

Glossary of Education Terms

ability grouping

Assigning students to classes based on their past achievement or presumed ability to learn (also known as homogeneous grouping). Grouping students according to their actual progress in a particular school subject is different from grouping them according to assumptions about their ability to learn the subject—although the results may be quite similar. And grouping them by subject is different from tracking, which strictly speaking refers to placing them in the same groups for all their classes based on their general ability to learn. Students may also be grouped within classes, but intraclass grouping permits more flexibility so is less controversial.

Whether students should or should not be grouped by ability is a persistent issue in education. Advocates say it is unrealistic to expect teachers to provide for the great range of differences in student backgrounds and abilities, and that a certain amount of grouping is better for students. Critics contend, citing research, that when students are grouped by ability, those in lower tracks are usually taught poorly and don't get exposed to "high-status" knowledge.

accreditation

Official recognition that an individual or institution meets required standards. Accreditation of teachers is usually referred to as licensing or certification. Schools are accredited in two ways: by voluntary regional accrediting associations (such as the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement), and by state governments, which are legally responsible for public education. Most high schools seek and receive accreditation by their regional association so that their graduates will be accepted by institutions of higher education. However, that form of accreditation does not necessarily ensure recognition by the state. In recent years, some states have begun to refuse state accreditation to schools with unacceptably low scores on state standards tests.

achievement tests

Tests used to measure how much a student has learned in various school subjects. Most students take several standardized achievement tests, such as the California Achievement Tests and the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. These norm-referenced, multiple-choice tests are intended to measure students' achievement in the basic subjects found in most school districts' curriculum and textbooks. Results are used to compare the scores of individual students and schools with others—those in the area, across the state, and throughout the United States.

advanced placement (AP) program

College-level courses offered by high schools to students who are above average in academic standing. Most colleges will award college credit to students who pass one of the nationally standardized AP tests. Passing AP tests can save students time and tuition on entry-level college courses.

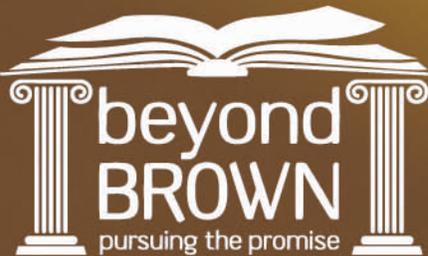
alternative schools

Schools that differ in one or more ways from conventional public schools. Alternative schools may reflect a particular teaching philosophy, such as individualization, or a specific focus, such as science and technology. Alternative schools may also operate under different governing principles than conventional schools and be run by organizations other than local school boards.

The term alternative schools is often used to describe schools that are designed primarily for students who have been unsuccessful in regular schools, either because of disabilities or because of behavioral or emotional difficulties. However, some proponents argue against establishing "last chance" or

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

alternative schools (continued)

"remedial" schools in which the students are seen as a problem to be fixed. They say a better approach is to alter the program and environment to create a positive match with each student.

Although some school districts continue to operate alternative schools established a few years ago, those districts starting new unconventional schools these days often characterize them as charter schools.

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

One of the two large teacher unions (the other is the National Education Association). The AFT represents about 1 million teachers, school support staff, higher education faculty and staff, health-care employees, and state and municipal employees. The AFT is affiliated with the AFL-CIO.

aptitude tests

Tests that attempt to predict a person's ability to do something. The most familiar are intelligence tests, which are intended to measure a person's intellectual abilities. The theory underlying intelligence tests is that each person's mental ability is relatively stable and can be determined apart from her knowledge of subject matter or other abilities, such as creativity. Some aptitude tests measure a person's natural ability to learn particular subjects and skills or suitability for certain careers.

at-risk students

Students who have a higher than average probability of dropping out or failing school. Broad categories usually include inner-city, low-income, and homeless children; those not fluent in English; and special-needs students with emotional or behavioral difficulties. Substance abuse, juvenile crime, unemployment, poverty, and lack of adult support are thought to increase a youth's risk factor.

The term came into use following the 1983 report of the Commission on Excellence, which declared America's public schools to be "at risk." Educators responded that the real problem was society's neglect of certain students.

Some advocates question use of the term "at risk," arguing that it may affect the way teachers, administrators, and peers view the student. But they agree that such students need special attention and support, including caring adults who challenge them with high expectations.

attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

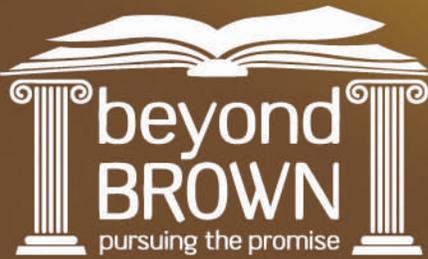
Children diagnosed with attention deficit disorder tend to have problems staying on task and focusing on conversations or activities. ADD children may be impulsive, easily distracted (e.g., by someone talking in another room or by a passing car), full of unfocused energy, fidgety, and restless.

