concentration motivating each iteration of each policy reform, more specifically defined as those at the epicenter of each educational reform movement examined in this book.

Unfortunately, the aforementioned definition of insanity is still alive and well, and this is the overarching theme of this book. Educational policymakers have been propagating and regenerating educational reform policies, despite the research evidence and based on now 40-years of failed reforms, all of a similar type and kind. Likewise, U.S. policymakers are propagating all of this, all the while justifying similar policy actions, as primarily fixed upon standards- and test-based instruments. All the while, they continue to use the same positive and negative consequences as incentives and disincentives, respectively, as the emphatic triggers meant to, finally, help reach the same anticipated ends (i.e., increased student achievement).

Lavigne and Good start by offering their readers a very bleak, albeit dead-on illustration of not only what it looks like, but also what it means to be a public-school teacher in the US today. In the section *Teaching in America*, Lavigne and Good base their arguments not only in the current research evidence, but also in dialogue with a set of assumptions perpetuated, including but not limited to teachers being caring yet ineffective, being nearly impossible to fire even if grossly ineffective or incompetent, being the causes or primary causes of U.S. students' endless low achievement (as compared to other industrialized nations), and the like. While some of the assumptions are supported by current research (e.g., teachers do matter in that they influence student learning and achievement more than any other *in-school* factor), even these facts are often twisted and used against teachers to advance political

agendas and societal ideals (e.g., if teachers matter so much, we *should* hold them more if not entirely accountable for not increasing student achievement more). Lavigne and Good explain the opposing interests and initiatives surrounding the inconsistencies and absurdities of such reductionist assumptions about teachers, noting that many of the debates about reforming education occur in perpetual avoidance of the real but rarely discussed roots of problems continuously misattributed to students, teachers, and schools: poverty.

One of the most important contributions of this book is the attention to the evidence of how and to what extent our nation's educational policymakers have continued with their policy-based recklessness, despite years of research evidence that would certainly warrant alternative policy moves. One case in point is when Lavigne and Good detail how *Race To The Top* (RTTT, 2009) was implemented despite the “body of research information that could [have been] utilized. [T]his [set of] research suggested that more successful teachers were those who build strong and supportive classrooms and who instructed in ways that emphasized both understanding and application” (p. 47).

These facets of effective teaching were captured, perhaps, on the observational systems encouraged via RTTT, but they were not valued nor appropriately weighted via RTTT, given the extent to which the more objective measures were more prominently in play (i.e., student growth models and Value-Added Models or VAMs). In terms of these more objective measures, however, Lavigne and Good also note that researchers of “these studies, to date, ha[ve] not found anything to contradict earlier PP [process-product] studies, and ha[d] essentially replicated them” (p. 49). Put differently, what we knew about the driving forces or rather measures behind RTTT – student growth models and VAMs – prior to RTTT and since the 1970s, 1980s, and

1990s, is essentially the same as what we know now, post RTTT. See also Amrein-Beardsley (2008) v. Sanders & Wright (2008), both of which speak to this point, whereas the same methods, regardless of the marketed sophistication of the VAM used and promoted in the latter (i.e., the Education Value-Added Assessment System [EVAAS]), yielded near exact estimates of teacher effects. Lavigne and Good showed that “RTTT did not improve teaching and learning” (p. 95), in many ways because “RTTT-inspired teacher-evaluation models [did not] provide adequate time, resources, and support for principals to enact the new models well” (p. 103). In short, “RTTT promised quick and sweeping success[es that] were [simply] not fulfilled” (p. 126). Throughout this chapter, Lavigne and Good provide other evidences capturing how and why RTTT simply did not work.

In the end, states did not yield the gains expected in terms of student achievement, again, especially as a result of teacher improvement, reductions in force, the use of teacher bonuses as incentives, and the legitimate pursuit of more objectively identifying effective teachers (e.g., despite some evidence, from New Mexico; see also Amrein-Beardsley & Geiger, 2019; Kraft & Gilmour, 2017; Steinberg & Kraft, in press; Weisberg et al., 2009). In addition, RTTT did not improve graduation rates, as also anticipated, increase instances of teachers using RTTT data to improve upon their teaching in formative ways, as also anticipated, and the like. Instead, RTTT proved to be “tremendously costly (in terms of money and time),” given it eventually “failed to increase student achievement” (p. 152). Ironically, and despite RTTT being one of the most sweeping reforms of our time, Lavigne and Good also remind us that we still have essentially no evidence that RTTT, or really any of its components worked.

