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Episode 2: School Reform with Dr. Christopher Tienken

Gerard Shea

Seton Hall University

Christopher Tienken PhD

Seton Hall University

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Zet Forward Transcript

Episode 2: School Reform with Dr. Christopher Tienken

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (00:11)

Hello and welcome to ZET forward, a podcast celebrating authors and other individuals who are involved with projects for the benefit of Seton Hall University and the world around us. My name is Gerry Shea and I'm proud to welcome and introduce our guest for today, Doctor Christopher Tienken. Doctor Tienken is associate Professor of Education, Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University in the College of Education and Human Services. He is the former editor of the American Association of School Administrators, Journal of Scholarship and Practice, and the current editor of the Kappa Delta Pi Record.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (00:40)

His research interests include school reform issues such as standardization, the influence of curriculum quality on student outcomes and the construct validity of high stakes standardized tests as decision making tools. And we'll talk about some of that today. He has authored over 85 publications. His book is titled "The School Reform Landscape Reloaded: More Fraud Myths, and Lies" his new book with Carol Mullin is "The Risky Business of Education Policy." And thank you so much, Doctor Tienken for joining us today. I appreciate it. And I will just say that I loved the book,

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (01:10)

It really put things in a really great perspective for me as it relates to you know, sort of charter schools and school reform, the idea that charter schools really don't increase student achievement if you control for, you know, like socioeconomic background, that was an eye opener for me. And just like standardized test, basically, they just, they just show that you make if if they track if you make money and that that's going to that result that the test results reflect your your at your your economic background not your you know your intelligence or anything like that. So that was a really great context for me.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (01:41)

So I really appreciate the book and thanks so much for writing it. It was really fantastic.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (01:45)

Thanks, Gerry. It's a pleasure to be here today.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (01:47)

Alright, great. Thanks for coming on. And 1st question. What inspired you to write The School Reform, the book, The landscape Reloaded?

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (01:54)

So quite frankly, I just got tired of hearing how. Broken schools were, you know, in the in the mainstream media and social media, we were being bombarded for, for decades actually with misinformation about schools. And then when you really dig into the underlying data on public school effectiveness, the data we're telling a very different story. So I decided to write about that story and present the actual data. And that's that's really how most of my books get started. I find

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (02:30)

Right.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (02:31)

misinformation about a topic related to my area of expertise, you know curriculum assessment and then begin to investigate it. And you know along along the way while I'm while I'm doing that you know I provide direction for educators on how to improve things while remaining true to the evidence. So I really try to bridge the gap between the research and and the practical application for school leaders and and teachers. But I'm just, I'm trying to, you know, tell the truth. There's, so to speak. So we can we could really, you know, continue to move forward with public education. It's instead of being mired in misinformation.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (03:10)

Right. And there's a lot of misinformation about that out there. So then addressing that the sort of the context for the modern reform movement was Sputnik and that started. That was kind of came out of some information and some misinformation, I think. So if you could a lot of people don't know about it, I didn't know about it. So people might not know about how Sputnik really spurred this reform movement back in the 50s.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (03:20)

Yeah, sure. So so one thing that I you know, I I've noticed and and and you'll notice when you read the literature or you just listen to the arguments being made, there's always this argument being made that in some way US students are falling behind their international peers and you hear that you hear these terms thrown around. You know this this. But this is a Sputnik moment, you know, this is our chance to get to get ahead so on and so forth. And so that really that really interested me. And so I began to wonder. Hmm. You know, where are we really behind in this space race? 'cause? I couldn't understand if we were behind in the space race, how we ended up on the moon and there and and and. And the Russians never ended up there. Right. So, you know, lo and behold, started researching.

And I found my way into the Eisenhower Library and in the Eisenhower Library are all the declassified memos. And so I just started going through all the declassified memos from the meetings that were held about Sputnik and in and in one of these memos, you know, Eisenhower comes out and says that he, he, he he knows we're not behind. The scientists gave a briefing that we could have launched a satellite years before the Soviets. But but, Eisenhower explained he did, and I'm paraphrasing his words. He did not want to open up space. Uh, and and and start World War Three in space.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (05:04)

Right.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (05:05)

So he thought it politically. He thought it was better. OK, let that let the Russians open it up. And so then we will, you know will follow behind that. But what so he knew and and the scientists knew that we had the we had the ability to launch a rocket. Years before Sputnik one, we didn't do it on purpose and and he knew that that the public schools weren't weren't a problem. But keep in mind, Gerry, the the context back then was it was really almost forbidden for the federal government to

get involved in local education and the Eisenhower and the Eisenhower administration and his, his advisors were trying to find ways to pump money into public education. Okay. They were looked. They were looking to pump more money in education, but they knew it was taboo at the time. And so they really took advantage of this, and they said it was actually good fortune that this happened because now this allows us to put forth a bill which became known as the National Defense Education Act, which allowed them the pump and DEA and National Defense Education Act and and that allowed that the pump millions of dollars into education to him through to increase basic research both at the at the high school level and college level, get tons of money went into higher Ed for research.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (06:22)

