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DEFENDING EDUCATION

WHAT IS RACE?

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Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Race

http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-01-x.htm

Our eyes tell us that people look different. No one has trouble distinguishing a Czech from a Chinese, but what do those differences mean? Are they biological? Has race always been with us? How does race affect people today? There's less – and more – to race than meets the eye:

1. **Race is a modern idea**. Ancient societies, like the Greeks, did not divide people according to physical distinctions, but according to religion, status, class, even language. The English language didn't even have the word 'race' until it turns up in 1508 in a poem by William Dunbar referring to a line of kings.

2. **Race has no genetic basis.** Not one characteristic, trait or even one gene distinguishes all the members of one so-called race from all the members of another so-called race.

3. **Human subspecies don't exist.** Unlike many animals, modern humans simply haven't been around long enough or isolated enough to evolve into separate subspecies or races. Despite surface appearances, we are one of the most similar of all species.

4. **Skin color really is only skin deep.** Most traits are inherited independently from one another. The genes influencing skin color have nothing to do with the genes influencing hair form, eye shape, blood type, musical talent, athletic ability or forms of intelligence. Knowing someone's skin color doesn't necessarily tell you anything else about him or her.

5. **Most variation is within, not between, "races."** Of the small amount of total human variation, 85% exists within any local population, be they Italians, Kurds, Koreans or Cherokees. About 94% can be found within any continent. That means two random Koreans may be as genetically different as a Korean and an Italian.

6. **Slavery predates race.** Throughout much of human history, societies have enslaved others, often as a result of conquest or war, even debt, but not because of physical characteristics or a belief in natural inferiority. Due to a unique set of historical circumstances, ours was the first slave system where all the slaves shared similar physical characteristics.

7. **Race and freedom evolved together.** The U.S. was founded on the radical new principle that "All men are created equal." But our early economy was based largely on slavery. How could this anomaly be rationalized? The new idea of race helped explain why some people could be denied the rights and freedoms that others took for granted.

8. **Race justified social inequalities as natural.** As the race idea evolved, white superiority became "common sense" in America. It justified not only slavery but also the extermination of Indians, exclusion of Asian immigrants, and the taking of Mexican lands by a nation that professed a belief in democracy. Racial practices were institutionalized

within American government, laws, and society.

9. **Race isn't biological, but racism is still real.** Race is a powerful social idea that gives people different access to opportunities and resources. Our government and social institutions have created advantages that disproportionately channel wealth, power, and resources to white people. This affects everyone, whether we are aware of it or not.

10. **Colorblindness will not end racism**. Pretending race doesn't exist is not the same as creating equality. Race is more than stereotypes and individual prejudice. To combat racism, we need to identify and remedy social policies and institutional practices that advantage some groups at the expense of others.

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DEFENDING EDUCATION

Origin of the Idea of Race

by Audrey Smedley

Anthropology Newsletter, November 1997

Contemporary scholars agree that "race" was a recent invention and that it was essentially a folk idea, not a product of scientific research and discovery. This is not new to anthropologists. Since the 1940s when Ashley Montagu argued against the use of the term "race" in science, a growing number of scholars in many disciplines have declared that the real meaning of race in American society has to do with social realities, quite distinct from physical variations in the human species. *I argue that race was institutionalized beginning in the 18th century as a worldview, a set of culturally created attitudes and beliefs about human group differences.*

Slavery and the Coming of Africans

Race and its ideology about human differences arose out of the context of African slavery. But many peoples throughout history have been enslaved without the imposition of racial ideology. When we look at 17th century colonial America before the enactment of laws legitimizing slavery only for Africans and their descendants (after 1660), several facts become clear.

1). The first people that the English tried to enslave and place on plantations were the Irish with whom they had had hostile relations since the 13th century.

2) Some Englishmen had proposed laws enslaving the poor in England and in the colonies to force them to work indefinitely.

3) Most of the slaves on English plantations in Barbados and Jamaica were Irish and Indians.

4) Many historians point out that African servants and bonded indentured white servants were treated much the same way. They often joined together, as in the case of Bacon's Rebellion (1676) to oppose the strict and oppressive laws of the colonial government.

In the latter part of the 17th century the demand for labor grew enormously. It had become clear that neither Irishmen nor Indians made good slaves. More than that, the real threats to social order were the poor freed whites who demanded lands and privileges that the upper class colonial governments refused. Some colonial leaders argued that turning to African labor provided a buffer against the masses of poor whites.

Until the 18th century the image of Africans was generally positive. They were farmers and cattle-breeders; they had industries, arts and crafts, governments and commerce. In addition, Africans had immunities to Old World diseases. They were better laborers and they had nowhere to escape to once transplanted to the New World. The colonists themselves came to believe that they could not survive without Africans.

When some Englishmen entered slave trading directly, it became clear that many of the English public had misgivings about slave-trading and re-creating slavery on English soil. It was an era when the ideals of equality, justice, democracy, and human rights were becoming dominant features of Western political philosophy. Those involved in the trade rationalized their actions by arguing that the Africans were heathens after all, and it was a Christian duty to save their souls. By the early part of the 18th century, the institution was fully established for Africans and their descendants. Large numbers of slaves flooded the southern colonies and even some northern ones. Sometimes they outnumbered whites, and the laws governing slavery became increasingly harsher.

A New Social Identity

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the image of Africans began to change dramatically. The major catalyst for this transformation was the rise of a powerful antislavery movement that expanded and strengthened during the Revolutionary Era both in Europe and in the United States. As a consequence proslavery forces found it necessary to develop new arguments for defending the institution. Focusing on physical differences, they turned to the notion of the natural inferiority of Africans and thus their God-given suitability for slavery. Such arguments became more frequent and strident from the end of the eighteenth century on, and the characterizations of Africans became more negative.

