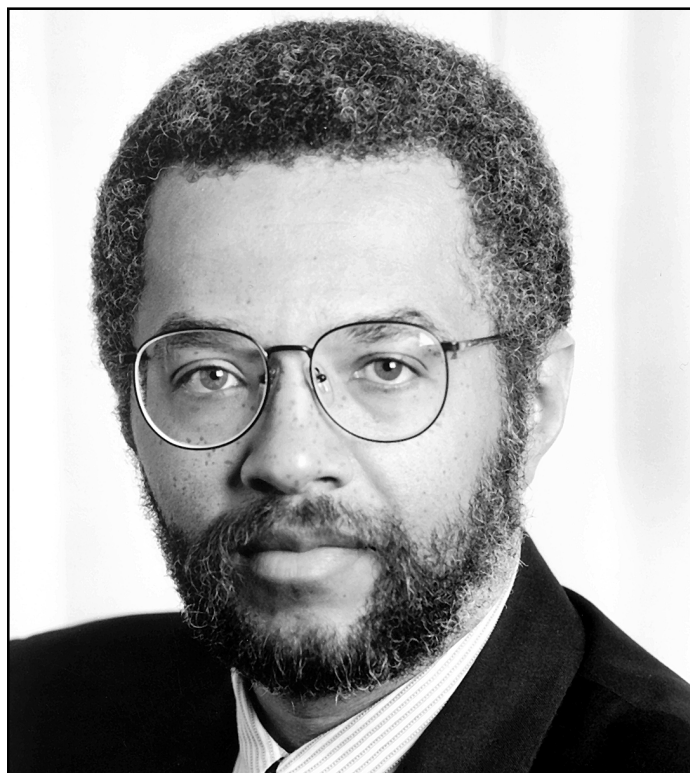


Jeff Howard

By Mardell Raney



JEFF HOWARD, AN ARTICULATE HARVARD-TRAINED PSYCHOLOGIST AND DEDICATED FOUNDER OF THE EFFICACY INSTITUTE, BELIEVES THAT PEOPLE AREN'T BORN SMART—THEY BECOME SMART. AMERICA'S APPROACH TO EDUCATING CHILDREN IS FAILING BECAUSE THE ATTITUDES THAT UNDERLIE IT—THE INNATE-ABILITY PARADIGM—ARE WRONG. THIS SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY—WHICH IS DAMAGING TO ALL CHILDREN—IS LETHAL FOR CHILDREN OF COLOR. HOWARD HAS CALLED FOR A THIRD NATIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT—AFTER CIVIL RIGHTS AND DESEGREGATION—THAT WOULD MOBILIZE AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS TO FOCUS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK CHILDREN; BUT HIS VISION AND HIS MISSION ARE FOR ALL CHILDREN.

Your first Efficacy Seminar was made up of black Harvard undergraduates who had obviously already experienced a great deal of success or they wouldn't have been there. Were you originally addressing only the development and success of black students? And why did you start with this rather elite group?

I started with that group of black students (14 or 15 men and women from Harvard and Radcliff) because that's where I was at the time. I began to see that something was wrong and I started talking about it as an undergraduate. I was head of the Black Student Association my sophomore year and very politically aware. I understood that the Civil Rights movement had generated a thrust to get folks like us at Harvard and similar schools across the country. But at the same time, many coming to Harvard weren't making a total commitment to academic work. A few people did, but many of us made a virtue of not being committed. We had all kinds of rationales, told ourselves all kinds of stories. But I couldn't reconcile that with the fact that people were literally fighting and dying to get us access to these institutions. I tried to make this a political issue among Harvard black undergraduates, but nobody was interested.

Were you ever able to get anyone's attention at Harvard on this issue?

Yes, the dean, who had ears everywhere, heard about my activities and called me into his office. He handed me something called *The Confidential Report on Negro Students*, which presented evidence that my theories had a real basis in fact. Black students were indeed performing poorly relative to other students at the university. The administration figured I was onto something and we were fighting on the same side, so they gave me some data to keep me moving. I kept talking but to no avail. In spring 1969, I saw that this issue affected students, not just at Harvard, but up and down the east coast. Finally I went back to Chicago, my hometown, where I saw people sitting around and playing cards in the student union instead of studying. Many of these students were flunking out of the University of Illinois. I realized then that this was a national phenomenon.