Many people with ADD are also hyperactive and may move rapidly from one task to another without completing any of them. Hyperactivity, a disorder of the central nervous system, makes it difficult for affected children to control their motor activities. More than half of students with learning disabilities exhibit behaviors associated with attention problems but do not necessarily have ADD.

According to the National Attention Deficit Disorder Association, ADHD is a "diagnosis applied to children and adults who consistently display certain characteristic behaviors over a period of time. The most common core features include: distractibility (poor sustained attention to tasks); impulsivity (impaired impulse control and delay of gratification); and hyperactivity (excessive activity and physical restlessness). In order to meet diagnostic criteria

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (continued)

these behaviors must be excessive, long-term, and pervasive. The behaviors must appear before age 7, and continue for at least 6 months. A crucial consideration is that the behaviors must create a real handicap in at least two areas of a person's life, such as school, home, work, or social settings. These criteria set ADHD apart from the 'normal' distractibility and impulsive behavior of childhood, or the effects of the hectic and overstressed lifestyle prevalent in our society."

Source: Quote from Fact Sheet on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD/ADD), 1998, Highland Park, IL: National Attention Deficit Disorder Association. Copyright 1998 by Peter Jaksa. Retrieved February 18, 2002, from <http://add.org/content/abc/factsheet.htm>

average daily attendance (ADA)

Based on counts taken on predetermined dates during the school year, average daily attendance is a factor used by state and federal departments of education to determine how much money schools are to receive.

behavior modification

Use of an approach based on behavioral science to change a person's way of doing things—specifically, systematic use of rewards, and sometimes punishments, to shape students' classroom deportment. Such systems usually involve explicit objectives, elaborate record keeping, and visible tracking of progress.

Used especially in special education classes for behaviorally disturbed students, behavior modification is controversial. Opponents say it is impersonal and mechanistic, makes students dependent rather than independent (at least at first), and borders on cruelty. Advocates see it as scientifically based and effective.

bilingual education

The use of two or more languages for instruction. In the United States, students in most bilingual classes or programs are those who have not acquired full use of the English language, so they are taught academic content in their native language (usually Spanish) while continuing to learn English. Bilingual education is controversial, having been outlawed in California and severely criticized in other places. Opponents say it is expensive, impractical, and prevents students from learning English rapidly and efficiently. Advocates say it gives language learning students access to the same academic curriculum as other students and that it allows limited English proficient (LEP) parents to remain involved in their children's studies. They claim that maintaining students' native language does not interfere with their learning of English and that research shows that bilingual instruction is effective.

block grant

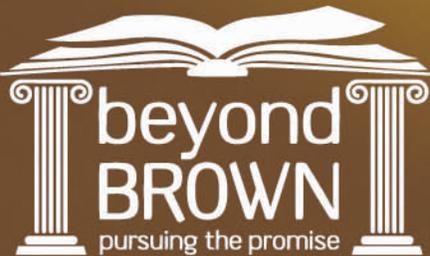
The result of combining funding for several separate government programs (usually federal) into a larger program with one set of requirements. A positive feature of such a grant is greater flexibility. When federal funds are released to states in the form of block grants, the individual states have more discretion in allocating the funds. Advocates believe that states can define and serve their own areas of need better than the federal government can. A negative aspect of block grants is that the total amount provided is often less than it would otherwise have been.

Brown v. Board of Education

The case heard by the United States Supreme Court in 1954 in which racial segregation in public schools was held to be unconstitutional.

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

charter school

A self-governing educational facility that operates under contract between the school's organizers and the sponsors (often local school boards but sometimes other agencies, such as state boards of education). The organizers are often teachers, parents, or private organizations. The charter may detail the school's instructional design, methods of assessment, management, and finances.

Charter schools usually receive government funding, may not charge tuition, must be nonsectarian and nondiscriminatory, and must be chosen by teachers, students, and parents. To renew their charters, these schools are expected to show that they meet the expectations of parents and their governing boards, continue to attract families, and retain and attract teachers. In exchange for this form of accountability, charter schools are free from most state and local regulations, often including teacher certification requirements.

classroom management

The way a teacher organizes and administers routines to make classroom life as productive and satisfying as possible. What some people might describe narrowly as "discipline." For example, teachers with good classroom management clarify how various things (such as distribution of supplies and equipment) are to be done and may even begin the school year by having students practice the expected procedures.

competency tests

Tests created by a school district or state that students must pass before graduating. Sometimes called minimum competency tests, such tests are intended to ensure that graduates have reached minimal proficiency in basic skills. In recent years, some states have replaced minimum competency tests adopted in the 1970s or '80s with more demanding tests aligned with adopted curriculum standards.

conflict resolution

Programs that teach students how to negotiate problems in a nonviolent way. Core concepts include recognizing that conflict can be a pathway to personal growth, understanding that there are alternative solutions to problems, and learning skills to solve problems effectively. Conflict resolution is often provided through peer mediation, in which children or teens assist other students to work through problems without resorting to violence.

core curriculum

The body of knowledge that all students are expected to learn. High schools often require a core curriculum that may include, for example, four years of English, three years of science and mathematics, two or three years of history, one or two years of a foreign language, and one year of health studies. Courses that are not required are called electives.