From here we see the structuring of the ideological components of "race." The term "race," which had been a classificatory term like "type," or "kind," but with ambiguous meaning, became more widely used in the eighteenth century, and crystallized into a distinct reference for Africans, Indians and Europeans. By focusing on the physical and status differences between the conquered and enslaved peoples, and Europeans, the emerging ideology linked the socio-political status and physical traits together and created a new form of social identity. Proslavery leaders among the colonists formulated a new ideology that merged all Europeans together, rich and poor, and fashioned a social system of ranked physically distinct groups. The model for "race" and "races" was the Great Chain of Being or Scale of Nature (Scala Naturae), a semi-scientific theory of a natural hierarchy of all living things, derived from classical Greek writings. The physical features of different groups became markers or symbols of their status on this scale, and thus justified their positions within the social system. Race ideology proclaimed that the social, spiritual, moral, and intellectual inequality of different groups was, like their physical traits, natural, innate, inherited, and unalterable.

Thus was created the only slave system in the world that became exclusively "racial." By limiting perpetual servitude to Africans and their descendants, colonists were proclaiming that blacks would forever be at the bottom of the social hierarchy. By keeping blacks, Indians and whites socially and spatially separated and enforcing endogamous mating, they were making sure that visible physical differences would be preserved as the premier insignia of unequal social statuses. From its inception separateness and inequality was what "race" was all about. The attributes of inferior race status came to be applied to free blacks as well as slaves. In this way, "race" was

configured as an autonomous new mechanism of social differentiation that transcended the slave condition and persisted as a form of social identity long after slavery ended.

Humans as Property

American slavery was unique in another way; that is, how North American slave-owners resolved the age-old dilemma of all slave systems. Slaves are both persons and things----human beings and property. How do you treat a human being as both person and property? And what should take precedence, the human rights of the slave or the property rights of the master? American laws made clear that property was more sacred than people, and the property rights of masters overshadowed the human rights of slaves. Said Chief Justice Roger B. Taney in the famous Dred Scott case of 1857, "Negroes were seen only as property; they were never thought of or spoken of except as property" and "(thus) were not intended by the framers of the Constitution to be accorded citizenship rights."

In order to transform people solely into property, you must minimize those qualities that make them human. Literature of the early nineteenth century began to portray "the negro" as a savage in even stronger terms than those that had been used for the Irish two centuries earlier. This was a major transformation in thought about who Africans were. Historian George Fredrickson states explicitly that "before 1830 open assertions of permanent black inferiority were exceedingly rare" (The Black Image in the White Mind, 1987). By mid-century, the ideology of "negro inferiority" dominated both popular and scholarly thought.

Science and the Justification for "Races"

What is so striking about the American experience in creating such an extreme conception of human differences was the role played by scientists and scholars in legitimizing the folk ideas. Scholarly writers began attempting to prove scientifically that "the Negro" was a different and lower kind of human being. The first published materials arguing from a scientific perspective that "negroes" were a separate species from white men appeared in the last decade of the eighteenth century. They argued that Negroes were either a product of degeneration from that first creation, or descendants of a separate creation altogether.

American intellectuals appropriated, and rigidified, the categories of human groups established by European scholars during the eighteenth century, but ignored Blumenbach's caution that human groups blend insensibly into one another, so that it is impossible to place precise boundaries around them.

When Dr. Samuel Morton in the 1830s initiated the field of craniometry, the first school of American anthropology, proponents of race ideology received the most powerful scientific support yet. Measuring the insides of crania collected from many populations, he offered "evidence" that the Negro had a smaller brain than whites, with Indians in-

between. Morton is also famous for his involvement in a major scientific controversy over creation.

The very existence of a scientific debate over whether blacks and whites were products of a single creation, or of multiple creations, especially in a society dominated by Biblical explanations, seems anomalous. It indicates that the differences between "races" had been so magnified and exaggerated that popular consciousness had already widely accepted the idea of blacks being a different and inferior species of humans. Justice Taney's decision reflected this, declaring, "the negro is a different order of being." Thus slave-owners' rights to their "property" were upheld in law by appeal to the newly invented identity of peoples from Africa.

Scientists collaborated in confirming popular beliefs, and publications appeared on a regular basis providing the "proof" that comforted the white public. That some social leaders were conscious of their role in giving credibility to the invented myths is manifest in statements such as that found in the Charleston Medical Journal after Dr. Morton's death. It states, "We can only say that we of the South should consider him as our benefactor, for aiding most materially in giving to the negro his true position as an inferior race" (emphasis added). George Gliddon, co-editor of a famous scientific book Types of Mankind, (1854) which argued that Negroes were closer to apes than to humans and ranked all other groups between whites and Negroes, sent a copy of the book to a famous southern politician, saying that he was sure the south would appreciate the powerful support that this book gave for its "peculiar institution" (slavery). Like another famous tome (The Bell Curve, 1995) this was an 800-page book whose first edition sold out immediately; it went through nine other editions before the end of the century. What it said about the inferiority of blacks became widely known, even by those who could not read it.

During discussions in the U.S. Senate on the future of "the negro" after slavery, James Henry Hammond proclaimed in 1858 "somebody has to be the mudsills of society, to do the menial duties, to perform the drudgery of life." Negroes were destined to be the mudsills. This was to be their place, one consciously created for them by a society whose cultural values now made it impossible to assimilate them. In the many decades since the Civil War, white society made giant strides to "keep the negro in his place." Public policies and the customs and practices of millions of Americans expressed this racial worldview throughout the twentieth century.

These are some of the circumstances surrounding the origin of the racial worldview in North America. Race ideology was a mechanism justifying what had already been established as unequal social groups; it was from its inception, and is today, about who should have access to privilege, power, status, and wealth, and who should not. As a useful political ideology for conquerors, it spread into colonial situations around the world. It was promulgated in the latter half of the 19th century by some Europeans against other Europeans and reached its most extreme development in the twentieth century Nazi holocaust.

All anthropologists should understand that "race" has no intrinsic relationship to human biological diversity, that such diversity is a natural product of primarily evolutionary forces while "race" is a social invention.

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DEFENDING EDUCATION

The Historical Origins and Development of Racism

by George M. Fredrickson
http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-02-01.htm

Racism exists when one ethnic group or historical collectivity dominates, excludes, or seeks to eliminate another on the basis of differences that it believes are hereditary and unalterable. An ideological basis for explicit racism came to a unique fruition in the West during the modern period. No clear and unequivocal evidence of racism has been found in other cultures or in Europe before the Middle Ages. The identification of the Jews with the devil and witchcraft in the popular mind of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was perhaps the first sign of a racist view of the world. Official sanction for such attitudes came in sixteenth century Spain when Jews who had converted to Christianity and their descendants became the victims of a pattern of discrimination and exclusion.