Oh, interesting.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (06:23)

OK. And that's how they did it. They used Sputnik as an excuse to to pump the federal money into into public education.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (06:34)

That I didn't know. Very interesting. So is that is that the National Defense Education Act is that, is that still in effect? Is that like no child left hand, is that uh reauthorization to that is that it's different. OK.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (06:42)

No, no, that's no, no, no, no. Child Left Behind was born from the elementary and Secondary Education

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (06:47)

OK.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (06:48)

Act of 1965.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (06:49)

OK.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (06:50)

During Lyndon Johnson. That was, that was a different act. Uh, so those those two were not connected to that one was not connected to Sputnik.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (06:58)

OK, very good. OK, interesting.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (07:00)

That's yeah. ESEA, which is the, you know.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (7:02)

The new one?

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (07:03)

The parent of no child Left Behind was part of the war on poverty.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (7:07)

OK. Very interesting. OK. That that's another good. I didn't know that context. That's really good context too.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (07:12)

Yeah, part of the civil rights package. Oh yeah. Yeah, that's that's what that was put in for.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (7:17)

And every five years, they're supposed to reauthorize, is that the?

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (07:19)

Yeah, five or seven years. You know, we went quite a long time between Bush and Obama.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (7:24)

Right.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (07:25)

And NCLB went way beyond the the seven year reinstatement five year reinstatement. But we just got a new one back in, UH, was it 20, 2019, 2018, ESA, every Student Succeeds Act. It's the same. It was essentially the same thing as NCLB, however. OK. However, it allows it allows private it allows states to to to create these programs where corporations can be paid if they come up with programs that improve achievement. So it's opened the door to really. I don't want to corporate investment, but it's not investment, it's it's greater corporatization of public education.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (08:17)

Oh wow.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (08:18)

They're called performance bonds, and it's guaranteed money for programs that, quote unquote, improve achievement.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (08:28)

So this is another. This is another avenue of the privatization thing that's been going on for yeah, while now. And I think you mentioned the book, which is interesting, like No Child Left Behind was basically a Trojan horse kind of right for to, to for some of these efforts into privatization. And if you could just talk a little of that be, that be great.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (08:43)

Sure. Yeah. One of the things, one of the things that that No Child Left Behind brought in was this. At first it was a mandate that you had to set aside a certain portion of your title, one federal funding money for private companies to conduct tutoring services.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (09:02)

OK. Interesting.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (09:04)

Right. And so and So what schools had to do is is actually go out and hire at first hire private companies to provide after school tutoring services and use their title one money. To pay for it after you know, widespread abuses of that system and pushback from the schools. It was finally allowed

that schools could use that money to have their own teachers. The, you know, the actual people who know the kids.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (09:37)

Right, right.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (09:38)

Provide tutoring services as well, so a lot of schools went in that direction.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (09:46)

Interesting. Yeah, I did. That's another history of that. I didn't. I didn't know about it. So they they, they, they, they they had to use private tutors, amazing private companies.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (09:54)

Yeah, it was. It was a blatant attempt to bring in, to bring in the private market into into schools.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (10:01)

That's amazing. That's amazing. OK, now, just so just in terms of, I know you'd really talk about, John Dewey a lot in the book and his book. So what was that like? So what guided your research in terms of like the philosophy that I did? Yeah.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (10:15)

Oh yeah, sure. So I'm I'm guided by progressive education philosophy and there's there's basically 4 four pillars to that. Right. So we the philosophy focuses on the number one, the way that students learn the best. So let's make sure we use methodology, pedagogy that fits the way that students learn best. And generally that's when we treat students as active constructors of meaning who bring prior experience to the to the classroom.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (10:48)

Uh-huh. Awesome

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (10:49)

And and and we and we and we involve them in the learning process. The second pillar is making sure that the the curriculum is connected to the student. So you know, wrapping the curriculum in interesting topics that are relevant now.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (11:05)

Right.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (11:06)

Now for whatever, for whatever age level you're looking at. So you're making that connection between the new knowledge. And the student's experiences like the the third pillar, is understanding human development that, you know, students develop cognitively, socially, emotionally.

In different stages, so we need to be really cognizant of the types of curriculum standards, the types of activities that we that we do with kids and make sure they're they're pliable, make sure they address a wide range of developmental stages instead of expecting everybody to know the same thing in the same format on the same day. Right. So that's that's not developmentally appropriate, that's developmentally inappropriate.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (11:50)

Right.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (11:51)

And then finally, the fourth pillar is. Uh is is making sure that the curriculum and instruction is attuned to social forces of the day because if you want, if you're progressive philosophy is based on the idea of preparing students for the way the world will be. So since we don't know how the world is going to be right. We need to expose students to a lot of different ideas.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (12:16)

Yeah

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (12:17)

A lot of different skills, and the education always needs to be relevant. Right. And so those are basically the four, the four principles of progressive education and that's really it's it's known as a curriculum paradigm put together by Daniel Tanner and and Laurel Tanner many years ago. But it's really the lens that I used to look at education through and makes sense of things in the education landscape. And so that's what I use is my my primary you know framework to do my to do my research.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (12:51)

Right. And you talked about the Common Core standards in the book and how, like did the persistent and I think you mentioned specially for students who are, you know, in poverty or, you know, sort of lower socioeconomic level, a lot of the stuff is not relevant. You talked about relevancy, that's not really relevant right to them. So let's so it also becomes like a kind of a punitive thing, learning things that are not going to help you in anyway. It's got to be a kind of a horrible, you know.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (13:15)

Yeah, well, think about this. It's, it's, it's, it's really I I find it almost it's it's it's backwards now where you have a almost 50% of the school population. OK is nonwhite right? We are still dealing with a curriculum in in all 50 states 'cause all 50 states were influenced heavily by the the Common Core. We're dealing with a set of curriculum standards in all 50 states.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (13:45)

Uh-huh.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (13:46)

That is really made by the dominant. White class relevant. OK, only relevant really to the dominant white middle class. Alright. And so we're really leaving out the future of the country. You're leaving out 50% of the future of the country. Through this curriculum that is clearly based on dominant white middle class culture.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (14:15)

Absolutely.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (14:16)

So, so, so it's violating this idea of connecting content to kids in the in, in the progressive philosophy, it's violating social forces. It's not. It's, it's actually socially static. It's not socially responsible,

responsive. In any way. And so that's why, you know, a lot of what I also write about is now, how do you make an irrelevant curriculum relevant and and and, you know, we do that at that. We do that at the at the classroom level with the teacher in terms of the activities that he or she designs. So you can, you know, just because you have this irrelevant curriculum doesn't mean you have to deliver it that way. So, you know, part of what I write about is repackaging kind of like a socially unconscious.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (15:02)

Right.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (15:03)

Curriculum, OK. Uh, around topics that are more relevant to kids today.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (15:06)

Uh-huh.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (15:07)

And so we can still teach the mandated standards, but we just, we repackage it in a way that that respects the students that were working with.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (15:16)

Right, right. That's a great point. And then book you talk about consumer like, did they they framed this charter schools consumer choice right, but there's really not that much choice and it really is very much top down, right?

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (15:25)

Yeah, the, the, the whole, exactly, the whole idea of school choice comes from an economic theory of of consumerism. It has no basis in education, and it's really not a choice at all, because when you go to these. Uh, the you know the the a lot of these charter schools. Well, charter schools don't have elected boards of education.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (15:48)

Wow, it's true. Of course. Yeah.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (15:50)

OK. And more or less with most of these charter schools, it's their way. Or the highway. It it's really interesting to look at the attrition rates. In charter schools and you know how many kids they take in in 3rd grade and how many of those kids are left by fifth grade? How many kids did they take in its 6th grade? How many are left by eighth grade because the attrition rates in many of these places are, uh, abominable? They're they're they're they're offensive offensively high attrition rates. So it's a it's it's definitely a shell game, and it's really not choice.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (16:26)

Right.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (16:27)

At all. It's it's it's false choice. You don't really have a choice once you get in there.

Interviewer: Gerard Shea (16:31)

Right, you're stuck, and you're gonna do whatever their teaching. Your learning? Yeah.

Interviewee: Christopher H Tienken (16:35)

Right. And and getting in itself not it's not equal choice.

Gerard Shea (16:39)

Right. So Talk about how how do they, how do they they kind of sit the students.

Christopher H Tienken (16:42)

Yeah. So, so technically, they'll say they run a lottery system, right? But there's there's study after study, another big one just came out. It was, it was fantastic. A group of researchers they sent, they sent emails and made phone calls to hundreds of charter schools, and they used different names, different last names. So they used, they used white sounding names. They used Hispanic sounding names. They used African Americans sounding names. And they also they and and and and they also described their their children in different ways. Some children they described as having disabilities, some children they described as having language issues. Some children they described as you know being high achieving Gerry guess which ones got called back or responded to the most.

Gerard Shea (17:26)

Now the white kids, I would just guess, and the ones who are high achieving.

Christopher H Tienken (17:31)

The white kids I didn't have. Yeah, the white kids that didn't have learning disabilities and the and the students with the inquiries, with African American sounding last names and Hispanic sounding, last names, disabilities, ELL got responded to the least. So we know what's going on here. It's very clear in their practices. So yeah, they use a lottery, so to speak. But even even when you make it through the lottery with some schools do. And I know this because I talked to, you know, some charter leaders are actually willing to talk to me. On background

Gerard Shea (18:03)

Right, right.

Christopher H Tienken (18:04)

You know I can't use their names or where they're from, but in the research, you know, in the research I I try to seek out people who will talk to me. And so one of the one of the things that they use is they use intake interviews.

Gerard Shea (18:14)

Oh gosh. Okay

Christopher H Tienken (18:15)

So once you are, you know, you once you win the lottery, you go to the school for an interview and that's where they get to look at you and see what you what you're all about. They do some, they may do some diagnostic testing and so on and so forth. And then if you if you if you look like you're going to be a high score on test 'cause, that's how they you know they market themselves on on achievement. If you look like you're going to be a high score on tests, then they make it sound like it's the greatest place on Earth. If you don't look like you're going to be a high score, then they start to

tell you things like well, you know here this should we require this. I don't know if you're really going to be able to do this and also by the way we require, you know, 20 hours a month of service by the parent.

Well, look, some of these parents are working multiple jobs nonstandard hours just to support their child. They're just looking for a good education. So then when you can't come up with the 20 hours of volunteer work in this in that, you know, you're not accepted to the school, so they do all of these things to cherry pick.

Gerard Shea (19:22)

Cherry pick

Christopher H Tienken (19:23)

The students that they want, you know, and I'm. I'm not saying all charter schools do that, but what has happened over the past, especially the past decade, 15 years charter schools have become corporate corporate eyes and now they're run by really they call themselves non profits but they they're run by these charter chains. It's almost like a Walmart of, you know, Walmart of charter schools, you know like and so they they'll be these companies that run hundreds of charter schools and they're usually they're also usually financed or invested in by. Some of the Big Wall Street banks.

Gerard Shea (19:53)

Gotcha.

Christopher H Tienken (19:54)

Also uh hedge funds or are heavily invested in here because they make a lot of money off of them. They what they do is they loan them money for facilities.

Gerard Shea (20:03)

OK.

Christopher H Tienken (20:04)

OK remember, the loans are backstopped guaranteed by the taxpayer, so even if the Charter school goes under. The taxpayer has to pay the money for the loan on the building.

Gerard Shea (20:17)

Oh my goodness.

Christopher H Tienken (20:18)

So the Big Wall Street banks and hedge funds are making a lot of money on facilities loans right now. That was part and that that was all made possible by. A set of tax credits put in under the Clinton administration. It was they weren't meant for charter schools. They were meant to revitalize our urban areas. So that if you were to go and invest in an urban area.

Gerard Shea 00:20:40

Right

Christopher H Tienken (20:41)

You know, in real estate and whatnot, in an urban area, you got some tax breaks. So the so the big banks get the tax break on that end and they get the guaranteed interest on the facility loan on the

back end. So they're getting it both ways, OK, whether the Charter school succeeds or not, it can be in business one year. You know, if it's a five year, 10 year lease on your building, the taxpayer is paying that for 10 years, so. So it's it's become a business and so that's what really I get really concerned when we start to treat students as part of a profit margin rather than treating them as developing human beings.

Gerard Shea (21:22)

Exactly.

Christopher H Tienken (21:23)

That's it. So that's why I chose to call it out. You know, I call it out in some of my research.

Gerard Shea (21:26)

Well, that's great. It's it's important to do that. And so basically, yeah, the, the, the, this kind of the the way the the Charter schools have evolved here, they've kind of perpetuated. I mean they're I guess were originally meant to kind of give people opportunities and I think you said at the beginning it was definitely what they were doing. But that has evolved overtime now.

Christopher H Tienken (21:45)

Right. Yeah. The the first charter schools opened in Minnesota and California, 1991. It was two of them were really what I call Mom and pop. They were they were specifically made for for students who were being underserved, OK they were, you know, they were family. Run him in many of the charter schools were like that. They were community run.

Gerard Shea (22:00)

Oh, that's interesting. OK.

Christopher H Tienken (22:01)

Uh, you know, they were started by teachers. They were. They were started by people who are trying to do something different. And so they really did start out with a noble 'cause, you know, and I applaud those schools that are still going. They're doing great work, but it's really the industry. It's become an industry. It's it's been overcome, overrun by corporatization. I got, you know, I want to give a shout out to a couple of colleagues who do some just outstanding work on the segregation aspect of charters. So Julia Rubin.

Gerard Shea (22:31)

Ok.

Christopher H Tienken (22:32)

From the Bloustein school over at Rutgers. And her colleague Mark Webber. They've done some outstanding work on the segregation aspect of charter schools, you know, 90% in most charter schools, 90% of the 90% of the student body is all the same. There's there's no diversity in these.

Gerard Shea (22:51)

Oh.

Christopher H Tienken (22:52)

Schools. OK. And so they've done a lot of work. And then Bruce Baker from Rutgers has done a lot of work on the finances of charter schools and also the attrition rates that I was talking about.

Gerard Shea (23:05)

Well, yes, that's fascinating

Christopher H Tienken (23:06)

He's really taken some deep dives into the data and it really pulls it apart. So those, those are three people that I really rely on when I'm doing my research on charter schools. I rely a lot on their work and interactions with them.

Gerard Shea (23:20)

All right. That's great. Thanks for it. Thanks. I'll try to put those in the show notes. I guess if later on when we're done, I want put when we post the podcast, so could you just talk about that, Chris, a little bit now? The students they kind of, they, they there cherry picked. But as even as they're at the school, the lower achieving students sometimes end up being pushed out for test scores.

Christopher H Tienken (23:39)

Yeah. OK. So, right, So what happens is you know, the charter schools take the kids that they think are going to score the best on these standardized tests 'cause again, they many of them run around and and market themselves on high test scores. So then when the after the student takes the you know the first Test let's say its third grade or their 5th grade or 6th grade whatever is in the school whatever grade levels. In the school, if they don't do well, they're generally kind of counseled. Out of the school.

Gerard Shea (24:09)

Counseled out.

Christopher H Tienken (24:10)

OK They're persuaded to to exit the school or their or their exited from the school. So one of the things that Bruce Baker is great at this looking at the the student enrollments of these charter schools over time and looking at cohorts. So let's say a cohort comes in and in 2020 in 3rd grade, how many students in that cohort are left by the end of fifth grade?

Gerard Shea (24:33)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (24:34)

And so he'll show that cohort decreased 20%, 25%, 30% and those and and and what's funny then then you then you overlay their test scores on top of that. So you have a graph of of enrollment that's going down OK from 3rd, 4th and 5th grade.

Gerard Shea (24:51)

Gotcha.

Christopher H Tienken (24:52)

And then you and then you put the graph of achievement and the graph is going up 3rd, 4th and 5th grade.

Gerard Shea (24:57)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (24:58)

Well, that's because the kids who weren't scoring well are no longer in the school. So that's what's making the achievement go up. You're going from 100 kids to 72.

Gerard Shea (25:11)

Gotcha.

Christopher H Tienken (25:12)

Yeah, your test scores are going from 58% to 75% because we've got, we've, we've we've eliminated. We've gotten rid of students who are not scoring well. That's what they do. Those are the games that are being played.

Gerard Shea (25:27)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (25:28)

And you know, and and and at real public schools. We don't do that.

Gerard Shea (25:31)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (25:32)

We take everyone, everyone who comes to the door, we take them. And and and and and and and we do the best that we can with with students regardless of their their disabilities, their challenges, their their English language status, their poverty status, whatever it is public schools take them charter schools, many of them not all many of them try to exclude them.

Gerard Shea (25:59)

That's really interesting. So they're kind of they're, they're they're. They're sort of fudging the numbers on it in a certain way, which is very interesting. And you also had in the book talk about like about standardized tests in general. So if you could just talk about like standardized tests once again they just the best thing, they're they're really best at kind of. Economic income is what they're best at, sort of judging, and how that relates to test scores, not actually like achievement in a sense.

Christopher H Tienken (26:23)

Yeah, sure. So look for the, there's 100 years, I guess, over 100 years now starting with the with World War 1. Over 100 years of research that shows standardized test scores, a large portion of the test score is based on out of school factors.

Gerard Shea (26:43)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (26:44)

Specifically specifically out of school factors related to related to money. OK, so time and time again on on every test where there would be a a state test, the SAT is also well known for this. You know the SAT, every \$20,000 of your family income as it goes up your essay SAT score. Goes up OK without without, without end, every every \$20,000.

Gerard Shea (27:12)

Oh yes, that makes sense.

Christopher H Tienken (27:13)

Uh, you know, in aggregate, that doesn't mean that you know, every single student is going to score within there within their family income band, but in aggregate, OK, the test scores increase as family income increases. And that's like that for for all standardized tests. And that's there's a couple of different reasons for this number 1. You know, family income, what it is, it's it's a gateway to experience. OK. And so students are students with higher family incomes are out and about more. Ok.

Gerard Shea (27:52)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (27:53)

And and the experiences that they have are more. Uh, academically related. There's a lot of what's known as collateral learning going on.

Gerard Shea (28:02)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (28:03)

OK, so, so, you know, you really see this in kindergarten. It's the greatest place to see this because you have some kindergarten students who come. They have a huge site vocabulary.

Gerard Shea (28:16)

Yes.

Christopher H Tienken (28:17)

They know a lot of words. Some students even come to kindergarten already reading. Right? Well, where do you get site vocabulary from? You get it from being out and about in the world.