Another substantial contribution and perhaps the most important for policymakers

– at least ideally– is Lavigne’s and Good’s chapter on *Learning from Failure*. Recalling that “[d]espite the vast resources invested in it, RTTT failed” (p. 137), in this chapter Lavigne and Good address the golden questions: So what and what now? Accordingly, they provide suggestions for *actually* improving teaching and learning in classroom-situated, but also research-based and -informed ways.

Lavigne and Good suggest that we all “put *improving* teaching and learning first” (p. 157). In order to do this, we should certainly increase teacher pay, while also advocating for a more equitable distribution of resources and funding across schools. But we must also come to know and embrace which teaching practices actually work to improve student learning outcomes, acknowledging that few principal-preparation or professional development programs include any of this as a part of their curriculum, or their curriculum regarding how to support principals in terms of best evaluating teachers towards these ends. “[P]rofessional development can be focused on enhancing principals’ knowledge base of effective instructional practices and observing and providing useful feedback” (p. 159). These suggestions, correspondingly, have clear implications for policy, even at the local policy level in that we might do this by better investing in and focusing on instructional leadership and supervision. This, provided the “complex (and also limited) role[s] that principals play” (p. 141), as well as the often “unrealistic expectations and demands” still often placed upon principals (p. 141; see also Paufler, 2018).

Lavigne and Good add that principals need better, and more context sensitive and situated measurement tools that will help them better assess, support, and develop their teachers. See, for example, their suggestions regarding checklists that can be used to supplement traditional or innovative teacher observational systems (pp. 160-161). They also make sound recommendations about, perhaps,

relying on others to engage in or help with some of this important work (e.g., peer observations conducted by teachers with similar content expertise). Related, they suggest that teachers, themselves and as fostered by principals, engage more often with each other via professional learning communities (PLCs), whereby teachers are provided with “substantial blocks of time weekly to meet as they focused on various concerns – curriculum, lesson plans, and student achievement – as well as the students as a cohort – their progress, group behavior and cohesion, and culture and climate” (p. 169). Notably, research evidence suggests PLCs work to substantively support student learning, in general but also in high-needs, urban schools. See also Lavigne’s and Good’s discussion of Japanese lesson studies (p. 170), as well as the potential benefits of using cost-benefit analyses and classroom-based research to inform such reform (e.g., to examine the effects of professional development; p. 173).

Obviously, engaging in any of the ideas in this book would require those outside of, but often in charge of what happens in classrooms (i.e., educational policymakers), to *not* continue the aforementioned cycle of

insanity, as well as *not* continue down such ahistorical paths towards educational reform. Notwithstanding, in this chapter Lavigne and Good “suggest ways for enhancing classroom research to better inform teachers supervision and professional development,” “ask society to support their teachers and schools by recognizing what teachers can and cannot do,” and “end by advocating for increased efforts to implement programs that have shown great promise” (e.g., high-quality early education; p. 137).

Lavigne and Good conclude that “[u]nfortunately, this is *déjà vu*—we have been here before, and inevitably we find our way back to policymakers, and sometimes educators, underestimating the complexity of teaching, supervising, and learning in modern schools” (p. 156). As such, applying even some of the recommendations Lavigne and Good advance in this final chapter would be particularly useful, especially in reflection of our policy past, in formulating better, more sound, and more defensible educational policies, not to mention educational policies that might have a better chance to actually yield desired results.

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About the Reviewer


Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, PhD., is a Professor in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. Her research focuses on the use of value-added models (VAMs) in and across states before and since the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). More specifically, she is conducting validation studies on multiple system components, as well as serving as an expert witness in many legal cases surrounding the (mis)use of VAM-based output.



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