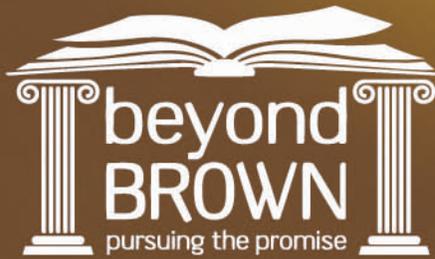
The term core curriculum was used in the mid-20th century to refer to a block-of-time program (two or more class periods) in which students and their teacher chose the topics they would study, but few of today's schools have such programs now.

curriculum

Although this term has many possible meanings, it usually refers to a written plan outlining what students will be taught (a course of study). Curriculum documents often also include detailed directions or suggestions for teaching the content. Curriculum may refer to all the courses offered at a given school, or all the courses offered at a school in a particular area of study. For example, the English curriculum might include English literature, literature, world literature, essay styles, creative writing, business writing, Shakespeare, modern poetry, and the novel. The curriculum of an elementary school

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

curriculum (continued)

usually includes language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and other subjects.

cyber schools

Educational institutions, many of them charter schools, that offer most or all of their instruction by computer via the internet. More such schools are being established each year.

decentralization

The deliberate reassignment of decision-making authority from states or districts to local schools based on the beliefs that people who are closest to a situation make better decisions and that people work hardest when implementing their own decisions. The primary vehicle for school decentralization in recent decades has been site-based management, under which decision-making authority has been delegated to local schools, often accompanied by a requirement that schools establish representative school councils.

diversity

In education, discussions about diversity involve recognizing a variety of student needs including those of ethnicity, language, socioeconomic class, disabilities, and gender. School reforms attempt to address these issues to help all students succeed. Schools also respond to societal diversity by attempting to promote understanding and acceptance of cultural and other differences.

dropouts

Students who leave high school before receiving a diploma. Because it is difficult to keep track of adolescents no longer in school, because students may re-enter schools and drop out again more than once, and because many students eventually get the equivalent of secondary education by means of GED tests, dropout rates are not completely accurate. However, many observers believe that the dropout rate is much higher than it ought to be.

dyslexia

A condition that hampers reading ability. Characteristics of dyslexia may include transposing letters and numbers when reading and writing; confusing hand dominance; difficulty in keeping track of the order of time, months, or seasons; hyperactivity; and difficulty with physical coordination and balance. The cause of dyslexia is unknown. Boys are four times more likely than girls to have this learning disability. Students with dyslexia need special resources and learning techniques to progress with their peers.

Edison schools

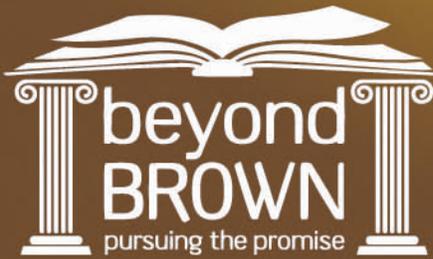
Schools run by the Edison Project, a private organization that contracts with local boards of education. All Edison schools (named to commemorate inventor Thomas Edison) are expected to follow the model developed by a design team headed by Benno Schmidt, former president of Yale University. Features of the model include extensive use of technology, individualized learning plans, teaching of values, and parent and community participation. Originally founded by Christopher Whittle, the Edison Project is an example of the privatization of public schools.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Teaching English to non-English-speaking or limited-English-proficient (LEP) students to help them learn and succeed in schools. ESOL (English for

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

General Educational Development (GED) exam (continued)

administered by the Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials of The American Council on Education.

As of January 2002, the GED consists of five tests that cover language arts-reading, language arts-writing, social studies, science, and mathematics. GED courses are often available in evening adult education programs in local school districts. The tests are given at 3,400 official GED testing centers across North America and elsewhere.

gifted and talented

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) says "a gifted individual is someone who shows, or has the potential for showing, an exceptional level of performance in one or more areas of expression." For example, a person may be exceptionally talented as an artist, a violinist, or a physicist.

For much of the twentieth century, giftedness was usually measured by IQ tests, and people who scored in the upper two percent of the population were considered gifted. However, some authorities believe that giftedness is indicated not so much by test scores as by consistently exceptional performance. Federal legislation refers to gifted and talented children as those who show high performance capability in specific academic fields or in areas such as creativity and leadership, and who, to fully develop their capabilities, require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school.

Source: Quote from "Who Are the Gifted?" in Parent Information [Web page], Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children. Retrieved February 21, 2002, from <http://www.nagc.org/ParentInfo/index.html>

Head Start

Established in 1965, Head Start is intended to foster healthy development of low-income children to help them succeed in school. Head Start and Early Head Start are federally sponsored, comprehensive child development programs that serve children from birth to age 5 as well as pregnant women and their families. Head Start grantee and delegate agencies offer a range of individualized services in the areas of education and early childhood development; medical, dental, and mental health; nutrition; and parent involvement.

hidden curriculum

The habits and values taught in schools that are not specified in the official written curriculum. May refer to what critics see as an overemphasis on obedience, dependence, and conformity.

high-stakes tests

Tests used to determine which individual students get rewards, honors, or sanctions. Low-stakes tests are used primarily to improve student learning.

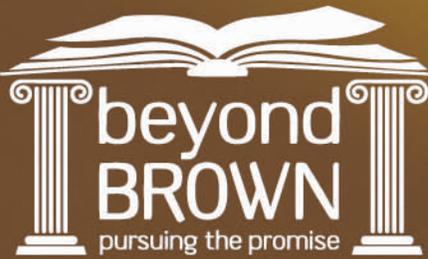
Tests with high stakes attached include college entrance examinations and tests students must pass to be promoted to the next grade. Tests affecting the status of schools, such as those on which a given percentage of students must receive a passing grade, are also considered high stakes.

homeschooling

Teaching children at home instead of sending them to public or private schools. Over the past decade, the number of homeschooling families has grown dramatically. In the mid-1980s there were only about 15,000 homeschools, but by 1994 the Department of Education estimated the number at about 345,000. A federal report issued in 2001 estimated that in 1999, the most recent year studied, at least 850,000 students were learning at home; some

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

homeschooling (continued)

experts believe the figure may now be more like 1.5 million. If so, homeschooled children would be about 4 percent of the total K-12 population.

State laws on the subject vary, but laws are changing rapidly in response to changing conditions. At one time many families chose homeschooling for religious reasons, but more are doing so now because of apparent dissatisfaction with the quality of public education. Families are beginning to network their homeschooling efforts with other families, and in some places, home schools and public schools are working together to benefit all the students. For example, some states and school districts permit homeschooled students to enroll part-time for particular classes or to participate in student activities.

illiteracy

Lack of the skills needed in a literate society. Whereas literacy once meant minimal ability to read and write, the term is now used to refer to many types of knowledge and skills, such as computer literacy. People may also speak of scientific, mathematical, economic, or musical literacy.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

A revision of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, the IDEA is a federal law passed in 1991 and amended in 1997 that guarantees a free appropriate public education for eligible children and youth with disabilities. According to the law, a child with a disability means a child with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities.

interdisciplinary curriculum

A way of organizing the curriculum in which content is drawn from two or more subject areas to focus on a particular topic or theme. Rather than studying literature and social studies separately, for example, a class might study a unit called The Sea, reading poems and stories about people who spend their lives on or near the ocean, learning about the geography of coastal areas, and investigating why coastal and inland populations have different livelihoods. Effective interdisciplinary studies have the following elements:

- A topic that lends itself to study from several points of view.
- One or more themes (or essential questions) the teacher wants the students to explore.
- Activities intended to further students' understanding by establishing relationships among knowledge from more than one discipline or school subject.

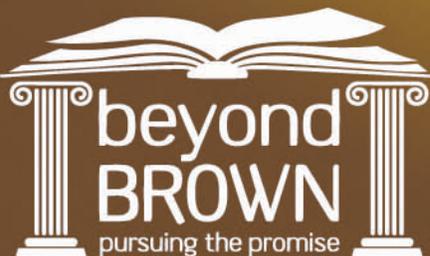
Interdisciplinary curriculum, which draws content from particular disciplines that are ordinarily taught separately, is different from integrated curriculum, which involves investigation of topics without regard to where, or even whether, they appear in the typical school curriculum at all.

IQ

Intelligence quotient—a number derived by dividing a child's "mental age" (derived from her score on an intelligence test) by her actual age. IQ is based on the principle that children who score well on intelligence tests have mental ability comparable to older children who are only average. A child whose performance would be expected for his age has an IQ of 100. A child with mental ability considerably higher than his actual age might have an IQ of 130. The term "IQ" is no longer used as frequently as it used to be, but intelligence tests continue to be scored using the familiar scale.

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

learning disability

A condition that interferes with a student's ability to learn. Even the definition of this term is controversial. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act amended in 1997 defines a specific learning disability as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. Such term may include such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia." Children not included under this provision include those who have learning problems which are "primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage."

learning disorder

Another term for learning disability, a condition that interferes with a student's ability to learn. For example, some people have dyslexia, which simply means reading disability. People with this condition have difficulty distinguishing among letters of the alphabet and translating words on paper into meaningful language.

low-performing schools

Schools, almost always located in urban or low-income rural areas, in which an unacceptably low proportion of students meet established standards, as indicated by test scores. Also called failing schools.

Some observers believe it is unfair to call such schools failing because, they say, the real failure is society's for allowing the social conditions that hamper student learning. Others point out that some schools, called effective schools, succeed in teaching low-income children, so others could do it too.

Because policies increasingly focus on such schools, and because test scores usually vary from year to year rather than going steadily up or down, state and national officials have devoted considerable attention to procedures for deciding which schools should be declared low-performing.

magnet schools

Alternative public schools, most of which focus on a particular area of study, such as performing arts or science and technology but also offer regular school subjects. Students from any part of the school district may enroll and the schools often have waiting lists. Most magnet schools were originally established by large urban school districts to help achieve racial desegregation, so they have entrance requirements intended to maintain racial balance. Some magnet schools have other entry requirements, such as achievement in the school's area of concentration, but others do not.

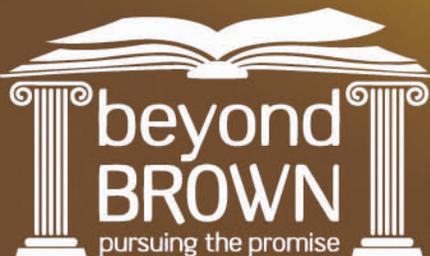
mainstreaming

The practice of placing students with disabilities into regular classrooms. The students usually also receive some assistance and instruction in separate classrooms, often called resource rooms. (Programs in which students with disabilities spend all or nearly all of their time in regular classrooms are called inclusion or full inclusion programs. Mainstreaming is also known as partial inclusion.)

Experts say successful mainstreaming requires regular communication and cooperation among teachers, students, and parents. Individualized Education Programs need to be jointly developed, thoroughly understood, and carefully followed. The classroom teacher may need special training and assistance from the special education staff. Mainstreaming is also more effective when regular students are given information about their peers with special needs.

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

mentor

A role model who offers support to another person. A mentor has knowledge and experience in an area and shares it with the person being mentored. For example, an experienced teacher might mentor a student teacher or beginning teacher.

Some student mentoring programs are designed to help at-risk students succeed in school. Acting as role models, mentors spend time with individual students once or twice a week—encouraging, listening, making suggestions, and taking the student to events, activities, or the mentor's place of employment to help the student learn about a career and consider further education.

multicultural education

Schooling that helps students understand and relate to cultural, ethnic, and other diversity, including religion, language, gender, age, and socioeconomic, mental, and physical differences. Multiculturalism is intended to encourage people to work together and to celebrate differences, not to be separated by them. However, the field itself is controversial.

Opponents of multicultural education feel that it detracts from students' knowledge of American history and commitment to traditional values, especially patriotism. Supporters feel that a multicultural approach provides a more balanced look at history and the world, and that studying several viewpoints increases students' depth of understanding.

Some multiculturalists believe that a natural first step toward helping students appreciate other cultures is first to focus on the students' own cultures. For example, they believe an Afrocentric curriculum gives African-American students pride in their cultural heritage. Other advocates believe that emphasizing the differences between groups promotes fragmentation and rivalries. They see multicultural education as a process that encourages teachers to integrate various cultures' beliefs, music, language, and social skills into each school subject, as appropriate.

multidisciplinary curriculum

Refers to curriculum in more than one discipline or subject area. People may use this term and related ones differently, but, in general, a multidisciplinary curriculum is one in which the same topic (e.g., harmony) is studied from the viewpoint of more than one discipline (e.g., music, history, and literature). For example, students may study weather using a variety of disciplines. They might study the current science behind measuring air pressure, learn about the history of weather prediction, and read and write poetry about weather.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

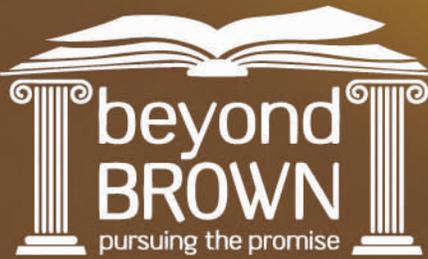
NAEP (pronounced "nape"), is also known as The Nation's Report Card. It is a federally funded program (currently contracted to Educational Testing Service in Princeton, N.J.) that provides information about the achievement of students nationally and state-by-state. NAEP tests a representative sample of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 each year and reports the results to the public.

National Education Association (NEA)

One of the two large teacher unions (the other is the American Federation of Teachers). NEA describes itself as America's oldest and largest organization committed to advancing the cause of public education. Founded in 1857 in Philadelphia and now headquartered in Washington, D.C., NEA has more than 2.5 million members who work at every level of education, from preschool to university graduate programs. It also has affiliates in every state and in more than 13,000 local communities across the United States.

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

neighborhood schools

The idea that children should be able to attend the public schools nearest their homes. School district boundaries are usually drawn to provide for this, although choice plans let parents decide which schools their children will attend.

Following the U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1956 outlawing segregated schools, many public school systems, especially those in large northern cities, adopted or were ordered by courts to implement desegregation plans under which some children were bused to schools away from their homes.

Opponents of such plans called for neighborhood schools instead.

outcomes

Intended results of schooling: What students are supposed to know and be able to do. Educators and others may use the term outcomes to mean roughly the same as goals, objectives, or standards; however, the word "outcomes" is associated with the idea of outcome-based education, which was controversial in the 1990s and is therefore avoided by most school systems today.

performance assessment

A form of assessment that is designed to assess what students know through their ability to perform certain tasks. For example, a performance assessment might require a student to serve a volleyball, solve a particular type of mathematics problem, or write a short business letter to inquire about a product as a way of demonstrating that they have acquired new knowledge and skills. Advocates believe such assessments—sometimes called performance-based assessments—provide a more accurate indication of what students can do than traditional assessments, which might require a student to fill in the blank, indicate whether a statement is true or false, or select a right answer from multiple given choices.

Evaluating students through task performance can be more time-consuming and therefore more expensive. Most large-scale assessments (such as state testing programs) use this form of assessment sparingly, if at all. But many educators believe it is worth the extra cost because it provides a more accurate and realistic picture of student learning.

phonics

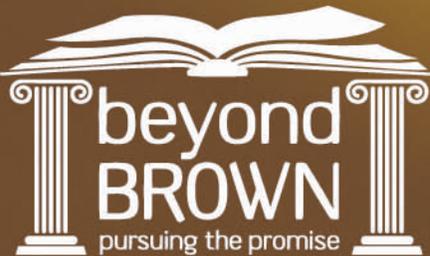
The relationship between the basic sounds of a language (phonemes) and the way those sounds are represented by symbols (letters of the alphabet). Many people see phonics as a method of teaching reading that begins with the study of individual letter sounds (44 basic sounds in English), progressing to words that contain those sounds, and only then to reading the words in stories. This approach, which might be described as systematic phonics, is opposite in theory and technique from the whole-language approach, which involves learning skills in the context of meaningful reading and writing. Most school reading programs are a compromise between these extremes. Teachers teach sound-letter correspondences but also have students spend part of their time on related reading and writing activities.

privatized schools

Public schools run by a for-profit company, usually under contract with the local board of education or some other government agency. Advocates believe that failing schools can benefit from more efficient management and from competition. Opponents dislike the idea that the corporations make money by educating children and argue that the profits should instead be used for teachers, equipment, and supplies.

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

PTA

With a membership of nearly 6.5 million, National PTA (also known as Parent Teacher Association) is a nonprofit organization of parents, teachers, students, and others that encourages parental and public involvement in the schools, advocates for children, and assists parents in developing parenting skills.

qualitative research

Research that uses methods adapted from anthropology and other social sciences, including systematic observation and interviews. Until recently, most educational research was quantitative. Some researchers are now using qualitative methods because they think statistical processes will not produce the understandings they seek. For example, a researcher might spend an entire year visiting a particular school; observing classes, meetings, and conversations; and seeking to identify the way decisions are made and the roles played by various staff members.

quantitative research

Research conducted in a traditional scientific manner using statistical procedures to compare the effects of one treatment with another. For example, a researcher might compare test scores of students taught using an experimental method with the scores of students taught in a more conventional way. Some researchers now see this approach as limited, so make greater use of qualitative research methods.

remedial education

Education intended to remedy a situation; that is, to teach students what they should already have learned. For example, reading classes at the high school or college level are considered remedial because most students learn to read in elementary school. The success of remedial education depends on several factors, including the teacher's approach and expectations, the instructional materials used, and the students' motivation to learn.

rubric

Specific descriptions of performance of a given task at several different levels of quality. Teachers use rubrics to evaluate student performance on performance tasks. Students are often given the rubric, or may even help develop it, so they know in advance what they are expected to do. For example, the content of an oral presentation might be evaluated using the following rubric:

Level 4—The main idea is well developed, using important details and anecdotes. The information is accurate and impressive.

The topic is thoroughly developed within time constraints.

Level 3—The main idea is reasonably clear and supporting details are adequate and relevant. The information is accurate.

The topic is adequately developed within time constraints but is not complete.

Level 2—The main idea is not clearly indicated. Some information is inaccurate.

The topic is supported with few details and is sketchy and incomplete.

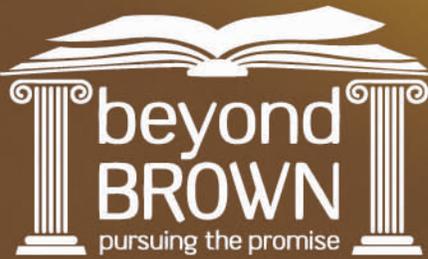
Level 1—A main idea is not evident. The information has many inaccuracies. The topic is not supported with details.

Scholastic Achievement Tests (SAT II; formerly ACH)

Subject-matter tests required for college entrance by many institutions of higher education. The SAT program is administered by The College Board, a 100-year-old, not-for-profit membership association.

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT I)

Formerly called the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the SAT was introduced in the 1950s and renamed in 1994. The SAT I is one of the two alternative standardized tests commonly used by institutions of higher education as a primary basis for evaluating a student's application for admission (the other is the ACT). According to The College Board, the name now reflects more accurately what the exam does: It measures what a student has learned, not what a student might hope to accomplish in life. The SAT I is taken each year by 1.3 million students from a variety of cultures, economic conditions, regions, and schools. Requiring three hours to take, the test has seven sections: three verbal, three mathematics, and a nonscored "equating" section used either to try out new questions or to set the scoring scale.

special education

Educational programs for students who, because they have a disability of some kind, require special instructional help to reach their potential. This may include specially trained teachers, innovative technology or instructional materials, access to a resource room, or even external placement. The term sometimes (but not usually) includes programs for those considered gifted.

standardized testing

Tests that are administered and scored under uniform (standardized) conditions. Because most machine-scored, multiple-choice tests are standardized, the term is sometimes used to refer to such tests, but other tests may also be standardized.

standards

In current usage, the term usually refers to specific criteria for what students are expected to learn and be able to do. These standards usually take two forms in the curriculum:

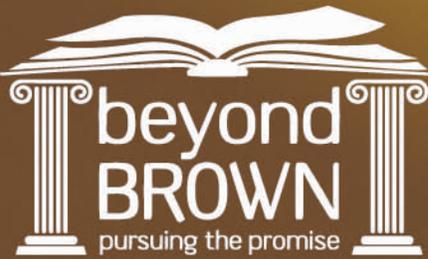
- Content standards (similar to what were formerly called goals and objectives), which tell what students are expected to know and be able to do in various subject areas, such as mathematics and science.
- Performance standards, which specify what levels of learning are expected. Performance standards assess the degree to which content standards have been met. The term "world-class standards" refers to the content and performances that are expected of students in other industrialized countries. In recent years, standards have also been developed specifying what teachers should know and be able to do.

teaching for understanding

Engaging students in learning activities intended to help them understand the complexities of a topic. Teaching for understanding is different from teaching simply for recall, which results in students being able to answer questions without knowing what their answers really mean. Specialists advise that a good way to know whether students understand is to ask them to perform a task that shows they can apply and make use of what they have learned in a realistic setting. For example, students might participate in a mock trial to demonstrate that they have developed their understanding of the rights of the accused.

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

teaching to the test

Preparing students for a test by concentrating on the particular things the test contains rather than on the broader body of knowledge the test is intended to measure. An extreme example would be drilling students on the 20 words the teacher knows will appear on a spelling test rather than teaching the whole set of words students are supposed to have learned to spell.

tenure

The legal provision that people in certain positions may not be fired without a good reason, which must be proven in court. Teachers and professors are often awarded tenure after a specified trial period. Once they have established their competence to teach and have been given tenure, they may not be dismissed for improper reasons, such as teaching an unpopular idea or belonging to the wrong political party. Opponents of tenure charge that the elaborate procedures required to dismiss a tenured person, commonly known as "due process," are so onerous that they prevent school systems from discharging poor teachers.

Title I

Refers to Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which is intended to improve education in high-poverty communities by targeting extra resources to schools and school districts with the highest concentrations of poverty. These are areas in which academic performance tends to be low and the obstacles to raising performance are the greatest.

First enacted as part of the War on Poverty, Title I was known for a while as Chapter I. ESEA must be periodically reauthorized. The most recent reauthorized version of the law, named No Child Left Behind, requires states to administer annual assessments in reading and math for all students in grades 3–8. Schools will be expected to demonstrate that all students are making adequate yearly progress in achieving proficiency on state standards, as measured by test scores. Schools not making adequate yearly progress will be targeted for improvement and they will receive additional assistance from the state. Schools continuing to not achieve adequate yearly progress will be subject to sanctions, including reconstitution of staff or conversion to a charter school.

tracking

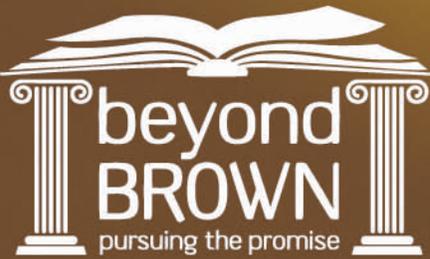
The practice of dividing students for instruction according to their perceived abilities. Students are placed on a particular track (college-bound, general, vocational, and remedial) and given a curriculum that varies according to their perceived abilities and future positions in life. At the elementary level, the practice is called grouping. Advocates argue that it makes instruction more efficient and provides students with instruction adapted to their abilities and previous knowledge. Critics argue that it deprives students of equal opportunity, unfairly and inaccurately labels some students, and perpetuates racial, ethnic, language, and social inequalities.

unit of study

A segment of instruction focused on a particular topic. School courses are frequently divided into units lasting from one to six weeks. For example, an American history course might include a four-week unit on The Westward Movement.

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

values education

Teaching children about basic human values including honesty, kindness, generosity, courage, freedom, equality, and respect. The goal is to raise children to become morally responsible, self-disciplined citizens. Because some values are controversial (such as attitudes toward homosexuality), parent groups have occasionally insisted that schools should not attempt to teach values at all. Taken literally, that would be impossible, because for children to live and work together, some values must be communicated and enforced. Character education programs frequently focus on a set of values arrived at by community consensus. These values may be taught through telling stories, holding discussions, and pointing out examples when they occur.

Values clarification, a form of values education used in some schools in the 1960s and '70s, has been strongly criticized as misguided and irresponsible. Proponents advised that students should discuss complex value issues (such as who should be thrown from an overloaded lifeboat) while teachers were to remain neutral. Even some of the advocates now admit that, without reasonable adult guidance, values clarification can be harmful. On the other hand, experienced parents and teachers know that, although it is important for adults to be clear about where they stand, students also benefit from opportunities to express their honest views as they think things out for themselves.

voucher

A certificate issued to parents that can be used as full or partial payment of tuition for any nonpublic school. Advocates of vouchers say low-income parents should be able to choose the kind of school their children will attend and that competition will improve the public schools. They argue that citizens should not be required to pay both school taxes and private school tuition. Opponents say that using government funds for private religious schools violates the separation of church and state, and that vouchers reduce the amount of funding available to public schools.

year-round schooling

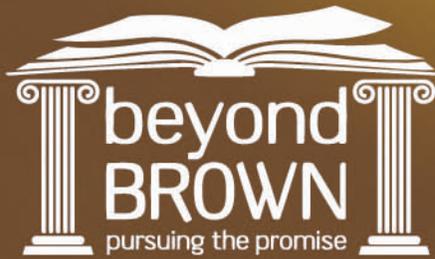
Replacing the conventional school year of 9–10 months and a long summer break with a continuous school year with breaks at other times. Advocates say the traditional school calendar reflects a society that needed children home in the summer to work on farms. In today's society, children are frequently left home alone in the summer with little to do.

School systems have devised several different year-round models. In the single-track approach, the lengthy summer vacation is replaced by several shorter breaks that are scattered throughout the calendar year. In one such plan, known as 45-15, the school year consists of four 45-day sessions separated by breaks of approximately 15 days each. The advantage is that students retain more information than they would over a long break and need less review, so can continue learning more readily. The breaks give both students and teachers more frequent opportunities to relax. Some schools offer minicourses and enrichment classes during breaks.

In a multitrack approach, most often used in rapidly growing communities, school is always in session, but only a portion of the students attend at any one time so that there is enough room to accommodate everyone. A school built to accommodate 750 students can be used to educate 1,000 students if, at any given time, 250 of them are on vacation. The multitrack method saves money that would otherwise have to be spent for school construction, although costs are incurred for the additional salaries, maintenance, and air conditioning (as needed). Families often resist both single-track and multitrack year-round schooling plans because they disrupt schedules and interfere with vacation plans, at least initially. Breaks at nontraditional times of the year, however, may allow families to enjoy less expensive, less crowded vacations.

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926



Glossary of Education Terms

year-round schooling (continued)

A different version of year-round schooling, seldom used because it is expensive, extends the school year from the conventional 180 days to as many as 247 school days.

zero tolerance

Provisions in legislation or official policies that require specified punishments for given offenses, no matter how slight the offense. Zero tolerance rules are adopted to send a message about unacceptable behavior, and adherents support them for that reason. However, school administrators who are permitted no flexibility in enforcing such rules are sometimes ridiculed in the press for their apparent poor judgment.

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise is available on DVD and VHS.

To order, visit www.firelightmedia.org, call 1-800-343-5540 or write Firelight Media, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926