The period of the Renaissance and Reformation was also the time when Europeans were coming into increasing contact with people of darker pigmentation in Africa, Asia, and the Americas and were making judgments about them. The official rationale for enslaving Africans was that they were heathens, but slave traders and slave owners sometimes interpreted a passage in the book of Genesis as their justification. Ham, they maintained, committed a sin against his father Noah that condemned his supposedly black descendants to be "servants unto servants." When Virginia decreed in 1667 that converted slaves could be kept in bondage, not because they were actual heathens but because they had heathen ancestry, the justification for black servitude was thus changed from religious status to something approaching race. Beginning in the late seventeenth century laws were also passed in English North America forbidding marriage between whites and blacks and discriminating against the mixed offspring of informal liaisons. Without clearly saying so, such laws implied that blacks were unalterably alien and inferior.

During the Enlightenment, a secular or scientific theory of race moved the subject away from the Bible, with its insistence on the essential unity of the human race. Eighteenth century ethnologists began to think of human beings as part of the natural world and subdivided them into three to five races, usually considered as varieties of a single human species. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, an increasing number of writers, especially those committed to the defense of slavery, maintained that the races constituted separate species.

The Nineteenth century was an age of emancipation, nationalism, and imperialism--all of which contributed to the growth and intensification of ideological racism in Europe and the United States. Although the emancipation of blacks from slavery and Jews from the ghettoes received most of its support from religious or secular believers in an essential human equality, the consequence of these reforms was to intensify rather than diminish racism. Race relations became less paternalistic and more competitive. The insecurities of a burgeoning industrial capitalism created a need for scapegoats. The Darwinian emphasis on "the struggle for existence" and concern for "the survival of the fittest" was conducive to the development of a new and more credible scientific racism

in an era that increasingly viewed race relations as an arena for conflict rather than as a stable hierarchy.

The growth of nationalism, especially romantic cultural nationalism, encouraged the growth of a culture-coded variant of racist thought, especially in Germany. Beginning in the late 1870s and early 1880s, the coiners of the term "anti-Semitism" made explicit what some cultural nationalists had previously implied--that to be Jewish in Germany was not simply to adhere to a set of religious beliefs or cultural practices but meant belonging to a race that was the antithesis of the race to which true Germans belonged.

The climax of Western imperialism in the late nineteenth century "scramble for Africa" and parts of Asia and the Pacific represented an assertion of the competitive ethnic nationalism that existed among European nations (and which, as a result of the Spanish-American War came to include the United States). It also constituted a claim, allegedly based on science, that Europeans had the right to rule over Africans and Asians.

The climax of the history of racism came in the twentieth century in the rise and fall of what might be called overtly racist regimes. In the American South, the passage of racial segregation laws and restrictions on black voting rights reduced African Americans to lower caste status. Extreme racist propaganda, which represented black males as ravening beasts lusting after white women, served to rationalize the practice of lynching. A key feature of the racist regime maintained by state law in the South was a fear of sexual contamination through rape or intermarriage, which led to efforts to prevent the conjugal union of whites with those with any known or discernable African ancestry.

Racist ideology was eventually of course carried to its extreme in Nazi Germany. It took Hitler and his cohorts to attempt the extermination of an entire ethnic group on the basis of a racist ideology. Hitler, it has been said, gave racism a bad name. The moral revulsion of people throughout the world against what the Nazis did, reinforced by scientific studies undermining racist genetics (or eugenics), served to discredit the scientific racism that had been respectable and influential in the United States and Europe before the Second World War.

Explicit racism also came under devastating attack from the new nations resulting from the decolonization of Africa and Asia and their representatives in the United Nations. The Civil Rights movement in the United States, which succeeded in outlawing legalized racial segregation and discrimination in the 1960s drew crucial support from the growing sense that national interests were threatened when blacks in the United States were mistreated and abused. In the competition with the Soviet Union for "the hearts and minds" of independent Africans and Asians, Jim Crow and the ideology that sustained it became a national embarrassment with possible strategic consequences.

The one racist regime that survived the Second World War and the Cold War was the South African in 1948. The laws passed banning all marriage and sexual relations

between different "population groups" and requiring separate residential areas for people of mixed race ("Coloreds"), as well as for Africans, signified the same obsession with "race purity" that characterized the other racist regimes. However the climate of world opinion in the wake of the Holocaust induced apologists for apartheid to avoid, for the most part, straightforward biological racism and rest their case for "separate development" mainly on cultural rather than physical differences.

The defeat of Nazi Germany, the desegregation of the American South in the 1960s, and the establishment of majority rule in South Africa suggest that regimes based on biological racism or its cultural essentialist equivalent are a thing of the past. But racism does not require the full and explicit support of the state and the law. Nor does it require an ideology centered on the concept of biological inequality. Discrimination by institutions and individuals against those perceived as racially different can long persist and even flourish under the illusion of non-racism, as historians of Brazil have recently discovered. The use of allegedly deep-seated cultural differences as a justification for hostility and discrimination against newcomers from the Third World in several European countries has led to allegations of a new "cultural racism." Recent examples of a functionally racist cultural determinism are not in fact unprecedented. They rather represent a reversion to the way that the differences between groups could be made to seem indelible and unbridgeable before the articulation of a scientific or naturalistic conception of race in the eighteenth century.

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DEFINING EDUCATION

Interview with Theda Perdue

edited transcript
http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-02-07.htm

Theda Perdue is a historian who teaches at the University of North Carolina. Among her books are The Cherokee; Cherokee Women*; and the forthcoming "*Mixed Blood" Indians: Racial Construction in the Early South.

What does it mean to say that race is an idea?

Today we have an idea that race is somehow set in stone, that race is something that has always been with us. We do not fully appreciate that race is an idea. It's an idea that has a history. It is an idea that was constructed by society in order to further political and economic goals.

In the 21st century, I think it is enormously important that we remember that race is a human creation, that it has a past, and that that past very much influences the present, and that understanding that past is essential to plan for the future.

What was the Enlightenment's role in the evolution of our ideas about race?