Gerard Shea (28:26)

Right, yeah.

Christopher H Tienken (28:27)

OK, that's that's so the larger your your world, the larger your site vocabulary generally speaking and so because standardized tests are also very text based? OK, even the math tests that math tests are really reading tested with numbers.

Gerard Shea (28:43)

Yes.

Christopher H Tienken (28:44)

Because they're so text based, it really benefits students with larger vocabularies and higher. And higher reading levels right. The other thing the other. The other thing is a lot of research on the types of questions. Uh, that are asked on these tests and the types of situations and examples that are used in in the in, in reading tests and literature tests. You know it's very common again to see examples that use very white middle class language.

Gerard Shea (29:18)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (29:20)

OK, still attached to the white middle class Canon of literature.

Gerard Shea (29:26)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (29:27)

With with those kinds of experiences, so they're, you know, they're they're really made.

Gerard Shea (29:30)

Yeah.

Christopher H Tienken (29:32)

If they're again, they're not made for at least half the kids in the in the country. So the languages is dominant class. The examples are dominant class. I mean there's been examples on standardized tests. Well, maybe you might. You might even remember this Gerry. I don't know. It might have been 10 years ago, Ok. 10 years ago in New York City. All of a sudden all the New York City schools were taking field trips to the farm.

Gerard Shea (29:58)

Oh, no, I don't know remember, that's great though.

Christopher H Tienken (29:59)

And that's because on the third-grade test in New York City there were reading passages and examples having to do with a farm situation.

Gerard Shea (30:08)

Interesting, right?

Christopher H Tienken (30:09)

Right. And some of the city kids had never been to a farm, so they don't have the context. Doesn't mean they don't know the material.

Gerard Shea (30:16)

They don't. Yeah, they don't. The context.

Christopher H Tienken (30:17)

Right, But what you don't understand, you don't have. You can't make that connection to the

context, so it's harder to understand and decipher what the question is being asked, what the passage is saying when you don't have prior knowledge. I mean, think about reading something that you have no prior knowledge of.

Gerard Shea (30:33)

Absolutely.

Christopher H Tienken (30:34)

You can't make a connection to it. Yeah, there there's. There's nothing to help you make sense of it. And so that's what we're actually doing to students with standardized tests. In many cases, they are non contextualized. Again, that violates this progressive principle of connecting content to students. So these these tests are very static and they really pick up more on this idea of family and community social capital.

Gerard Shea (31:03)

Yeah, absolutely.

Christopher H Tienken (31:04)

OK, so if you're out and about, you've had a vast amount of different experiences you're going to be able to make connections to more things, even even if you don't know about them. Oh yeah. Yeah. OK, I've seen that. I've, you know, I recognize that I may not know a lot about it, but at least I understand the context. Whereas if you're coming into something and you have no context, you can't even make sense of it. And it's interesting because you'll see. The students who score. Some of our students who come from poverty or different cultures who might score low on a standardized test when you give them a curriculum based test based on something that they actually learned in school.

Gerard Shea (31:42)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (31:43)

They do much better. And that's because the teacher contextualizes the information in the classroom. The teacher will use examples that the students can relate to, so they're teaching the content through relational examples. In context, and the students do much better because it it kind of the teacher is the mediator between that, that lack of social and community capital.

Gerard Shea (32:12)

Yeah.

Christopher H Tienken (32:13)

And the student the teacher fills that gap by providing the appropriate examples by actually creating the prior experience on the spot for the student.

Gerard Shea (32:21)

Yeah, that's great example. So basically, these standardized tests are just totally out of context for these students. It's it's. Yeah.

Christopher H Tienken (32:26)

Totally out of context. They you they use language that really favors white middle class students. They use examples. I mean, there's been examples on, on standardized tests about I told you the farm. OK, so there's you know there's certain things we don't have those experiences. There's been examples about yachting, regattas. I mean, there's been examples about Wall Street.

Gerard Shea (32:48)

Right, yes.

Christopher H Tienken (32:49)

And even some of you ready, it's even some of the vocabulary, so the plumbing versus pipes, supper versus dinner, I mean it.

Gerard Shea (33:01)

Yeah.

Christopher H Tienken (33:02)

OK. Things that we take for granted because we're from the dominant culture.

Gerard Shea (33:07)

Right, right.

Christopher H Tienken (33:08)

That that's not some of those different language.

Gerard Shea (33:12)

Yeah, no doubt. Yeah, totally different.

Christopher H Tienken (33:14)

Hey, it doesn't mean the students don't. Aren't learning or they don't know the material they do. We're just not. We're not assessing it correctly.

Gerard Shea (33:23)

Yeah, that's that's that's really interesting. That is really interesting and I the one thing I'd which stuck out in the book to me was I think you had a quote from someone who said that the American, the only the only problem, with the American education system is poverty essentially. Like if you got rid of poverty we, you know, there wouldn't be any issues.

Christopher H Tienken (33:39)

Well, yeah, when you so. So we've done a lot of studies at Seton Hall. We've been able, we've been able to and and and colleagues have done them before me as well in other states. We just picked up the mantle here at Seton Hall and continued the work. But we've been able to predict the actual percentage of students who are going to score proficient or above at the district or school level. OK, for state test in New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts. Iowa and Ohio so far, OK. And you know, and and and and we're pretty our predictions in in many cases are in this the seven. You know we can predict 75% of the schools that are going to pass this we can predict 78% of the districts that are going to pass this thing using only. Using only a family and community capital variables from the US census.

Gerard Shea (34:43)

Right. Right. What does that include? What are some of the groups included?

Christopher H Tienken (34:47)

OK, so some of that would be would be a household income, OK, the percentage of bachelor's degrees in your community,

Gerard Shea (34:54)

Gotcha. Oh, interesting.

Christopher H Tienken (34:56)

The percentage, the percentages of single family households in your community and specifically single family run by a female?

Gerard Shea (35:04)

Gotcha. Ok, interesting.

Christopher H Tienken (35:05)

Alright, uh, percentages of households with income over \$200,000. Ok. So that's households and then percentages of families, not households, but families. So these are the ones with kids, right? Families with income less than \$35,000.

Gerard Shea (35:23)

OK, right. So then that's that's uh. Good. Really good predictor of how they're going to score, how people score on the standardized tests, which is why?

Christopher H Tienken (35:31)

Right. And and and and again I have to, it's not because students would those factors can't learn.

Gerard Shea (35:37)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (35:38)

They can. It's that this the test that we're giving them is not measuring their learning.

Gerard Shea (35:44)

Right, exactly. Really. Yeah, really good stuff.

Christopher H Tienken (35:46)

Like the the results are are contaminated by out of school factors.

Gerard Shea (35:50)

That's really interesting. Another thing the book I think someone said that if they just corrected for the housing, if they created how someone had it like a a good player, like a safe place to live with, you know, 'cause lead in the pipes a lot of places into poverty issue. But like if the housing issues were were corrected, that would also have a huge effect on, you know, on on student outcomes or even standardized test outcomes.

Christopher H Tienken (36:09)

Yeah. Oh yeah, LA County wide study down in Montgomery County, Maryland showed when when they used more integrated housing. Uh students did much better in school. Ok.

Gerard Shea (36:22)

Interesting.

Christopher H Tienken (36:23)

Again, because think about it right now. Now we're, we're we're, you know, we're taking students who were segregated in certain types of communities, their world, their worlds were very small. OK, we're giving them a chance to be in other types of communities where the world is much larger.

Gerard Shea (36:38)

Yeah.

Christopher H Tienken (36:39)

They have more life experiences. They have access to libraries. They have access to playgrounds. They have access to, to peers with different backgrounds. OK. So everybody benefits from that

Gerard Shea (36:53)

That's amazing. So important. Yeah. So, like, yeah, the context who they live with, who their peers are, the, the, the cultural capital they they are exposed to. It's just really important. I think that's a really.

Christopher H Tienken (37:02)

And and looking it goes both ways right. It goes both ways. Because American Society is very diverse and it's and you know it, it's important that we all have experiences and and access and opportunities with that diversity.

Gerard Shea (37:18)

It benefits everyone. Not yeah.

Christopher H Tienken (37:19)

Benefits, everybody. It's a learning experience in a growth experience for everyone.

Gerard Shea (37:23)

Absolutely. So important. Absolutely. So important, I think. Yeah. You talked about in the book to, which is great, you know, like, you know, rich people can benefit from, you know, experience, you know, living with poor people. And, you know, this sort of this, this economic, you know, melting pot it not, you know, sort of anyways is really important, which I think I think that's a great point. And then really important for people to understand. You know, rich people, you know, it's not good for them be separated, you know it it's it's much better that they be just in with everybody else. So I think that's.

Christopher H Tienken (37:48)

We look, there's a there's a large body of research that shows. Uh wealthy people segregate themselves

Gerard Shea (37:55)

Yeah.

Christopher H Tienken (37:56)

And then what happens is in some cases not all OK not of course I'm not. I don't want to over generalize, but the research is clear that they that they become their their their reality is much different than.

Gerard Shea (38:09)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (38:10)

The reality of society.

Gerard Shea (38:11)

Gotcha

Christopher H Tienken (38:12)

And they they become detached, they can become detached from the reality of society and that's not good for them. It's not good for. It's not good for the for a democracy.

Gerard Shea (38:23)

No, it's not at all. No, it's terrible for democracy, right? Yeah. It leads to all sorts of bad things, you know, which probably seeing some of this policy relates as it relates to schools, right?

Christopher H Tienken (38:31)

Well, you, yeah, you see well, you mean it it be. It ends up in, in factionalism, tribalism.

Gerard Shea (38:36)

Yes, right, absolutely. And we're seeing that unfortunately, but yeah. So I think I think this book is a, you know, sort of a step towards sort of healing some of that stuff hopefully.

Christopher H Tienken (38:42)

Ok. And and that's why the public school you think about this, the public school. Is the only public institution, right?

Gerard Shea (38:50)

Yes

Christopher H Tienken (38:51)

The only public institution where we have the opportunity for all future voting citizens to pass through, OK, where they can become socialized to the principles of democracy.

Gerard Shea (39:04)

Yeah.

Christopher H Tienken (39:04)

Right. it in a way where they're interacting with with students who are different from them.

Gerard Shea (39:11)

Right, right.

Christopher H Tienken (39:12)

You know that? That's the great promise of public education that, of course, we're still trying to fulfill even even more than 60, 70 years after Brown versus Board of Education. OK, but it is, it is the potential of public Ed. And so, you know, when you when you introduce these choice systems that allow for voluntary segregation. Uh, you're just going in the wrong direction.

Gerard Shea (39:37)

I agree 100 percent alright. Chris will. Thanks so much. We will wrap up with a few questions. Just a few wrap up questions at at. Thank you so much for your time. Yeah. So what what what's the next project you're looking at?

Christopher H Tienken (39:50)

OK. Yeah, sure. Ah, well, I mean, I'm. I'm on a project now that we're we're we're starting to wrap up. It's an international project with some universities in Italy and in the UK where I'm doing the US side of it where we're looking for. We're studying schools in Italy, the UK, in the United States that use outdoor education curriculum.

Gerard Shea (40:12)

Oh, interesting. Wow.

Christopher H Tienken (40:13)

OK. And we're looking for, we're looking for characteristics that kind of cut across. Uh, continents and and cut across cultures in terms of of successful and effective outdoor education programs. Again right in line with Progressivist philosophy of hands on experiential.

Gerard Shea (40:33)

Right, yeah.

Christopher H Tienken (40:34)

OK, so we're, I'm involved in that right now. That'll be the that'll be the next publication that I do. You know, the latest book, The Risky business of of Education Policy would just came out. That, as you know, as you said it was an edited volume with the Carol Mullin.

Gerard Shea (40:54)

Yep.

Christopher H Tienken (40:55)

We've got some great chapters in there on the corporatization of education. Uh segregation. Charter schools.

Gerard Shea (41:02)

Right, right, right.

Christopher H Tienken (41:03)

The the current state of Brown versus board of Ed. A great piece by my colleague at the University of

Oslo in Norway on the PISA testing another, another great piece on democratic education. So it's a that book was a great project for me to put together.

Gerard Shea (41:24)

Right.

Christopher H Tienken (41:25)

You know, it's we're searching for these researchers on these important topics so that that just ended. And I'll probably at some point in the in the not too distant future do a second edition of *Defying Standardization, Creating Curriculum for an Uncertain Future* that came out about in in 2016 and I'm I'm looking for different ways to update that now.

Gerard Shea (41:49)

Alright, sounds good. So maybe we'll have you back on the podcast when that when that comes out.

Christopher H Tienken (41:52)

Would enjoy that. Thank you.

Gerard Shea (41:54)

Alright. And so when where, where can people find "The School Reform Landscape Reloaded" and also "The Risky Business of Education Policy?"

Christopher H Tienken (42:00)

Yeah, look, all all of those are or at your at your your your large book distributors. I mean I I prefer I prefer if you go through private bookstores.

Gerard Shea (42:11)

Oh, good point. Absolutely.

Christopher H Tienken (42:12)

You know and and independent. I really enjoy independent bookstores, but you can get them anywhere I am. They're also this information on my website at www.christienken.com. And also I'm on Twitter at Christienken. So there's many different ways to to find me and and interact. I mean, I I love interacting and collaborating with with people.

Gerard Shea (42:39)

Sounds good. Sounds good. I will put those links also in the in the in the show notes when we when when I post it. Alright.

Christopher H Tienken (42:44)

Great.

Gerard Shea (42:45)

So thank you Chris. I appreciate the time. This was a great discussion. I really I. But I have to say. I learned a lot from the book. I learned lot from you in this discussion and I think it's really important topic it has a lot of social justice it's you know it it covers so much and it's so important to our society so yeah thank you for writing the book and thank you so much for coming for coming on. And thanks to everyone for listening to Zet Forward and please join us next time when we talked to another

person from the Seton Hall community about their work and how it benefits the world around us. Until we meet again, all the best. And Hazard Zet Forward.