Were others observing these same things or concerned about this issue?

Yes, indeed. In 1969, the *Harvard Education Review* published the famous article by Arthur Jensen on race and I.Q. I watched the stunned reactions of anger and denial among black students at Harvard. People talked about it feverishly for a couple of days, then the discussion abruptly halted. Nobody wanted to talk about it anymore, but I wanted to talk about the fact that

Harvard would publish something like this. I knew there was a connection, but I didn't know what it was.

Did you persist in your efforts, and did you have any support?

I got damn near ostracized. People made it very clear that they didn't want to talk about it anymore. There was unanimity on that point—it hit a raw nerve. As I told you, my basic formulation was fear of this notion of intellectual inferiority which undermined people's capacity to commit their efforts. That's why I was seeing this general pull-back from academic commitment. *The Confidential Report on Negro Students* presented evidence that when people don't work, they don't do as well—which confirmed the rumor in everybody's consciousness and perpetuated a cycle. I came to that knowledge as a senior at Harvard.

For an undergraduate working with his peers, this must have been difficult and unpopular—and took great courage. Why did you persevere?

I just didn't know any better. I got onto the scent of something and I couldn't stop. I did a ninety-degree turn from law school to a graduate program in clinical psychology, because I realized that what I had in my head was fundamentally a psychological formulation. I needed to understand how this worked. Eventually I switched to a social psychology program because I couldn't get the answers that I was looking for by doing one-on-one clinical therapy. I wound up with a joint degree in clinical and social psychology.

Was this the right course of study to address your questions?

I was looking for a fundamental theoretical or conceptual formulation, which I thought I could get in social psychology. That turned out to be correct. I persuaded a group of courageous undergraduate volunteers to spend twelve days going through my first Efficacy Seminar. I discovered that this first group (although already among the better students) did substantially better after going through Efficacy. They started telling everybody, and a lot of people lined up for the seminar.

When you created your Efficacy philosophy in 1974 by combining your work in social psychology with Professor David McClelland's motivation theories, did you foresee the implications for education? Were you specifically addressing self esteem, motivation, or what?

I've never been interested in self esteem. That's been one distortion of our approach. In fact, we at the Efficacy Institute have never talked about self esteem. We explicitly talk about self confidence. There's a critical distinction. Self esteem is how you feel about yourself and what I can do to help you feel better. You may be illiterate, you may be a complete loser, but I may be able to help you have good self esteem and feel good about your miserable existence anyway. That's probably harsh, but I'm really opposed to a self-esteem thrust because I think it's funda-

mentally empty. We believe in using self confidence to drive effort. Self confidence is a psychological state based on an understanding of previous accomplishments and future potential. I've done this so, hey, maybe I could do that. That's founded in real experience and it's a driver toward committed effort to further accomplishments. It's totally different from self esteem. So, of all the things that have been said about us, probably the thing I resent most is the reduction of our program to a self-esteem movement because we have nothing to do with that.

How did this misinterpretation of your message come about?

Sometimes it's innocent. Some reporters hear self confidence and think self esteem, and it gets transposed into their articles. But others want to reduce this to a self-esteem movement, and they understand that this is a way of ridiculing it. And it's just dishonest, because that has never been what we are about. That trivializes our program.

In an article in the National Urban League's The State of Black America, you issued a call to arms to the black community for a third national social movement, after the earlier civil rights and desegregation movements. But this movement, as you envisioned it, would focus on the development of black children and would be led by the black community itself. How have other national black leaders reacted? Have leaders such as Henry Louis Gates or Jesse Jackson espoused this movement, or endorsed or supported your activities?

They haven't mobilized yet.

Does the work of the Efficacy Institute focus exclusively on the educational development of black students, or is it concerned with all American children?

It started with our concern about black children, but we soon came to understand that America has a problem educating all of its children. There are particular issues with children of color, which we are aware of and committed to. While we'd like to see communities of color be the first to really mobilize to get rid of this old system, we understand that it's about America's children. My article in *The State of Black America* was written for black folks and published by one of the largest black organizations. That statement is sometimes misinterpreted as saying, Efficacy is only about black folks. If the largest Hispanic organization in the country asks me to write an article, it will address the issues of Hispanic kids. Efficacy has applications for all children.