The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement of the 18th century that focused on a belief in natural law - that is, that there was one system of law that governed all human behavior. If you believe in natural law and you believe that all humans are subject to it, then there is a belief that all human beings are essentially the same. So most Enlightenment thinkers suggested that there was a common humanity, and that differences in individuals or in cultures was based on their experiences, on their education, on their opportunities, not on some fundamental inherent difference in them.

Enlightenment people were not egalitarians in the sense that they did not all believe that all people were equal. But the inequality was not something that was inherent and inborn. Inequality was the product of environment. And if you changed the environment, then you ultimately could make all people equal.

In the 17th century, Europeans tended to attribute human difference to religious reasons. That is, Indians were different from Europeans because they were non-Christians; they were heathens. By the 18th century, the Enlightenment made people think in more secular terms. So Jefferson and his contemporaries would attribute differences in human beings to their lack of education and opportunity, to their environment, rather than to the lack of Christianity.

Can you fit Amer-Indians into that picture?

When Europeans first came to the Americas, they of course encountered people who were very different from them. And there seemed to be no provision in the Bible to explain how they came to be there. So Europeans began to look for reasons, and one of

the things that they hit upon was that perhaps the American Indians were the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. Indeed in the 18th century, the Age of the Enlightenment, the idea that North American Indians were the lost tribes was enormously popular. And consequently, this gave Europeans a kind of tie to North American Indians. It also meant that North American Indians were essentially the same as Europeans. They simply had been separated from them for centuries and consequently had developed in very different kinds of ways.

People in the 17th century did not think about differences between human beings in the way that we think about those differences today. They were more likely to distinguish between Christians and heathens than they were between people of color and people who were white. That is, they regarded a person's status in life as somehow more fundamental than what color they were, or what their particular background was. And so in the 17th century, certainly Europeans had a concept of difference, but it was not a concept that is analogous to modern notions of race.

They also tended to attribute what they considered Indians' bizarre behavior to the work of the devil. That is, they considered it to be a part of heathenism, and that if Indians simply converted to Christianity, that they would not only stop behaving in the way they did, but that they would stop being heathens; that is, that their fundamental situation, their status in life, would change.

How did Indians view the Europeans during the first encounters?

Of course we don't really know how Indians viewed them because native people left few written records of the time. We do have drawings, we have oral traditions, so we're able to piece together some of the attitudes of native people.

Many Indians thought that they could use Europeans to accomplish their own goals. So native people saw Europeans as foreigners, but foreigners who could be useful to them. They didn't see them immediately as enemies. This is because native people tended to regard outsiders as people who were outside their kin network, outside their political organization. They did not necessarily see foreigners as fundamentally different. That is, they did not see them in racial terms.

In early America, did Indians consider themselves Indian?

I think most modern scholars recognize that race is a social and cultural construction. And consequently, people who have a different culture and live in a different society construct "difference" in various ways. The Cherokees constructed difference in terms of kinship. What made you a Cherokee was a Cherokee clan. If you belonged to a Cherokee clan - that is, a large extended family - you were Cherokee. And you became a member of a Cherokee clan through your mother. Clans were matrilineal; children inherited clan membership through their mothers. It did not matter who your father was. Consequently, Cherokee women who married European men, their children still were

Cherokee. They were never considered "mixed-bloods." They were always considered Cherokee, because your matrilineal clan made you a Cherokee.

Cherokee and other American Indians did not originally have a sense of themselves as one people. They saw themselves as quite distinct from other Indian tribes. Cherokees believed that they were very different from their neighbors the Creeks, for example, and they certainly were different from the Shawnees, with whom they were often at war. Indians did not see themselves as being a distinct race. And yet their experience with Europeans, both in terms of European attitudes about race and also their historical experience with Europeans, began to make them think of themselves in common terms. That is, they began to understand that Europeans lumped them together, that Europeans considered them to be one people.

At the same time, they had many of the same experiences with Europeans. Europeans wanted their land. And consequently, Indians would often join together - particularly by the late 18th and early 19th centuries - to make common cause against Europeans, both in war and in diplomacy. In the early 19th century, for example, John Ridge and another Cherokee served as secretaries for the Creek nation, because they were very adept in the English language and the Creeks wanted other Indians to help them negotiate with the United States.

So you have episodes in the early 19th century that demonstrate that Indians begin to think of themselves, if not exactly the same, at least as having common problems and common issues that they needed to deal with. This becomes much more the case, of course, as the 19th century progresses, because the United States begins to attempt to consolidate all Indian tribes west of the Mississippi in specific territories. And consequently, Indians who had never encountered each other, who had very little in common culturally, end up being neighbors. And they began to try to work out a way to live together, and they began to see that they could help each other in many respects. And so ultimately, by the end of the 19th century, Indians began to think of themselves as related peoples, if not the same people.

How did the Indians' material position in colonial America affect European racial attitudes towards them?

In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the Indian problem had many dimensions. One aspect of it was: How do you make a profit off these people? Because after all, the Europeans who came to North America were, in general, very interested in profits. How do you make a profit?

Indians occupy a really interesting position in the 17th and early 18th centuries, because they are seen as obstacles to expansion and obstacles to land-owning, but they're also seen as an opportunity - an opportunity to enslave them and to secure their labor, or sell them and get capital from that sale. But Indian trade was also very profitable. If you trade with these people, then what happens if they're enslaved? Then you lose both the producers of pelts, the consumers of manufactured goods. On the

other hand, the demand for Indian slaves is so high that it's very profitable to set one Indian tribe against another and to sell the captives on the slave market. And so I think Europeans at this particular time had lots of different ideas about how to deal with Indian people; they had different ideas about how to exploit Indian people.

The second thing is: How do you live with them? Indians had a different value system; they had a different social system; they had different beliefs. How do you live with them? What do you do when they kill your cattle who are ranging in the forests? What do you do when they capture some of your own people and adopt them and make them Indian? How are we going to deal with these people? And how are you going to get their land? How are we going to be able to expand and open up new farmland? How are we going to be able to accommodate our growing population, if these Indians are still here? And so the Indian problem had lots of dimensions.

