

Missing the Point: The State of the National Discussion of Urban Schools

Transcript: Lecture by Dr. Charles Payne

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Sharon Ravitch: Welcome. My name is Sharon Ravitch. I'm a faculty member at the Penn Graduate School of Education and a proud board member at Research for Action, and on behalf of the Board of Directors of Research for Action and the team there, it is our pleasure to welcome you to this lecture. We'd first like to thank the International House for welcoming us, and we'd like to thank all of you for coming. We have a strong showing in the room: academics, educational advocates, education activists and practitioners. So I want to take a moment and tell you a little bit about Research for Action. Many of you know us well and some of you may not, so it's an opportunity to tell you about a wonderful organization. Research for Action conducts high quality research and evaluation with schools, districts and communities. It has a reputation nationally for sensitive and thorough data collection, insightful interpretation, and analytic rigor. RFA works to build public knowledge about economic, political and social contexts in order to understand the opportunities for and barriers to greater equity and education. It seeks to increase the capacity of districts and practitioners to make strategic decisions to improve instruction; to broaden the discourse about accountability in order to foster shared responsibility for improving learning outcomes and opportunities for students; to enhance democratic participation in school reform by making decision-makers aware of the perspectives of those public education stakeholders who are often disenfranchised; and to contribute to cross-sector dialogues that improve civic capacity to think creatively about education reform. We are pleased to introduce Dr. Charles Payne, and I'll allow my colleague Germaine to do so. Thank you.

Germaine Ingram: Good afternoon. I'm Germaine Ingram. I'm really proud to be a board member of Research for Action, and I'm really pleased and honored to be introducing our keynote speaker this afternoon. Charles Payne has impressive academic credentials, including one from my own alma mater, Syracuse University, and he's held distinguished teaching posts at several colleges and universities including Southern University, Williams College, Haverford College, Northwestern, Duke and currently at the University of Chicago, but those accomplishments aren't the reason we invited him to address us today. He's written and edited important volumes on school reform, civil rights, and the history of African American resistance to oppression. You'll have an opportunity to purchase one of his recent books and have him autograph it, but that's not the reason that we're delighted to have him here today. The reason we invited him and are so honored that he accepted is that his combination of intellect, curiosity, clear speaking, commitment to action, and profound caring for the future of children with the least opportunities invariably helps us to see a way forward just a little bit better. Not by giving us prescriptions and theories, but by doing what James Baldwin says art does: by laying bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers. His ability to lay bare the questions intelligently, provocatively, engagingly, even lovingly, about how we as a society educate and raise up our young people, or fail to

do that, is the reason we are grateful that he broke his promise to himself not to add another commitment to his calendar and has joined us here today. The distinguished theologian and activist Howard Thurman used a metaphor that he called the wall to explain the obligation of people of faith, any faith, to address the plight of the underprivileged and dispossessed. He said that our faith should lead us to gather at the wall to support those whose backs are to the wall. Charles, by his research, writing, teaching and activism, calls on us to muster the faith and will to gather with him at the wall. I can't think of anyone better to speak to us on this very special occasion of celebration, honoring, and transition for Research for Action. Please welcome Charles Payne.

Charles Payne: Well, I have had some introductions in my time, but that one was truly special. Had I known what the introduction was going to be like, I would have brought my mother this afternoon, and she would have believed that introduction. I am from South Jersey, as some of you know, so coming to Philadelphia always feels like coming home to me, especially so when I'm coming for something that's connected to Research for Action. I'm glad I can share this bittersweet moment, this moment when we're welcoming talented new leadership, and at the same time expressing our appreciation for a job well done to Eva and Jolley. In the contentious world of urban education research, the work of Research for Action has been distinguished by its sanity, by its balance, by its insistence on standing by its research no matter the political climate. Those of you who are younger may not believe this, but educational research is far more respected in important places in this country today than was the case twenty years ago. Mind you, I know that the way in which educational research is used and abused is still atrocious; all I'm saying is that it used to be worse. So as far as I can see, what the two organizations which have done the most to put research in a different, more respected place, have been, on the one hand, the Consortium of Chicago School Research, and on the other, Research for Action. I don't know of anyone else who has had as much impact on the broader issue of the standing of education research as those two organizations.

Speaking truth to power is an easy thing to say. It's a very hard thing to do. It's hard enough to go to the emperor and say one time "Hey, you're butt-naked;" to make a living doing that for 18 years, that's a damnably hard thing. Here's my image, my metaphor for RFA. I think of RFA as this little small child, and it's tugging at the coattails of this great big giant. It is the giant of people who make decisions, who make policy, and the giant is very well intentioned, but the giant is very, very busy with very, very important things. What is the giant doing? The giant is "thinking outside the box." That's what the giant is doing. What is the giant doing? The giant is "breaking the mold." And I'm moving my hands because these are all magical words and the world changes and transforms when we use them. The giant is "raising test scores." And the giant is much too busy to listen to a small child, but the child is there anyway tugging and looking up at the giant, trying to get the giant's attention and shouting up at the giant, "Mr. Giant! Teaching matters! Mr. Giant! Relationships matter, Mr. Giant! Mr. Giant! Don't forget about equity and civic capacity!" Most of the time the words are just blown away on the wind, but every once and a while the giant listens and stops and pauses and does things in a deeper, more effective way than giants would do otherwise. I would argue that teaching quality, the way in which RFA helped to lead a national discussion on teaching quality and the importance of teaching quality and the

maldistribution of good teachers is one of its most important contributions to the national discussion. That was a case in which the giant paused and listened for a moment. Mind you, this took a long time and mind you, the giant's execution of the idea leaves something to be desired but the point is that the giant does take heed every now and again and the point of that is to say that this is not a pointless exercise, the work that we in urban education are doing, sometimes it does matter.

Now basically that's everything I came here to say, but I am a card-carrying member of the professors' union, and the rules of our union say that you can't let any audience out in under thirty minutes, and so that no one files a grievance against me, I will now repeat what I just said for another twenty minutes.

Indulge me for a second, though. I want to make a point about the maldistribution of ideas, the maldistribution of information. I'm going to name you some superintendents, or chief executive officers as some of them now prefer to be called, and would you shout back to me the city that you associate with these people? And we will just see how this goes. Michelle Rhee [DC]? Joel Klein [NY]? Ron Huberman [Chicago]? I expected that to be weaker but it was still there. Beverly Hall [Atlanta]. Pat Forgione [Austin]. That was remarkable! I will break you people down yet! Deborah Jewell-Sherman! Boy, I usually get this silence before I get to the last name...Richmond.

What do Atlanta (Beverly Hall), Austin (Pat Forgione), and Richmond, what do they have in common? - I generally assume that for most purposes the most important metrics we have of how good a school system is doing are the NAEP test and how well cities do on the NAEP on one hand and how well they do on the graduation rate from high school. Those cities- Atlanta, Austin and Richmond- are among the leaders in both of those categories. This audience kind of messed me up because usually when you get to Beverly Hall there's this silence- this audience is too focused, there are too many people from Penn here, you know too much. But the point I wanted to make is that when you put these names up before of most audiences, when you begin to name the people who lead the work that I believe to be the most important large-scale work in this country, they're not nearly as well known as other educational leaders. It's almost as if there's an inverse relationship between how much a superintendent has done and how well known that superintendent is nationally. And I know there are lots of other things which intervene in that relationship, including the size of the city, but I just wanted to point your attention to the possibility that there is an underlying dynamic in which our national conversation has been shaped in such a way that it sweeps the most important things under the rug while less important things manage to hog more than their fair share of our attention, which is what I mean when I say that too much of our national conversation is a conversation that is missing the point. And I'm going to try to illustrate that by talking about three kinds of discussions and how I see them. The discussion about school choice, the discussion about merit pay for teachers, and the discussion about turnarounds, all of which I think in various ways are missing the point of the things that I think we should be thinking about.

Choice. There are lots of rationales for school choice, and let me say at the beginning by the way that at a purely moral level, I don't have an issue with choice. If public policy is organized in such a way that it gives important choices to privileged people, it's hard for me to see why less privileged people shouldn't have the same choice to the degree that we can make that possible. At a purely moral level I have never been able to mount an argument against choice. How it works out in practice is a much different, and

often more complicated. There are many ways to justify, many rationales, that people bring to bear when they are advocating for school choice. The strongest level of the argument, I think, is that by giving students and parents the rights to choose the best schools, the weaker schools are forced to do better or go out of existence. You create a competitive, market-driven system in which those who can't keep up, those who can't do quality work, are simply forced out of business by superior institutions.

And notice by the way this assumption, that we will come back to later, that what schools need is a kick in the pants, that the problem is a lack of urgency, the problem is that people aren't working hard enough, and that the key, the crucial lever, to change those crucial things, is more pressure. And footnote: to anybody who hasn't figured out by now that accountability is a part of the answer is simply a fool. You can't argue about whether or not it's a part of the answer. That's not what I'm saying- I'm saying that in this form, the strong form of the choice argument, accountability becomes *the* lever, the whole answer. That's why I'm complaining about it. So far, as you in Philly know better than I, again this audience may know everything I'm about to say, it's turning out to be much more complicated than that. What we see in Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago, are growing fears that school choice is in fact reinforcing social inequality. It is deepening the stratifications of race, ethnicity, and class that we had before we had these policies. Some of that fear is based on the (apparently) true fact that some parents are much better at working out the informational issues, working out the complexities of the application processes in these cities, and so what choice does is take our most sophisticated parents and take them out of contact with neighborhood schools, so this is loss of social capital.

There is a study which I think of as very much in the Research for Action tradition of telling the emperor about his apparel. A forthcoming study from Research for Action finds that as choice is implemented in Philadelphia, it is not clear that it should be called "choice;" that there is a very low incidence of students being assigned to their chosen schools, so much so that the report is going to suggest that a majority of students do not in fact choose the high school that they go to. In fact, it's much more a system of school choice than it is of student choice. That is what the choice policy as enacted has done is empower schools – the good schools – that are getting far more applicants than they have seats to pick and choose among the students, empowering them to reject the students they don't like, and you can guess for yourselves which students they are likely to reject. Choice, according to the forthcoming study, is also leading to a higher concentration of special needs and low performing students in the neighborhood schools. Choice is also destabilizing the neighborhood schools by making it more difficult for them to know who is going to be coming to those schools until school actually starts. I think that the estimate is that, in the neighborhood schools, they don't know who 18% of their students are going to be until after the first day of school. How do you plan for that population if you don't know who's coming? Again, you are systematically making the neighborhood schools, which are already the most stressed schools, you are systematically making their work more difficult.

But, let me make you feel a little better here- you are probably doing this better than Chicago. Doesn't that just make your heart twitter? At least you have a centralized system of applications. In Chicago, every high school makes up its own application form, sends out its own application form, and then makes its own decisions upon reasons that are not entirely clear to any of us about who to accept and who to reject. I have been in schools, where counselors, my students in fact, were calling such-and-such

a good high school, asking why they had never received the application forms that the school had required, and they had been told by high school counselors, “We don’t like to send application forms to that address. We don’t like to send application forms to that neighborhood.” Now what I find interesting is not that it happens- of course it’s going to happen, you give people this kind of freedom- but that it’s been so institutionalized that people think it’s ok to say that. “We don’t send applications to the south side or the west side” – that you can say that and not fear that anything is going to happen to you, because nothing is going to happen to you. Again, you can just take your best guess as to which kids are most likely to be rejected. Whatever the merits of choice and moral principle, as it’s being enacted in most of the cities where I have any sense of the process right now, it’s making hard situations harder.

In retrospect- I feel almost silly saying this- the right way to have done this would be to increase the number of good options first, and create choice policy second. Once a lot of schools are above some threshold of quality, then we can have a meaningful conversation about choice. Until that happens, it’s hard for me to imagine any choice policy that’s not going to make the rich richer. It’s interesting that you can argue that a lot of what the national conversation on schools is doing is dancing around the question of “how are we going to confront our toughest schools?” We have a new tough-talking generation of urban school leaders, and frankly I find much of what they say, much of what they do, these new superintendents and CEOs, I find a good bit of it admirable. They are saying some things that needed to have been said long ago. But for all the tough talk, I don’t see many of them as being willing to engage, to confront the fundamental issues affecting our toughest schools- the issues of the quality of leadership, the issues of the quality of instruction, the issues of the character of school climate. There are all kind of direct ways to think about those, but the new generation of leadership seems very reluctant to take those issues anything like a head-on fashion. There are certainly places, and it happens, I think, to be the places which are moving the NAEP, where that is not true, where leadership is confronting those issues in a very straightforward fashion. I think those are the places that in our national discussion we discuss least.