Your philosophical beliefs and the work of your institute have come under fire, instead of being embraced by the educational establishment and other groups as an affirmation of the potential of all children. Some people have attacked your work as overly optimistic and simplistic. How do you answer them?

These are people who can't find it in their hearts to believe that all typical children can learn. Although the people in the school

reform movement are wonderful, positive, and progressive, some really don't believe that all these kids can learn. So they tend to deny evidence that it's true. They label as simplistic any approach that takes as its bottom line the fact that we must and can educate all of these kids.

Then who or what can help bring this about? What approach would be most effective?

If Efficacy has been derelict, it's been in capturing public attention for what we're doing. We've been very good at figuring out an approach, gaining the confidence of educators, securing locations, working in partnership with people across the country. Piece by piece, we've been putting together an approach that can change entire school districts. But we haven't publicized that. I think that's one reason a third movement hasn't picked up steam yet. But we're convinced that it will. It's time is coming, and we hope to play an important role in education reform.

Exactly how do you plan to do this?

We have a dual approach. We want to demonstrate the efficacy of Efficacy by finding a few school districts who are prepared to make a real commitment to reorganizing themselves top to bottom. Those results can then be used to snap the national public to attention, to show them what's possible when educators, parents, and communities really get committed. That's one way to publicize this. But we must also start talking about it more to the press, in articles, and in interviews.

Do you have plans for utilizing the web? Have you considered a national online forum or expanding your web activities?

We're trying to address that, and hope to start fundraising soon to expand our operation to embrace technologies such as these. But we're short staffed and running very lean at this stage.

The so-called innate-ability paradigm is a powerful and historical predictor of school and even lifetime success for children in our country. It's been generally accepted that a person's intelligence and what he or she is capable of learning is determined at birth. What convinced you that this isn't true? That intelligence is a social, not a genetic, endowment?

My experience convinced me that it wasn't true. As a child, I saw that kids could be very smart on the playground yet dumb in school. I couldn't figure that out. The same kids who were terrible students, even objects of ridicule, in the classroom could be articulate, witty, and intellectually dangerous outside of school—I mean, they could really go after you with mind games. That didn't add up, and it always troubled me. My experiences at Harvard helped me put it together. I knew that my peers were smart, and Harvard had recognized that by accepting them. Yet they were falling behind. They weren't serious about academics while others were making a real commitment.

Was this the evidence you needed to validate your philosophy?

Once I started working with school systems, I got what I considered to be absolute evidence. It's what we call "the teacher in 206," which I describe to groups of teachers all the time. This is a teacher who has, say, a fifth-grade classroom in a rundown school building across the street from the worst housing project in town. There are crack dealers, everybody is on welfare, shootings going on all night, the works. These kids face the worst social conditions possible. This school has three fifth-grade classrooms whose teachers typically get a random sample of the rising fourth graders. The K-4 classrooms have teachers frustrated by a sense of hopelessness; the kids, who act out and bring all kinds of problems to school, are in very bad condition after the fourth grade. In Rooms 205 and 207, that situation continues in the fifth grade. But when you walk into Room 206 after a month, you know something is going on. Three months later, you see an extremely intense, rigorous environment in 206 during her discussions: everybody's in rapt attention. When she's talking, there are twelve hands in the air trying to respond to her questions. By the end of the year, she has almost all of those kids to a true gifted-and-talented fifth-grade standard.

But isn't that an anomaly? What's she doing that's different, and can those results be replicated?

When I describe that scenario to a room of 500 teachers and say, "Raise your hand if you've seen this happen," 250-300 will raise their hands. I say, "No wait. Really. Do you actually know somebody like that who can get that kind of results with those kids?" The hands stay up. I ask them the same question that I had asked myself earlier when I discovered this phenomenon. "What does this mean? What are the implications?" Someone will always come to the same conclusion that I came to: there's nothing wrong with these kids. If 206 can take these kids to that level, then other kids can get to that level. No one has ever refuted that logic because it's true. Our problem is not the kids. Our problems are the adult institutions and the way we process kids.

When we're talking about this innate-ability paradigm becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, you say it's particularly dangerous for black children who've had centuries of misperception of inferiority in school. How do you change this and mobilize adults, particularly educators, to act on correct assumptions? Where do you start?

That's what the Efficacy approach is about. Getting adults to move out of this dangerous and destructive mindset and into a constructive mindset can be the basis for mobilizing ourselves to educate kids. We do that with a four-day seminar for educators. Our strategic approach to a district is becoming more comprehensive every year as we discover what's needed. It often starts with a two-day seminar for education leaders: the superintendent, his or her cabinet, board members, union leadership, teachers' union leadership, and community stakeholders. We

generally ask a community to mobilize forty people for a seminar, then we present this core of ideas and ask whether they are prepared to commit to mobilizing their community and reorganizing education around kids. We just did such a seminar in Oakland where the superintendent asked what we needed and then delivered everything we asked for, including the mayor, who was there for two days.

You've said that five generations of Americans have now been categorized and stigmatized in this way, and we've come to accept it as normal and valid. Several recognized tests reinforce the message of low ability and expectations for minority and poor children. With this pervasive attitude, is it feasible to think that we can really change the status quo when it comes to assessing student abilities, changing the way we evaluate and categorize children in the beginning?

We absolutely can and must, but that's not an effective way to approach the problem. If we change the test, that will be considered confirmation for many people of the inferiority of the children we want to change the test for. Room 206 doesn't change the test, she gets her kids to nail it. Jaime Escalante didn't try to change the advanced-placement calculus examination. He got his kids to excel at it. From that position of strength, we can talk with credibility about the need to move from standardized, norm-referenced testing to a criterion-referenced testing regime. But I don't want to change the test—especially for communities of color. In too many cases, that's a substitute for addressing the fact that the kids can't read in the first place.

At first glance, your statement "Smart is not something that you just are; smart is something you can get" seems a glib oversimplification. Do you really believe that's true?

It is obviously, demonstrably true. To call the idea that intelligence can be developed simplistic is itself a silly notion. Why can only one muscle in our bodies never get stronger? Who decreed that? What kind of God would have created that circumstance for the most critical muscle in the body, the one that defines us as human beings? To have that one fixed at birth is an arbitrary notion of the first order; and it's one that, if you can get the population to buy, you can then set up the kind of destructive, failing education system that we have today. Really a lot of this rotten edifice is built on the idea of fixed intelligence.

How did genetic determinism get such a foothold in our belief system that we built our whole education system around it?

There were always elements of racial and genetic determinism, a kind of racist-supremacy notion that was pervasive in American culture. That's one foundation for it. Another was the work of Terman and Goddard and others early in this century who were bent on an absolute campaign to sell to the American population the notion that intelligence was innate, fixed, and unequally distributed. They created the statistics of the normal

distribution, the Bell Curve, to describe the differences in intelligence in the population. Then they used that to justify all kinds of inequality in American society. What Herrnstein and Murray said in *The Bell Curve* was nothing new. Those guys laid out their argument in 1917 or 1918, then systematically sold it.

Just how did they go about selling this idea?

First through the army. They convinced the army that they could test people and find out who could do the higher-order cognitive tasks and who should be grunt soldiers. The army, always looking for efficiency, bought that idea. They stated their results to make them look a lot more formidable, a lot more predictive than they had any evidence for. Next they sold the idea to public school systems, which started processing our great grandparents in this way. Our ancestors were labeled as to intelligence and put in different curricula based on what these people said their capabilities were. It all turns on the idea that intelligence is fixed. You can't make this whole system work without that idea. Because you see, if in fact the brain is plastic, if you can develop people's intellectual capability, then classifying people and putting them in these rigid curricula that determine the rest of their lives doesn't make any sense. Neither can you justify or use difference in intelligence as a rationale for economic and social inequality. Only if intelligence is fixed. So that's really critical. They stole that idea, and lots of people in America, including many school reformers, have accepted it.

School reform is a critical national issue, and many reforms have been proposed—some quite expensive, and some targeting a single area such as math or computer technology. Your approach, while actually very simple, is quite comprehensive and presents a win-win situation for everybody. So why hasn't this been integrated into central reform proposals?

Because there is a dominant approach in school reform—which I call the teaching and learning approach—that focuses not on student outcomes but on good teaching and learning, which puts control of school reform in the hands of schools of education.

And they define "good teaching and learning."

Yes, as schools of education define it. They don't talk about outcomes. Their assumption is that if we do good teaching and learning, outcomes will follow. But I believe under their breath there's another hidden phrase that follows, "Outcomes will eventually follow according to the intellectual capabilities of the children." Many academics, because of their own training and history, were considered the smart ones. They got prestige from that and from the distinction between themselves and others. Today many academics who control school reform don't really believe that these children can learn; and because of that, school reform has been a failure. We've gotten no results after fifteen years of school reform and billions of dollars. So I don't give a lot of credit to people from the academic side of school reform

who criticize Efficacy or any other approach. They need to produce results or at least join those of us who want to produce results before they can be credible proponents of real reform.

Obviously, teachers must play a central role in reform. In your approach, students would be grouped differently, teachers would hold different expectations for each child, testing and measurement would have new objectives and meaning. In short, teachers would have entirely new roles and goals. How do you bring about this kind of change, and what's the incentive for entrenched and often disillusioned educators with years of classroom experience and only one way of having learned this process?

There's both an incentive and a sort of psychological driver. The incentive is that educators want to succeed on some level—even if it's buried. Most educators are decent people who really want the best for their students, who realize that they hold these kids' futures in their hands. They're not going to be happy or fulfilled as old people if they spend their careers presiding over this horrible failure. But, for lots of reasons, their practices haven't changed. Their belief in the innate-ability paradigm is so profound that they just can't see past sorting and selecting as a primary function. That's what teachers do—sort and select. I ask educators, "Look, if fifteen percent of your kids are gifted and talented, what does that make the rest?" Silence. Then somebody answers, "Ungifted and untalented." By sorting children, we are directly communicating to them that we have no belief in their capacity to learn at high levels. Do we need any other explanation to understand why they stop working or trying and start acting out? But educators don't change their behavior because they were raised in American culture; they know on some level that some have it and some don't. It only makes sense to sort.

What is the psychological driver?

There's a psychological driver for change that we've learned to exploit. We tell teachers that, beginning with the first grade, you folks are emphasizing that about one third of first graders are VSs, one third are SSs, and one third are KDs—Very Smart, Sort of Smart, Kind of Dumb. Six-year-old first graders never deny the labels. Think about the implications. What does it tell a KD kid who gets ridiculed on the playground as being a dummy. What happens to those kids for the rest of their lives? Then we ask the teachers, "Where do you think most educators were by the time they finished high school? VS, SS, or KD?" They laugh uncomfortably and say "SS." We walk them through the psychological implications to see that there is, in fact, downward mobility in this system. Lots of people were VS in first grade; but we only finish with maybe five percent VS. That's what happened to most teachers. They were VSs early on and came to like school; then they got dropped out of the math program or the foreign language program. They understood themselves no longer to be the smart kids in school, and they were profoundly injured psychologically—just as all children are. Their self confidence was diminished dramatically. But they persevered; they

got a degree and a teaching certificate—and then we gave our children to them. Finally, I say to the teachers, "So what do you expect people who've had that experience would then do to the next generation of kids?"

What a wrenching experience for them! How do they respond?

They tell you, "The same thing." We respond—and this is the central feature of the Efficacy approach—"There is nothing wrong with these kids, and there is nothing wrong with you, the teacher. You can learn to teach these kids." That's the psychological driver. I want to be very clear about that. Like most Americans, they have come to accept that they are something less than rocket scientists. Isn't that one of the most common phrases in our culture? "I'm no rocket scientist!" which means "I wasn't in the gifted and talented group." Teachers have accepted that, yet they've been given this incredibly difficult task of turning around American education. Most of them don't think they can do it, and the kids don't think they can do it. But we at the Efficacy Institute know they can.

What an empowering idea—not just for students, but for their teachers and parents.

It absolutely goes for parents. There's nothing wrong with these kids and there's nothing wrong with their parents. Most of the parents, especially in inner cities, weren't SSs. They were KDs. So we make parents understand, "There's nothing wrong with you. You can become a person who learns to drive effective effort in getting your kids developed."

We've heard for years that "teachers teach the way they were taught"—reinforcing the perpetuation that you describe. What's the possibility that schools of education might incorporate the Efficacy approach?

It would be wonderful, but I'm not holding my breath. So far, the opinion leaders of schools of education haven't demonstrated a willingness to try anything other than the traditional teaching and learning approach, which is too bad. But I think they'll come around eventually. Especially when their customers, the school systems, start turning away graduates because they need people who can do different things than what Columbia and Harvard and the rest are turning out.

What's the position of teacher unions and other teacher groups to your approach, or do they have a position?

There are lots of smart union people—and remember when I use the word "smart," I don't mean fixed intelligence: I mean people who have become smart, who have started to figure it out because they needed to. Smart union people across the country are beginning to figure out that they must get results or they're going to lose the franchise. The public is fully prepared to give the education franchise to those who can show results.

Why doesn't the national media jump on your message?

Generally, we've received very favorable press coverage. That's part of why we were thrown for a loop by what happened in New York. Reporters hear what we're talking about, then start thinking about their own childhood or their kids, and ask questions. Many local articles were not only favorable but really showed an understanding of the issues, such as one great story on Baltimore. But we haven't received much national coverage. There's something about this message. Some folks get very excited: they read it, understand it, have been waiting for it. But others are intimidated and don't like it, for whatever reason. Because it violates some assumptions they've been operating on, they turn away.

Maybe it sounds too easy, too good to be true? After all, you don't talk a lot about pedagogy.

Sounds simplistic. Must be naive. Let me translate that. "I couldn't do calculus myself. So what makes them think these kids can do calculus?" That's what I hear when people call this simplistic and naive.

A few outstanding educators, such as Jaime Escalante and Kay Toliver, use a similar approach with great success. We've seen what Escalante has done with at-risk kids in Los Angeles.

Yes, 206s all over the country are doing it every day. We just have to find those people. But educators don't want to do that because they've accepted this negative idea and—in many cases—their own limitations. So it's a challenge to get people, especially influential people, to turn away from this idea that most students are too stupid to learn at a high level.

From a psychological point of view, shouldn't we be concerned with more than test scores, for example, with implications for the quality of life and personal happiness? As a psychologist, what do you foresee if people really embraced your theories in their total lives?

A society of learners. People who soak up knowledge and information. A society that sets very high standards of education for the entire population and makes it happen. It would change our economic structure and alter our competitive position in the global economy.

What's the downside?

There's virtually no downside. However, a few folks in the current elite population might have a few problems: If all kids can do calculus, then how do we determine who gets into Harvard? Who's really smart? I made a presentation yesterday and had that experience. "That's fine, but if you teach this to everybody, then what are you going to do for the really smart kids?" For some people, the purpose of education is to differentiate their children from the rest.

But as educators, don't we want the best for every child? No one has a corner on intelligence or learning.

It's profoundly undemocratic, but it's the position that lots of folks hold, and it's one reason their kids tend to do very well. They fight like tigers for a competitive advantage for their own children and brook no opposition to that distinction. Some forces will block this kind of democratic approach, but that's not the position of typical educators. However, we already have some evidence in New York that the far right wing won't like Efficacy.

Tell us about the New York situation from your perspective.

The *New York Post* just outright lied about Efficacy in a series of articles. They called us a racist organization that went around the country saying that white teachers were oppressing black kids. That was so ridiculous and so far from fact that we didn't bother to respond. That was a mistake. We've learned that you don't let those things pass without responding. By the time we realized that, four or five other articles had been published. Then Chester Finn, of the hard-right affiliation, picked up on this and wrote an Op Ed piece in the *New York Times*. That was our real national exposure: Chester Finn interpreting Efficacy to the public.

How did you respond, and have you been able to correct this misinformation?

I talked to many people in New York, including those at the Heritage Foundation, Hudson Institute, and Manhattan Institute. I discovered that they weren't interested in the fact that what was said was not factual. They really don't like the idea of trying to organize education for everybody. They also don't like the idea of public education. That's something everybody needs to understand. There's an agenda on the hard right to break down public education as an American institution. They're explicit about it and they understand what they're trying to do. Meanwhile school reformers insist that reform is about teaching and learning; but when asked about real results, they say, "Well, sometime in the future." There's not going to be a future if one of these privatized firms can demonstrate a capacity to educate kids. The public will give their money to profit-making firms. We could lose the institution of public education if we don't get results. This is serious business, and there are forces organized against us. The forces of goodness and light, as far as I'm concerned, are confused and disoriented and have no belief in their own intelligence, much less in the intelligence of kids. If we don't turn that around, we're going to lose public education.

If intelligence is a developmental process, how important are the preschool years, and how can parents assist in that development?

That's part of our approach. We call it going deep. We're gearing up to train every teacher in a district to drive the mission of significant improvement in student outcomes. Next we want community leadership reinforcing it from pulpits and businesses,

then parents to become co-conspirators—an open conspiracy among everyone in a community to get their kids to 21st century standards. We tell the kids what we’re doing and get them to also be co-conspirators to turn this whole situation around.

How early could your theories be incorporated into a child’s learning? Is there a correlation between age and effectiveness?

It starts in effective families in infancy. Parents will understand that they are literally changing the structure of their children’s brains by singing, reading, talking, interacting with them. That process of development, of synaptic connections, never ends. It’s happening for you and me right now because of the interaction we’re having. The brain is an incredibly plastic entity, and it always responds to intensive, repetitive effort. When you engage in challenging activity, the brain responds. So let’s do it as early as possible because that’s when the brain is forming. But if we don’t catch someone early, is it over? No. The brain retains its plasticity, its capacity to form new synapses, new connection—until the day we die. The notion that intelligence is fixed is just laughable in light of what we now know about how the brain actually builds itself.

At the other end, is it ever too late to implement this approach? What about defeated adult learners who may be semi-illiterate, or dropouts with minimal or no skills, or those with a lifetime of poverty, failure, drugs, or violence?

It’s extremely difficult, but never impossible. One thing that has kept the Nation of Islam alive is their ability to take defeated people with no skills and get them reading, thinking, and functioning. It’s never too late. It’s just harder. So given limited resources, let’s front load this process and really organize pre-K and elementary education first. Next, we address the middle school kids whom we’ve damaged for the last seven years and those in high school who’ve been damaged for the last ten. We owe it to them to address their situation right now and set them up to become lifelong learners. We must put tools in their hands and help them understand what it’s going to take for them to become effective people.

You say, “Ability group placements represent powerful expectations.” Children undoubtedly are aware of these placements and live up or down to them all their lives. Can that cycle be interrupted at any point?

Yes. I have a great story. The Kansas City (Kansas) School System shut down on a Friday afternoon and gave the teachers to me for three hours in a big auditorium. There were about two thousand people present, and one high school teacher in the front just kept bugging me. I do a very interactive presentation, and this guy was just short of being nasty. I heard and responded to the content and ignored the rest. (It was one of my better days.) Halfway through my presentation, I realized that he was really throwing me softballs. In spite of being skeptical to an extreme, he was

giving me good stuff that I was able to respond to and move the group. He continued this throughout the presentation. There was intelligence in everything he said, but the aspect was very ugly.

That sounds like every presenter’s nightmare. Why did you say this was a great story?

Two weeks later, a woman in Kansas City reported that on the following Monday, this teacher had started every one of his ninth-grade classes by telling students that he and others had been guilty of categorizing their intelligence. In so doing, he had seriously limited them by not teaching them at high levels. Now aware of these implications, he apologized with tears in his eyes, I’m told. He promised that he would never do it again, that from now on he was going to teach them. That was his job. I don’t know what happened, but that story was all I needed. He did us a service because that’s the model. Once we understand the folly of what we’ve been doing, we must apologize profoundly to these injured children, make them understand how wrong we’ve been, and beg them to work with us to demonstrate how intelligent they really are. I think we’ll find that a large percentage of kids will go for it.

That’s an amazing story. Does technology play a role in the success of your approach?

Technology can play an important role, but we haven’t had the time or wherewithal to explore it fully. I’m waiting for a breakthrough process, which I think may happen in mathematics. The people at Nintendo figured out billions of dollars ago that you pull kids in, you get them engaged, and that’s the model: engagement of intensive focused effort. The result is rapid incremental development of new skills and capabilities. These kids operate at a speed and accuracy level unheard of outside game playing. We have to take that model and translate it to mathematics, to grammar, to the dynamics of social interaction and political structures.

Do you see technology as having great importance in the areas of student empowerment and individualized instruction?

Only to a point. Kids’ beliefs in their own capabilities will generate commitment. They get that belief from us, so we’ll always be an essential component. Once they engage, they can become independent of us as they mature. We have tremendous power. If we destroy their confidence, we undermine their capacity to commit effort. No effort, no learning. Or we can build their confidence, get them to engage in challenging activities, and launch them on a winning cycle for life.

Your Efficacy program in Tacoma showed great results. Rudy Crew, the man in charge of that, is a dynamic combination of pragmatism and optimism. What’s he doing now?

Rudy’s now the Chancellor in New York City, and that’s why we were attacked by the *Post*. He announced in his first press con-

ference that he was the Chancellor and Efficacy was his program. So they came after us. We've had limited influence in the last two years in New York, but we're still very much alive. Rudy really knows how to lead from the superintendent's chair. We've used what we learned from him and tried to pass that on to others.

What was your own education like as a child, and what about the techniques and expectations of your teachers?

I got the best of what a public education on the south side of Chicago had to offer. Ms. Dimmitt, my first grade teacher, didn't believe that people couldn't learn to read. Everybody in Ms. Dimmitt's class learned to read. Later I went to Tilden Technical High School, which is the test school for the south side. There was a hierarchy where two divisions were college prep, the next two division were sort of high-level technicians, and at the bottom were the dummy divisions. Again, I saw that everybody was smart coming in, then, amazingly, the people in the bottom divisions actually became dumb. Occasionally, when we shared a classroom, they were considered the dumb kids—but they weren't dumb on the playground.

Later I saw the same thing in reverse when Harvard made the assumption that we were all winners. Something very important happened to me just before my freshman year. All of the twelve-hundred incoming freshmen were brought in for four or five days of orientation. We were called to Memorial Hall, the great hall at Harvard, to hear President Nathan Pusey speak. He strolled out on the stage and made basically a look-to-the-left, look-to-your-right speech with a twist. His meaning was clear. He said, "We expect all three of you to graduate on time and with honors." That same speech at the University of Illinois went, "Look to your left, look to your right; only one of you

will still be here your senior year." But President Pusey said, "Gentlemen, you should understand that Harvard does not make admission errors. You are here because you belong here." Twelve hundred kids walked out on air.

I'm sure that, like you, none of them ever forgot that speech.

Harvard, in fact, always graduates upwards of ninety-four or ninety-five percent on time—and the majority with honors. Their assumption is that all of their students can succeed. I learned a lot by watching that operation.

For whom does your program make the greatest contribution?

For society in general. That's one of the benefits of going to a place like Harvard which has the big vision of society and expects influence on the social level. If we're successful, that influence will be on society as a whole and its future, how it thinks about itself, its people, and its capacity to adjust to changing circumstances: a society that knows it's filled with adept learners and can respond to any circumstances.

What's the central message you'd like to leave with us?

We're on a mission to transform education in the United States. It's not Efficacy that's important, it's the mission. Each school district has to be on a mission to move its students to 21st century educational outcomes. Each classroom teacher has to be on a mission to move her kids to a true gifted-and-talented standard. My vision of the 21st Century School is that everybody is involved as co-conspirators. We can all reinforce and support each other in that process, but it's a mission for the future of the country. ◀

The forces of goodness and light are confused and disoriented and have no belief in their own intelligence, much less in the intelligence of kids. If we don't turn that around, we're going to lose public education.

The Efficacy Institute, Inc., was founded by Jeff Howard in 1985 in Lexington, Massachusetts, as a nonprofit consulting and training firm. Its mission is to promote the academic and social development of children by teaching adults that intellectual development is a process, not something fixed at birth or limited by sociological or cultural factors. For more information, contact the Efficacy Institute at 781.547.6060.