Indians also presented a challenge for Europeans, because there were a certain number of Europeans who preferred to be Indians. I mean, it was something that Europeans puzzled about. Why would people go over to the Indians? Of course, Indians in the early colonial period certainly lived much better than European colonists did. And there were many things about Indian society that were very attractive, especially to women, who enjoyed a great deal more autonomy, a great deal more power, than women did in colonial society.

Why did settlers at first accept intermarriage with Indians?

In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, a number of people suggested that one solution to the Indian problem was simply to marry them. William Byrd is perhaps my favorite. He suggested that the best missionary's a sprightly lover. That is, the best way to convert somebody is to marry them. And that way, you incorporate them socially into your own society. Others suggested that by marrying Indians, you become heir to their land; that the easiest way to acquire Indian land is simply marry into the community, and then it becomes yours by right, without bloodshed.

Others suggest that marrying into Indian communities provides a certain security, because then you have people in those communities who will defend your interests, or if nothing else, reveal Indian plans to you. They're learn the language; they will become your advocates, in a sense, in those communities. And so intermarriage was seen as the solution to many dimensions of the Indian problem.

Intermarriage also provided a way to exploit Indians economically, because if a trader married into a prominent family, then it meant that that trader was going to get a good business in that community. And so intermarriage very much figures into that. And indeed in the South, virtually all the traders who operated in Indian country in the 18th century had Indian wives, sometimes more than one. So intermarriage seemed to be a solution of lots of problems.

Now, intermarriage is only acceptable if you believe that the people you're marrying are fundamentally the same as you. What happens in the 19th century is that there increasingly is the belief that Indians are not the same as Europeans. And consequently, intermarriage begins to be more problematic. Doesn't stop. Indeed, in the early 19th century, there are lots of opportunistic intermarriages, whites who marry Indians thinking that there will be an economic advantage to it. There's not this notion that through intermarriage we will ultimately assimilate these people and acquire their resources. There is instead a much more exploitive dimension to intermarriage.

What was Thomas Jefferson's attitude towards the Indians?

Thomas Jefferson wrote rather extensively on Indians in his Notes on the State of Virginia. And it's very clear that he regarded Indians as fundamentally the same as Europeans. He believed they had not had the opportunities or the education that people of European descent had had; but he also was quite convinced, with appropriate education, with appropriate opportunities, that they could produce someone the equivalent of Newton. That is, he believed that Europeans were not inherently superior to Indians; they were only culturally superior to Indians. And he believed that culture could be changed.

European settlers called Indians "savage." Why?

Europeans regarded Indians as savage because they didn't live the way Europeans did. They didn't wear the same kinds of clothes; they didn't live in the same kinds of houses; they seemed to have no religion; they simply lived in a different kind of way. They had a different set of sexual mores; they organized their families in very different ways; they had different political structures. They were simply different. And the differences seemed to be so extreme that the Europeans applied the term "savage."

I think we need to remember though that in the 18th century, the term "savage" referred to behavior; it did not necessarily refer to an inherent quality that could not be changed. By the 19th century, that begins to change. By the 19th century, with the rise of romantic nationalism, people began to regard savagery as an inherent trait that Indians simply could not change.

How would you characterize the first U.S. government policies towards Indians?

The first United States government Indian policy reflected Enlightenment ideology. That is, the United States decided that the cheapest, easiest way to avoid an Indian war along its entire frontier, and also to acquire Indian land, was to "civilize" the Indians.

Originally this did not apply to all Indians along the frontier, because the United States government in the early 1790s was at war with Indians in the old Northwest [Ohio]. But southern Indians immediately came under this policy, and the United States government sent agents out to the southern Indians to teach them the arts of civilization.

Now, civilization included certain very specific things. It included Christian religion; it included an English education, a republican government, and commercial agriculture. And so these Indian agents, sent out by the federal government, began to set up model farms and to teach Indians how to live like white men. The idea, of course, was ultimately to assimilate them into the American mainstream. And this is why I say it very much reflects Enlightenment ideology, because Enlightenment people believed that if you could change the way people thought and behaved, that they would all be the same. And so the first United States Indian policy intended to assimilate American Indians.

There is, however, a dark underbelly to this. And that is that if you can convert Indians from hunters into farmers, if you could confine them to a small acreage, then you would have all this surplus land which could be opened to white settlement. And so the "civilization" policy on the one hand was a benevolent, philanthropic policy. On the other hand, it was a scheme to acquire Indian land without going to war.

How did Indians fit into Jefferson's vision for America when he purchased Louisiana Territory?

When Jefferson purchased Louisiana, he clearly had Indians in mind. In fact, one of the ways he justified the purchase of Louisiana was that it would provide a place for American Indians to go. And by that he meant Indians who did not choose to assimilate, Indians who wanted to continue a traditional way of life.

Jefferson is the person who first broached the subject of removing eastern Indians to the West. But Jefferson saw this as an opportunity for Indians who wanted to preserve their traditional culture to be able to do that in the West. He did not see it as a scheme to remove Indians simply because they were Indians. That is, the people for whom he envisioned removal were people who wanted to remain culturally Indian. He believed that people who wanted to change, Indians who wanted to become "civilized," could remain in the East and could become a part of the American family.

Jefferson and many of his contemporaries advocated intermarriage. They saw that the marriage of Indians and Europeans would in fact be a solution to the Indian problem. I think this is a pretty clear indication that their ideas about race were quite different from those that come to the fore in the mid and late 19th century.

How did the Cherokees come to be known as one of the five "civilized" tribes?

The Cherokees were one of the tribes that the United States government focused on in its attempt to "civilize" the Indians. And indeed, in the 19th century - and I think even today - most people consider the Cherokees to be the great success story of the "civilization" policy. The Cherokees were able very quickly to transform, at least on a superficial level, their culture. They welcomed missionaries, who established schools. Many of their children went to those schools and began to learn to read and write in English. The Cherokees developed a system for writing their own language. A

Cherokee named Sequoya is responsible for this. In the late 1820s, the Cherokees began publishing a bilingual newspaper. They wrote a constitution that was patterned after that of the United States. The Cherokees made many accomplishments that led their supporters to proclaim them to be "civilized Indians."

How do the Cherokees respond to American pressures and the 'civilization' policy?

In the early 19th century, I think the Cherokees were increasingly aware of United States' land hunger. And they began to develop strategies to protect their nation. They do this on a political level by providing for a representative government, and only that government had the right to cede land. The Cherokees do it by including the boundaries of their nation in their constitution. That is, they do it in a political sense.

But they also do it in an intellectual sense. Sequoya's syllabary for example, I think, is a wonderful expression of Cherokee nationalism. At the time (in the early 1820s), most Anglo Americans believed that for Indians to be civilized, they must learn English; they must learn how to read and write English. But what Sequoia does is that he invents a way for writing the Cherokee language. And lo and behold, it became enormously popular. Cherokees who were native speakers could learn to read and write in their own language, in a matter of days. And a majority of families in the Cherokee nation had readers in Cherokee, within a matter of 15 years or so. And what this means is that Cherokees increasingly identified themselves as Cherokee.

Before the early 19th century, I think most Cherokees would have identified themselves as members of clans and towns. They would not have identified themselves as citizens of a centralized Cherokee nation. But in the 19th century, in response to white pressure for land, in response to pressure for assimilation, Cherokees begin to develop their own national identity. In doing so, they draw on the same kind of nationalist fervor that swept the United States, that swept Europe; that is, nations were emerging all over the world - nations in a modern sense in which people regarded citizenship as something that was fundamental to their identity. And Cherokees begin to participate in this. And they very much latch onto a European brand of nationalism to create this national identity.

Is race a part of that?

Race is very much a part of that. Indeed, Cherokees in the late 1820s, begin to identify members of their nation by race. That is, they begin to consider blood as one of the components of national citizenship. Now it's not the only component, because people who were not Cherokees by blood (that is, intermarried white people) could also become citizens of the Cherokee nation. So they're open to incorporating other people. But there also begins to emerge a kind of racial identity in the 19th century, that is very much a part of nationalism.

As modern notions about race began to emerge in the 19th century, I think most American Indians - certainly the Cherokees - understood that these new notions about

inherent inferiority really jeopardized their opportunities, their possibilities, their land, their very existence. And so many Indians began to distance themselves from African Americans. We have to remember that Indians were not just isolated out on the frontier. They visited eastern cities; they went to Europe. They understood European race relations.

And as they began to become familiar with European racial ideologies, and particularly as those racial ideologies begin to harden in the 19th century, Indians tried to make very certain that they were not classified with Africans. That is, they tried to make very certain that Europeans recognized them as a distinct people, and as a people who were higher on the racial scale than Africans.

Many of the Cherokee laws had a propaganda purpose. Now, I don't mean that they were strictly done for the benefit of United States officials, but I certainly think that this was always in the mind of Cherokee legislators. Their laws regarding slaves and African Americans served a very important purpose. That is, it made it clear to white Americans that Cherokees were not in the same category with African Americans; that indeed Cherokees themselves regulated the behavior of African Americans in their own society. And this served to separate them racially from other people of color.

Why do the Cherokee come to be increasingly racialized by white Americans?

Indians in the South were in a really unique position in some ways in 19th century America. They lived in the region in which wealth was very firmly grounded in land. Planters needed land on which to grow tobacco, to grow cotton, to grow other staple crops. Indians occupied that land. Indian owned that land. And consequently, Indians were under constant pressure for that land.

Indians also lived in the midst of a society whose economy was grounded on racial slavery. And Indians were now being seen as not white. Consequently, Indians were caught in a double bind here. They were caught in a situation in which whites wanted their land, but also whites wanted to keep them subjugated. Indians could never be the equal of whites.

And so the pressure to remove Indians from the Southeast, to push them off their ancestral lands, really is a double-pronged attack. It's an attack on the basis of: Indians have this land; they're not making the proper use of it; it needs to be farmed by whites who can put it to proper use. But also the idea that you have these independent people of color in the South, who are not fully subjugated because they're governed by their own tribal governments. And these people have to be brought to heel. These people have to be subjugated to this racial system.

It was virtually impossible to subjugate them unless you did away with their nations. And of course that is what the state of Georgia did in the removal crisis. It simply declared the Cherokee government inoperative within the chartered bounds of Georgia. And Georgia law began to be enforced over Cherokees who lived within the state. And

Georgia law was discriminatory. Cherokees were not the equals of whites in Georgia law. They could not testify against whites. And this meant that Cherokees were brought into that racial system. Georgians, of course, intended to make life so miserable for the Cherokees that they would agree to go west; that is, that they would surrender their land, which could then be opened to white settlement.

What is romantic nationalism?

In the early 19th century, a new intellectual tradition began to emerge that challenged Enlightenment notions about fundamental human equality. We often refer to this as "romantic nationalism," and it has many manifestations in art and in music. But politically, it creates the modern states that we know today. That is, people began to think of a nation as people who had certain fundamental qualities in common. Nationalism begins to be, in many respects, equated to race.

Race is of course something that is inherent, or that people believed was inherent. And consequently they believed that nations should be composed of people who had fundamental qualities, inherent qualities, in common: they thought the same way; they believed the same things; they spoke the same language; they looked the same. There is a notion of nationhood that is essentialist. And this is very contradictory to the Enlightenment notions of a united humanity.

After Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, a few Cherokees eventually sign a treaty agreeing to leave and move to Oklahoma. Tell us about that.

The Cherokees who negotiated the Treaty of New Echota - the treaty which provided for the removal of Cherokees from the Southeast to what is today eastern Oklahoma - included Elias Boudinot, his cousin John Ridge, and his uncle Major Ridge. These three individuals had emerged as the proponents of removal.

It's difficult today, I think, to fully appreciate the enormous tension in the nation at that time, and the kind of pressure that the Cherokees were under. Whites invaded their land; they killed people; they stole their property; they forced them out of their houses. Cherokees were really being pressed from all sides, it seemed. And people like the Ridges and Boudinot, I believe, thought that the Cherokees had little alternative.

But I also think that the issue was more complicated than that. I think that the experience of Elias Boudinot in New England, when he married a white woman and was ostracized by the white community, when he was burned in effigy for his marriage to a white woman - I think he truly believed that the Cherokees had no chance in white society. And so their only hope to continue as a people, to continue their nation, to preserve their sovereignty, was to give up their land in the Southeast and move west. He believed that it was more important to preserve the people than it was to preserve the land. And consequently, he signed the removal treaty.

I do not think all members of the treaty party were quite so pure in motive. I think that some of them were quite self-interested. Indeed, there were benefits that accrued to them as a result of supporting the treaty. But I also think that the racial experience of Elias Boudinot and his cousin John Ridge, contributed to their decision to support a removal treaty.

I think the Treaty of New Echota, by which the Cherokees were removed to the West, marks perhaps the end of Jefferson's dream. With the Treaty of New Echota, all Cherokees were to be removed. Those who had been to school, those who had even received higher education, those who were very accomplished in all the arts of "civilization," were to go west-not because they wanted to pursue a traditional way of life, but because they were Indian. That is, "Indian" became a classification: a group of people who, simply by virtue of birth, were destined to lose their homeland and be forced to relocate to a strange land.

The people who signed the Treaty of New Echota were acting illegally. The Cherokees had passed a law which prohibited the cession of land by unauthorized individuals, and they had specified a penalty of death for its violation. So when those people met at New Echota in 1835, they knew that they were breaking Cherokee law. None of them were authorized by the elected Cherokee government. And what they did was simply to assume authority that the Cherokees had not vested in them. The result, of course, was that they were immediately in danger. They had broken the law, and it was quite likely that Cherokees would seek justice.

Justice was a long time coming. The Cherokees continued to live in the Southeast for another 2½ years. The treaty was ratified by the US Senate - by one vote. The treaty went into effect. The Cherokees were imprisoned in stockades in the summer of 1838. Some of them began their trek west, that summer. But casualties were so high that Principal Chief John Ross appealed to the United States to delay their removal until the winter, and the United States agreed. And in the winter of 1838-39, virtually the entire Cherokee nation moved west. The casualties were horrendous. The most commonly accepted figure is that perhaps 4,000 out of 16,000 Cherokees died. This is why the Cherokee removal is often referred to as the Trail of Tears.

People who lost family members were angry with members of the treaty party, not simply because they had broken Cherokee law but because they were the instruments for the deaths of their relatives. And so when Cherokees got to the West, many Cherokees were very supportive of enforcing the law against the cession of land. We do not know the details of the planning of the execution of Boudinot, Major Ridge, and John Ridge. But not long after they arrived in the West, a group of Cherokees killed Boudinot, not far from his home; they killed John Ridge on his front porch; and they killed Major Ridge as he rode along a road. The three major leaders of the treaty party paid for their actions with their lives.

What does Elias Boudinot's life tell us about changing ideas of race in America?

I think that Elias Boudinot's life and death can tell us a great deal about race in America in the early 19th century. Elias Boudinot fulfilled the expectations of 18th century Enlightenment thinkers. He attended school, he became an intellectual, he was the editor of the Cherokee newspaper. He was a brilliant man in many respects. He should have been a prime candidate for acceptance into the broader American society. But he was an Indian. He would never be accepted. Because by the time that he became a man, racial attitudes in America had begun to change. By the 1820s, it no longer mattered what a person's accomplishments were. What mattered was the color of their skin and their ancestry. And Boudinot can never change that. He would always be an Indian.

How did the Dawes Act help reinforce ideas of race?

In the late 19th century, the United States government moves to destroy common landholding of the Indian nations in Oklahoma. This was a policy that was first applied to Indians elsewhere through the Dawes Act.

The Dawes Act attempted to destroy the Cherokee nation. It divided the commonly held Cherokee land among individuals, and essentially made the Cherokee nation superfluous. In the process of doing so, the Dawes Commission made a roll of all Cherokees. And on that roll, they specified several things.

For one thing, there was a separate roll for intermarried whites. People were identified not simply as citizens of the Cherokee nation, but they were identified racially on that roll. There was a roll of Cherokee freedmen, people identified specifically by race. And Cherokee freedmen, even those who had Cherokee ancestry, were identified not on the "Cherokee by blood" roll, but on the "freedmen" roll. And the third roll was "Cherokees by blood." And "Cherokees by blood" were not simply listed; they were assigned a blood quantum. The percentage of Indian blood was enumerated.

The purpose, of course, was to gain control over economic resources, because there were restrictions placed on Indian allotments based on their ancestry. The assumption was that the more Indian blood a person had, the least likely that person would be able to manage his or her own affairs. So a so-called "full-blood" would need government protection far longer than someone who was only one-quarter Cherokee. The Dawes Commission equates acculturation and race. The more Indian you are, the more Cherokee you are, the less acculturated you must be.

The Dawes era is an enormous tragedy for the Cherokees, because it is the period in which their landholdings were decimated. But I think it's a tragedy for another reason too, because the Dawes Rolls became a measure of how Cherokee you were.

What happens in the Dawes era is that Cherokees internalize Anglo American notions of race. The Dawes Roll becomes the basis for modern membership in the Cherokee

nation. And blood quantum becomes an idea that is very much a part of modern Cherokee mentality. Today, Cherokees think in terms of blood quantum, what percent Cherokee you are. Indeed, in order to enroll as a member of the Cherokee nation, you have to present a "Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood." You have to be able to trace your ancestry and your blood quantum to someone on the Dawes Roll.

Certainly Cherokees have the right to determine their membership in any way they want, and I defend that right absolutely. But the Dawes Roll meant that Cherokees abandoned their old notions of Cherokee identity based on clan and kinship, and adopted a racialized identity that was drawn right out of late 19th century Anglo American racism.

DEFENDING EDUCATION

WHITE PRIVILEGE

DEFENDING
EDUCATION

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

Peggy McIntosh
https://www.isr.umich.edu/home/diversity/resources/white-privilege.pdf

"I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group"

Through work to bring materials from women's studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are over privileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to women's statues, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. Denials that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of while privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in women's studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, "having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?"

After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are just seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling

followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us."

Daily effects of white privilege

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and time of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.

2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.

3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.

4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.

5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

6. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.

7. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.

8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.

9. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.

10. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.

11. I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another person's voice in a group in which s/he is the only member of his/her race.

12. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.

13. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.

14. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.

15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.

16. I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others' attitudes toward their race.

17. I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my color.

18. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty or the illiteracy of my race.

19. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.

20. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

21. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

22. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

23. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.

24. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the "person in charge", I will be facing a person of my race.

25. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.

26. I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

27. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance or feared.

28. I can be pretty sure that an argument with a colleague of another race is more likely to jeopardize her/his chances for advancement than to jeopardize mine.

29. I can be pretty sure that if I argue for the promotion of a person of another race, or a program centering on race, this is not likely to cost me heavily within my present setting, even if my colleagues disagree with me.

30. If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn't a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.

31. I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them, but in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices.

32. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.

33. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing or body odor will be taken as a reflection on my race.

34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.

35. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.

36. If my day, week or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it had racial overtones.

37. I can be pretty sure of finding people who would be willing to talk with me and advise me about my next steps, professionally.

38. I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.

39. I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.

40. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.

41. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.

42. I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.

43. If I have low credibility as a leader I can be sure that my race is not the problem.

44. I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.

45. I can expect figurative language and imagery in all of the arts to testify to experiences of my race.

46. I can chose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.

47. I can travel alone or with my spouse without expecting embarrassment or hostility in those who deal with us.

48. I have no difficulty finding neighborhoods where people approve of our household.

49. My children are given texts and classes which implicitly support our kind of family unit and do not turn them against my choice of domestic partnership.

50. I will feel welcomed and "normal" in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social.

Elusive and fugitive

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience that I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these perquisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant, and destructive.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a patter of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turn, and I was among those who could control the turf. My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make. I could think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color.

For this reason, the word "privilege" now seems to me misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work systematically to over empower certain groups. Such privilege simply confers dominance because of one's race or sex.

Earned strength, unearned power

I want, then, to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. But not all of the privileges on my list are inevitably damaging. Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored groups.

We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages, which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantage, which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. For example, the feeling that one belongs within the human circle, as Native Americans say, should not be seen as privilege for a few. Ideally it is an unearned entitlement. At present, since only a few have it, it is an unearned advantage for them. This paper results from a process of coming to see that some of the power that I originally say as attendant on being a human being in the United States consisted in unearned advantage and conferred dominance.

I have met very few men who truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance. And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them, or whether we will get truly distressed, even outraged, about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance, and, if so, what we will do to lessen them. In any case, we need to do more work in identifying how they actually affect our daily lives. Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the United States think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see "whiteness" as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

Difficulties and angers surrounding the task of finding parallels are many. Since racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not the same, the advantages associated with them should not be seen as the same. In addition, it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage that rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex, and ethnic identity that on other factors. Still, all of the oppressions are interlocking, as the members of the Combahee River Collective pointed out in their "Black Feminist Statement" of 1977.

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms, which we can see, and embedded forms, which as a member of the dominant groups one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Disapproving of the system won't be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitude. But a "white" skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subject taboo. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to me now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that systems of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly enculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Although systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and, I imagine, for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light-skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.

Peggy McIntosh is associate director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. This essay is excerpted from Working Paper 189. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming To See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies" (1988), by Peggy McIntosh; available for $10.00 from the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley MA 02181 The working paper contains a longer list of privileges.

This excerpted essay is reprinted from the Winter 1990 issue of Independent School.

Confronting White Privilege

Teaching Tolerance, Fall 2012

Even as the United States becomes more diverse, a new era of “white flight” is unfolding. Whether they live in urban, suburban or rural communities, white students are likely to attend schools that reinforce their perceptions of cultural dominance. The average white student attends a school where 77 percent of the student body is of their race. This racial segregation is often linked with economic segregation. As the gap between rich and poor widens, fewer than 7 percent of white children attend high-poverty schools.

In general, educational research tends to focus on the effects segregation patterns have on kids from low-income families or communities of color. However, not investigating the educational experiences of white, affluent students wrongly frames them as the successful norm to which others are compared.

For teachers working within homogeneous groups privileged by race and class, providing a critical multicultural education is of tremendous importance. A robust, diverse democracy depends not on self-interested, uncritical kids, but on young people who are willing to step outside of their comfort zones. To do that, students must understand how race and class influence their lives and want to work to make the world a better place.

But bringing multicultural education into racially uniform classrooms can be a daunting task. Parents and administrators may see no need for attention to inequality. They also may encourage teachers to superficially cover or celebrate “other” cultures in uncritical ways. Because the majority of public school teachers in the United States are themselves from similarly homogeneous communities of privilege, they may feel intimidated by or unprepared for this kind of work.

What specific strategies for engaging these students are most effective at raising awareness without also provoking guilt or anger? Data that I collected while studying two teachers as part of a case study during a school year point to two different philosophies.

Bursting the Bubble

The first teacher in my study, Vernon Sloan, calls himself a “suburban missionary” intent upon “bursting the bubble” in which his students live. When asked to describe the reasoning behind his elective Urban History course, he explains, “There’s that artificial line that separates the poor from the affluent that the media presents us—this image of

poverty being bad, and then the people are bad so we have to protect ourselves. … You have to cross that line."

Sloan has worked for 30 years at a public high school in a large suburb that is diversifying, but remains predominantly white and upper-middle class. One of the students described the community this way: "Everything here is so nice and kept clean, and it's not like the rest of the world. The people that live here—they know what they want and try to keep out what they don't want. …It's a nice place to grow up, but it's not real." All of the 14 students who participated in the study described themselves as living in a "bubble." They acknowledged why the suburb might be desirable ("clean," "safe"), yet they felt sheltered and wanted to be exposed to the "real world."

Sloan sought to give students some of that exposure, to "burst" (or at least "trouble") their "bubble." For example, Sloan is one of the few adults in their lives who has talked explicitly about how his gender, race, class, language and sexual orientation grant him privilege. The naming of racism and classism was a theme throughout the course: Students located their families' personal histories in relation to white flight, interviewed older people about racial memories and examined local housing policies. Sloan also encouraged them to critically discuss racism within their schools. For instance, he pointed out that the hallway where some newly arrived black students hung out was called "The Jungle."

Sloan also described white ethnicity and explained the different histories of groups that "became white." He got them to cross the border of their bubble by taking them on field trips to places outside their comfort zones and by supporting a student exchange with a school that has a homogeneous black population. Rather than focus on traditional academic assignments, