



Jim Broadway

*Jim Broadway's*

## Illinois School News Service

Smart coverage of state education policy since 1995  
A civics seminar for public school advocates



Subscribe

Copyright 2017 (c) James Broadway All Rights Reserved

Select Language ▼

Powered by Google Translate

Volume 23, Number 15, March 17, 2017

### Does Rauner exemplify the Dunning-Kruger Effect?

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

The current issue of Psychology Today included an article about "mass intelligence," about how it is the knowledge and skills of the millions of society's members that make things work and that most of us are somewhat ignorant outside of our areas of expertise. Still, we confidently consider ourselves to be "pretty handy."

The article made a reference to the Dunning-Kruger Effect, so called because of a 1999 psychological study by Cornell doctoral student Justin Kruger and psychology professor David Dunning, in which they scientifically documented a phenomenon that is familiar to us all, and has been throughout history.

Aristotle talked about it. Einstein rolled his eyes and said yes, it really is true. The great scientist Charles Darwin noted gravely more than a century ago that "ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge." And you know examples, you know some folks who know little but think they know everything.

Kruger, guided by Dunning, devised four nifty experiments involving Cornell undergraduates who received extra credit for participating. Tests measured the students' abilities in certain areas (such as logic), and the students were asked to rate their own performance. The least competent overrated themselves the most.

**What Kruger and Dunning had achieved** was to demonstrate scientifically what philosophers through the ages - and also average citizens such as ourselves - have observed. At the lowest level, people are "Unskilled and Unaware of It," as the title of their paper proclaims. But there also was an unexpected finding.

Those whose performance reflected the most competence tended to underrate their skills and knowledge a bit. Kruger and Dunning concluded that it is the knowledge required for high-level performance that is also required for a person to know what high performance looks like. But there is more to it, something important.

The knowledge that enables high performance also enables a person to know *that there is much that he doesn't know*. And that awareness of how much more he might learn, how much better he can be, is what leads the high performers to rate themselves a bit lower than their actual achievement merits.

[Here is a link to their study](#). It is not dry or difficult. Sure, there's some math in it here and there, but you can skip over that, like I do. Don't skip over the part about the guy who robbed two banks believing that he had made his face invisible. (This study has been cited in more than 3,500 subsequent peer-reviewed studies. Amazing.)

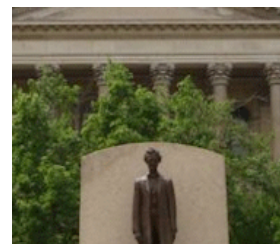
**So what's the point of bringing this up?** I believe it is relevant to the crisis that is paralyzing Illinois policymakers, that is blocking the enactment of legislation that would make the state run smoothly and restore it to fiscal solvency. I also think it is relevant to the experience of the profession of education in recent decades.

I was in the Capitol press corps in April of 1983 when we all received packets of information and a slick booklet published by the Reagan Administration, all of it underscoring an argument that the national economy was in the toilet, not because of failed economic and business policies, but because of public school educators.

"We report to the American people," the book entitled [A Nation At Risk declared](#), "that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people."

"If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves." With that, control of education policy was handed over to corporate leaders.

**These were well-intentioned, very confident** people. But they didn't know enough to know how much they didn't know. While Howard Gardner was exciting educators with his fully developed [theory of multiple intelligences](#), corporate leaders were shaping a one-size-fits-all public education system.



Neuroscientist and Nobel Prize winner Roger Sperry had barely finished advising educators and political leaders to see and to [account for the vast "differentiation"](#) in the brain structure and functioning of each individual student, when the move toward standardized curricula enforced by high-stakes testing was under way.

In 1999 (the same year Dunning and Kruger got published) I interviewed Chicago gazillionaire Ron Gidwitz, who was appointed as Chairman of the State Board of Education after contributing \$22,000 the year before to the gubernatorial campaign of Gov. George Ryan. He was brimming with confidence.

This is a huge experiment with two million Illinois schoolchildren, I said of the standardization movement. "What if you're wrong?" Gidwitz, who had never attended nor sent a child to a public school, brushed the question aside. "The public school system is so broken, there's nothing we could do that would harm it."

Well-intentioned. Confident. Unaware.

**Gov. Bruce Rauner's name is mentioned** in the headline. Is this to imply that his confidence that his way is right and anyone who disagrees with him is wrong, am I suggesting he is a victim of the Dunning Kruger Effect? Damn right. He's an amateur dabbler with a closed mind - the most dangerous kind.

There's a theory, as you may know, that the "grand bargain" that's needed for the state to recover over the next decade or so from the worst fiscal crisis in its history will have to wait until after the 2018 elections, until after Rauner is out of the picture. I'm told the stack of unpaid bills would total \$25 billion by then.

Meanwhile, the universities and crumbling around us, citizens who need services that states are expected to provide are getting nothing because the minimum-wage home care workers who have served them are now laid off, their non-profit employer struggling to stay afloat or actually closing its doors.

Rauner had never been in a position of public service or any kind, elected or otherwise, before he became governor of Illinois. I believe he means well, even though he shows little concern for the plight of the people who are suffering from his [inexperience and his obliviousness](#). Dunning-Kruger? Oh, yeah.

**Should school buses have seat belts** and require the kids to buckle up? [Rep. Michael McAuliffe](#) (R-Chicago), thinks they should, which is why he sponsored [HB 1802](#), which would require that each school bus manufactured after the effect date of the bill be equipped with seat belts. But the idea is not without its critics.

There are many arguments against the belts. The cost (\$7,000 to \$10,000 per new bus, more to retrofit older buses) is just one reason. There is also a safety factor. Sometimes children must be able to escape from a bus quickly for their own safety, and seat belts might slow them down.

There is also the experience factor. Every day, [PBS reported](#), 485,000 buses transport 25 million children to and from school and school-related functions. In the 10 years from 2006 to 2015, about 300 children died in bus-related accidents, but only 54 of them - fewer than six per year - were passengers on a bus.

"If I really believed school buses were unsafe with their current configuration, I would be 100 percent behind putting seat belts on school buses," a Nebraska school district transportation director told PBS. "But there is no scientific or empirical data that shows they would offer more protection than the current system."

Most child advocacy groups, such as the Parent Teacher Association, and regulatory agencies now support requiring seat belts in school buses, but McAuliffe's bill went to a subcommittee on Thursday. That's usually a bill's graveyard.

**How will your school district fare** under the Senate school funding reform proposal. You don't really know, because (as the letter below points out) SB 1 is still an empty shell. How about under the "Evidence Based" proposal now in bill form as [HB 2808](#)? Can't tell. It's still facing lots of scrutiny, potential amendments.

But the Illinois State Board of Education has now posted [district-specific impact data on its web site](#), Excel files telling you how each district would gain - or lose - state funding if any of four proposals offered in recent years were to become law.

As a general thing, in situations such as this, district-specific information of that type is not made publicly available until a specific bill, in its final form, has been agreed to as the "vehicle" for the new policy. When it is made available, that's when the arguments start. If the strife goes on long enough, agreements unravel.

My guess is that someone, more likely Rauner than State Board Chairman James Meeks, thought it would be a good idea to start the bickering as early as possible. There is more stress under the Capitol Dome than I've ever seen before.

#### **Letter to the Editor:**

The Illinois State Senate is trying to pass a secret school funding formula bill. Senate Bill 1 is now an empty shell bill waiting for an amendment that will be adopted on the floor of the State Senate without any committee hearing on it, and without input from the public on the specific wording of that amendment.

Illinois needs a good school funding formula, not just a new one.

The Rauner Commission recommended a supposedly Evidence Based system based on 27 elements that would improve Illinois schools. Some of the 27 were based on successful efforts in other schools, but some were not. And to get new state funds local school districts would have to do *none* of the 27.

As someone has said, it is like saying if you do X, you get Y, but you do not have to do X.

As an example, for special education, the recommended formula of one position for 141 general education students is based on a study done for the state of Vermont that even Vermont rejected.

Special education funding needs to be related to the need for special education, not based on a fixed number of general education students.

The need for special ed varies widely among Illinois school districts based on concentrated poverty, parental drug use, environmental factors including lead poisoning, pre-mature births, stress in daily living, the family/guardian situation, etc. (and all of these are heading in the wrong direction).

There is no magic school funding formula, but there are good ones and bad ones.

**Bev Johns**  
**Jacksonville, Illinois**

**ISNS past issues back through 2015** are available again for subscribers. You remember the process. Go to [this web page](#), click the "Subscribers-only" link and type in the secret password - which is currently: **senators**. Remember, this is a secret, just between us insiders, so don't go blabbing it around. Thanks. - Jim

**Invoice Reminder:** All invoices for subscription fees will be emailed via the PNC Bank, which now handles my accounts. THERE WILL BE NO PAPER INVOICE MAILED TO YOU. If you lose your invoice, use the contact link and tell me to resend it. I deeply appreciate your support of ISNS. This service cannot exist without you.

**Your inputs - questions, comments, suggestions** - are valued. For twenty years ISNS has been guided by wisdom "from the field." To contribute in this way, just [click this link to our contact form](#).