What I have to say about merit pay significantly overlaps with that. In principle...teachers should be paid a lot, I’m on board with that. In principle, I don’t see any great reason to be opposed to this. As a researcher, I have never been able to find any significant body of evidence which suggests that you can get broad, sustainable change through these merit pay systems. To be honest I’m not that much bothered by that. I know perfectly well that sometimes you have to try some things where the evidence is shaky. But what that means for me is you think of that as kind of venture capital. For those kinds of ideas, you put some relatively small amount of resources in them and see if they pan out. Some of the ways people are talking about merit pay now seem to be smarter than the ways we talked about them twenty years ago- the idea of combining merit pay with professional development, that’s a thought.. If you make the reward large enough, I can see why that would make a difference, although I’m not sure how sustainable that is. Still, this is not where you put your rent money, this is not where you put basic resources. You can have some exploratory, some gambling money, but you can’t put five billion dollars, which I believe is the last figure I heard for what the government is contemplating putting into merit pay systems, into something as unproven as this.

That's one issue for me. The other issue is sort of different. The level of disrespect for educators in some corners of this country, the degree of contempt that some very important people have for education as a profession, has become so corrosive that even when people are pushing what I am sure might be, could be, good ideas, they do those ideas- given their disrespect for educators- they do those ideas in ways which almost guarantee that those ideas are not going to have good consequences. There is probably a way to make merit pay work, but to the degree that merit pay is driven, by this notion of teachers as being squirrels and you feed them peanuts and they run faster, you give a hamster another food pellet and the hamster turns the wheel- this notion that a fundamental problem of urban schools is the motivation of individuals, that that's a key obstacle... I think that's flat false. Now mind you, mind you...I don't know, James Lytle [former superintendent of the Trenton Public Schools] is in the room so I have to be careful what I say about this. For most audiences I could say "I can tell you stories about lazy, hide-behind-the-contract, I'm-outta-here-at-two-fifteen teachers"- longer than anyone in the room. I can tell those stories for a very long time. I'm working with a school trying to set up a math tutoring program this fall. What we're asking classroom teachers to do is to give us a sense of what you want us working with with your children, just tell us what their priorities are. This child doesn't get fractions, this child doesn't get equations- Whatever, just tell us where the child is, give us the map. I had a teacher ask,, "Is this in the union contract?" A question like that can make me lose all civility. I can give you examples of the unmotivated, lazy, uncaring teacher- but that's *not the* problem. That is how normal people react to being in an unsupportive, under-resourced, dysfunctional environment. Both teachers and students are acting out in response to that environment in their own ways- that is not who they are, that is how they react to the situation that we have placed them in.

What merit pay in some formulations is doing, reducing the problem to individual teacher motivation, is simply missing the core issues of the context in which we expect teachers to work. Intervention based on that analysis is going to be intervention which intervenes at the wrong level. The whole notion that the unit of intervention is the individual teacher is by and large for me, again, wrongheaded. That is not the way to think of it. It is not how we intervene with and support the individual teachers. It is how we make faculties better. It is how we make the collective social unit a stronger social unit. I can't prove this, but I strongly believe that the power for change is in the social unit, the greatest power, not the individual, and when we get the social unit stuff right, when we get teachers pushing and challenging each other, supporting each other, most of the teachers in our school, can do what it takes to do their jobs well enough to change the life chances of our children. We do not have to bring in hordes of young people from Ivy League colleges- I think they have a role to play too but I don't see them as saviors, although I do know some who see themselves as saviors. I don't know how many variables the Consortium for Chicago School Research collects on each Chicago school- its something in the range of 70 to 80 things that they look at. One of the most powerful collectors of the capacity to change they have is the variable called "collective sense of responsibility." When a faculty believes that all children are all of our responsibilities, it doesn't matter whose classroom they are in, we are all responsible for what happens. Schools like that, no matter what the demographics are, are much more likely to change. That tells us something, I think, about the power of the social unit.

By the way, let me indulge myself by doing a brief commercial: the Consortium's most important book, Organizing Schools for Improvement, will be out in December from University of Chicago press. It is one way, I think, to go into conversations about how we change the most difficult schools- it is essentially a summary of what they think they've learned in twenty years of trying to look at Chicago schools.

Finally, let me say something about turnarounds. I believe the last federal plan that I heard reference to - I think it maybe was part of "Race to the Top," I've forgotten - the last federal plan I heard reference to called for identifying 5000 of the lowest-performing high schools in the country and turning them around, that is, making drastic differences in a year or two. Now I have really changed my tune on this one, because when I first heard it I said, "okay, here we go again, another empty buzz word, another big fancy concept which describes something that the people talking about it have no idea how to do on a consistent basis." We have had a long history of that power. I used to be... to a degree, I still am... very distrustful of quick change and complicated situations. I believe in going slow and making sure that actual change is happening. Almost nobody in this room is old enough to appreciate this, but if this were WWII, I would be Eisenhower and not Patton...Yeah, forget that, nobody thinks that way anymore. The truth is, in the last couple years, I have seen some of the worst high schools I know in Chicago come to life and become places where it's not crazy to send a kid- not dangerous to send a kid. I'm actually beginning to think some pretty positive things are going on in Chicago under that turnaround label. It's the more complicated problem that the value isn't where people think it is. What most people hear (and certainly this was the case in Chicago), what most people hear when they hear "turnaround," is "sweep out the old faculty and bring in a new faculty." In Chicago, most of the schools have replaced 90-95% of the faculty, and part of the reason for that is that old schools, even if they have good faculty, have dysfunctional cultures- I certainly believe this- so if you get rid of the teachers you're getting rid of the culture, you're bringing in new teachers, you're bring in a new culture and therefore you've got a shot, right? Nah. It turns out it's much more complicated than that.

Now I have no evidence for this beyond the anecdotal- a number of my students are in turnaround schools, they're wonderful spies, and I do know a significant part of the leadership in Chicago for turnaround schools. What I'm hearing is that people have consistently been disappointed with how difficult it is to get these new, carefully recruited, hand selected faculties to actually work together. It turns out that they don't come void of culture- they come with a set of attitudes based on where they had been. So they come in with certain predispositions about the degree to which one can trust one's colleagues, and certainly, they come in with some predispositions about the degree to which one can trust the leadership. And, by way of footnote, watching these schools and how they work, one of the things I've come to worry about is the sheer level of pressure they put on teachers, and the form of that pressure in the schools that I know best is often just telling teachers, "You know, if things don't get better, you will be gone." And I really think that it's ok to say that once in a while, but it just seems like teachers are almost beaten down with that idea. Anyway, that's a concern. The more important thing I wanted to say is that what we've seen in some of the worst high schools, some of the most dangerous high schools in Chicago: dramatic reductions in the level of serious crime, significant improvements in attendance- 20 to 30% in four and five month periods. Significant improvements in attendance, significant improvement on track rates. And a few of the schools, maybe half, I'm not sure, in some of

the schools we've seen a significant improvement in test scores, but all of the schools have been able to do the attendance/behavior stuff pretty well, all of the high schools I mean. Only some of them are moving test scores, and I'm actually not surprised by that, because that is just more difficult. But I think, if I'm understanding what I'm seeing in these schools, some of the worst schools in Chicago are- within a three to four year period, they're going to double their graduation rate. Okay, well they started in the 20s and 30s, and I'm saying they can get into the 40s or 60s, so by any reasonable standards... but you know, for the neighborhoods they're in, for the kids that they serve, now more kids are going to have the chance of getting some kind of initial credential. It is a significant change if we can sustain it.

The problem is, I don't think, again, it has very much to do with, "Well, we fired that faculty and we brought in a brand new, spanking clean and shiny faculty," right? There is something to that, but from what I can see, that's not what- the people in the building talk mostly about the level of resources that people get, which is something that's not talked about in the national conversation. They get 25 to 35 percent more money than other Chicago high schools, and what they do with much of that money is spend it on social supports for children. So they're creating job categories which did not exist five years ago: on-track counselors, 9th grade counselors, personalization counselors, transition counselors. They have more than quadrupled the number of social workers, but most of you know what that means: they go from having a half a social worker to having 2 social workers. Still, compared to where they were, it says something about how the leadership of these schools is thinking, that social supports for adolescents is a crucial- not an add-on, not an option- it's a crucial part of what you have to do working in these cities. Some schools have reinvented the job of truant officer, which is a position that was sort of officially done away with in Chicago a decade or so ago. Academically, what I see in these schools is much more coherence and more aligned curriculum- people know what teachers are teaching, teachers are teaching what they're supposed to, it is being monitored. The Academy for Urban School Leadership has probably been overall the most successful leader of the turnaround schools; it trains its own teachers from day one so that the people they send into buildings think alike and use a similar language, have a common pedagogical approach.

The other thing that I should say, and again this is very much personal judgment, I am overall impressed by the leaders of the turnaround effort in Chicago. I think they are thoughtful, and self-critical, mission-driven people. At Harper High School, one of the most violent schools in the city, last fall, students came back, realized there was not an adult in their building that they knew, and they went bananas. They drove that staff crazy. They were punishing people for taking "their" teachers,-- they knew those teachers, they were friends with some of those teachers. And those kids came back mad and punishing. This year the people who saw that said "Aha." And by the way some of the same kids who were angriest at Harper at the beginning of the year appreciated the calmer, safer, more orderly environment that Harper had achieved by the spring of the year, and Harper did go up something like 25% in attendance over the course of the year. But the people who were in charge said, "Oh, we blew it. We did not think in terms of what faculty turnover does to social capital in the school." So when they went into Fenger-- Fenger is a school which had so much publicity lately because of the Derrion Albert tragedy...when they went into Fenger last spring, they got a group of students and said, you students will interview everybody we consider hiring. Every single teacher has to come down and sit before a panel of students

and the students will have a vote in order to create some sense among the students that, yes, there will be a lot of new faces in the building when you come back, but you've had some voice, you had some part in selecting those faces. Now again, that's, I'll use the cliché, that is thinking outside the box, that is saying "Oh, we made a mistake and we're willing to correct it." A group of community groups that I work with took the leadership of turnaround schools to task for the way in which they parachute into a school: parents open the newspaper one morning and they say "Oh, our high school is being turned around, the whole faculty is being fired!" That's the way parents initially found out which schools. So it was suggested to them that you need to create a community-friendly way to do turnarounds. Six months later, they came back with a detailed way to think about how you operationalize the idea of community turnaround. What I'm saying is that the folk in charge in Chicago, so far as I know them and can judge, are a long way from the old time-serving bureaucrats. They're thinking about how to get this right, and they're willing to admit that they've made mistakes and to make adjustments.

One idea that I'm fascinated by- and I will just mention this to you because I know there are lots of school people in the audience- I've never thought about this: they have worked out something in which, say, the principal of West Philly High goes to the principal of South Philly High and they say, I'll take your ten worst boys if you take my ten worst boys. So they exchange the boys who account for an enormous disproportion of the discipline problems in the schools, and so far what they're saying is, when the kid changes schools, the level of inappropriate behavior goes down dramatically. And what they think it's about is that you are separating kids from their negative support structures, you're taking the leader away from his "boys," and when you take him away from his "boys" it is a different kind of kid. If you go to one school you have carved out a role for yourself as the "baddest" person in that school, once that role is carved out, you have to work to maintain that role. And if you go off someplace else, if it's structured with the appropriate supports, you're given another chance to recreate yourself, to become somebody else.

Anyway what I'm trying to say, again, is that people are thinking very hard and very creatively about how to do some of this work, and one of the things that scares me is that I'm not sure how, when the federal government forces this thing to go to scale, how are you going to ensure the quality of leadership? How do you keep out the profit-seeking hacks? How do you keep that to a minimum, since the truth is I don't think you can keep them out. Anyway, all of that is to say that so far as I can see from the turnaround schools that I'm looking at, I am developing this hypothesis that says something like: yes, it may well be possible to turn schools around much more rapidly than we had believed. It requires more, an order of magnitude more resources. It's not 5 or 10%, it's a whole lot more resources. With significant parts of those resources invested in social supports for children, it requires institutionalizing higher expectations for behavior and instruction, and it requires really, really deep leadership. Under those circumstances, maybe it is possible to take those high schools that no child should be allowed to go to, and do something with them.

My point of course is, I'm fairly certain that as the turnaround idea gets debated nationally in the months to come, it's not going to be debated in those terms. It will be largely framed, I think, in the much more punitive, clean sweep approach: get rid of the old folks and bring in the new ones, and that's a turnaround. Given the national climate, I'm afraid that the idea can get reduced to its simplest

form: back up the truck and fire everybody. I guess maybe that actually states again my underlying fear about all of this, that the national conversation is so focused on a few relatively simplistic, and, if you will, “get rich quick” ideas, that we may not be able to learn from our own experiences. We are ignoring, I believe, we collectively as a nation and intellectual community, we are ignoring some hard-learned lessons. For 18 years, Research for Action has urged us to pay attention to what I think absolutely are the core issues: teaching, relationships, resources, organization, civic capacity. The more carefully we attend to that kind of thinking, the sooner we will be able to give children the kinds of schools that they should be in. I have no doubt that Research for Action is going to continue to be a leader in that discussion. And with that, I am sure we all say to Dr. Shaw, welcome and bright beginnings. And to Eva and Jolley we will say “asante sana.” My understanding is that in Swahili, that means “We are very, very glad that you came our way.” And with that, let’s give them a round.

Audience Question (grad student): I was just curious as to what your thoughts and opinions were about organizations, such as Teach for America, and Teaching Fellows, and how they approach the selection of their teachers?

Dr. Payne: I don’t know Teaching Fellows. Teach for America I’m really ambivalent about. My attitude has been shaped significantly by superintendents I know who say that the Teach for America students they get are of better quality than the other teachers they normally get, and they don’t leave that much sooner, in the school systems that have a high turnaround rate. I do work with a group of schools in Chicago, and my guess is I probably will be encouraging them to use some Teach for America, although I am much more concerned with putting our efforts into creating pipelines of people who are likely to stay in our schools and stay in our profession. Beyond that obvious point, the concern for me is that Teach for America has, like charter schools, become a distraction. They help some, on balance judging from what I’ve seen. Still, they are not a solution.

We need to be giving more of our attention to more robust interventions, programs like the Boston teacher residency programs. I wish that some of the worry that is going into “Is Teach for America good or bad?” were going into “How do we scale up residency programs and make them better?” They are showing promise of producing teachers who are highly effective and who stay in these systems. To some degree, again, we always pay more attention to privileged people. Plus, Teach for America is brilliant at the media stuff. But they have really become a distraction in this discourse. They are just not that important, is the truth, I think. Though again, some of the folk that come through there are of quite high quality and they are going on to do important things. And the Teaching Fellows program I just don’t know. Is that a Philadelphia program? A new teacher project? Okay.

Audience Question (public school employee): I work in Philadelphia public schools, I’ve done that for a long time. And I’m a very frustrated black man, and I have to put the blackness out there, because that’s the way I view the world. Now, we have had more research than you can talk about. But from my

perspective as a black teacher, I don't see things happening at the teaching level. You can't legislate common sense, you can't legislate caring. National policy, no matter what is decided at the national level, how are we going to get real human beings to interact with real children, to understand the magnitude of the work, and how are we going to get policy makers to get it, to get that at the grad student level, who comes into the classroom, you have to have committed people- they have to care, they have to show love, they have to exercise good judgment. You cannot legislate me to teach well. The whole notion of good teaching- how are you going to have merit pay when nobody knows what good teaching is? There is no study that has established parameters, and it's impossible given the different decisions that on the spot a teacher has to make. So that's my frustration. I've been working at this for years, and I see people doing all sorts of things at the top level but I see very little being done where the teacher meets the student.

Dr. Payne: Boy, if we open this up, this could be the last question, we could go on for another hour on this one. Let me say, and I'll be willing to argue this sort of off line, off stage after this, I'm just going to assert and hope you'll let me get away for a second, that the idea that it's impossible to measure good teaching is flat false. If measuring good teaching means can we identify behaviors, things which happen in the classroom, which reliably predict youth outcomes, we can do that. There are certain kinds of questions, certain kinds of material, certain kinds of pacing, that are more productive than others. That's not that big of a deal, right?

Now the other thing: can you legislate, can you scale up, can you reproduce the behaviors that we identify as positive? Yeah, you can, and again there are people who are doing this, and have been. I don't know when Anthony Alvarado- I used to think of Anthony Alvarado as the "urban schools superintendent:" God got up one morning and said I'm going to make me an urban schools superintendent, and he made Anthony Alvarado. There was a time in which you could say that Anthony Alvarado was the only person who had large scale success in three different districts, counting districts 2 and 4[in New York City] as different districts. And part of what Alvarado said to teachers was "here is how I want you to teach. It is not your job to judge it, it's your job to teach it the way I tell you to. The job of my principals is to make sure that you're doing that, and if you do that then I am responsible for test scores, but if you don't do that then I'm going to get you out of my schools. It is not open for debate." That didn't work so well in San Diego, as some of you know. But what I'm saying is that he articulated and forced a style of pedagogy.

Part of what I understand Beverly Hall to be doing in Atlanta is, one, putting lots of energy into developing highly sophisticated, instructionally oriented leaders. On the other hand, centralization of instruction is a not all bad- of course here in Philly, you guys have your own version of this. On the other hand, she's centralizing many parts of the instructional process and not leaving them to individual choice. There is almost no system in this country, no matter how powerful the union is, where you cannot put enough pressure on that you can get rid of at least the lower level of teachers. You go into a teacher's classroom every day and you demand lesson plans every day. You give that person, corrective action plans - you can put lots of pressure on if the collective leadership of a system is really clear and

really confident about what good instruction looks like. Now that is where I think the thing breaks down. It's not that we can't do it, it's that we don't produce enough leadership cadres that have the clarity and the confidence. Right now we have (everybody knows that I'm oversimplifying, right?) two different kinds of leaders... *three* different kinds of leaders on this scene. The dominant urban leader has always been the time-serving clock-watching bureaucrat. Those are the folk who have run urban schools since the 1950s. We now have this new group of folk represented by Mr. Huberman, by Mr. Klein: the business-oriented, high-energy, do everything yesterday kind of reformist. Then you have the sort of Beverly Hall, Jerry Weast, the guy from Montgomery County, who do have a vision of instruction at scale. I think that both, those latter two classes, both have, and this is again probably oversimplified, but one of the big problems we have in this country right now is marrying the better parts of the business-oriented reformers with the better parts of the instruction-oriented reformers, to get both of those kinds of energy and talent at the table at the same time. Let me leave that there. It's just doable, with leadership.

Audience Question: Is transferring low-performing teachers from one low-performing school to another likely to produce the same positive outcomes as transferring the ten difficult kids from one to another?

Dr. Payne: I've forgotten what system this language comes from but that's called the "Dance of the Lemons." The truth is that probably is too simplistic. You have to understand that there are different kinds of "bad," and there is one kind of "bad" teacher that is going to be bad no matter what the context is. Another kind of "bad" teacher is one who doesn't fit into a particular context. Some of the principals that I most respect in terms of their capacity to shape staff, take the position that the fact that a teacher didn't work one place doesn't mean that they can't get that teacher to work. It's a matter of whether or not you can establish the right relationship with that teacher. So after careful scrutiny, they may take teachers who failed in some other building. . You could argue that if you're going to have bad teachers, have bad stable teachers, because the stability will produce some positive outcome in terms of their relationships with kids and parents, even if you hold teaching constant. I don't even want to think about that as an option. So no, we need to stop the "Dance of the Lemons."

Germaine Ingram: And we need to stop the question and answer.

Sharon Ravitch: So we'd like to thank Charles Payne very much for coming and sharing, and for being the intellectual and civic leader that he is for all of us. This lecture will be available on our website, on RFA's website, if you'd like to share this with fellow students, faculty advocates, or anyone else who would benefit from his wisdom. As Germaine mentioned earlier in the introductions, Charles will be signing books right outside of the theater. We'd like to offer that you sign up for RFA's mailing list, and people are walking around with clipboards to allow you to do that. We'd really like to thank all of you for coming and showing your support for the topic, and for RFA, and thank you, Charles, again, really. We are thrilled that you agreed to kick off this *Transitions and Transformations* event. Anyone here who is planning to attend the fundraising portion of this event, who has not already purchased tickets, there are a few left available, and for everyone else we would like to thank you for being a part of this. We would like to thank RFA particularly and Jolley and Eva for really being thought leaders locally and nationally and for being a north for researchers here and across the country. Thank you very much.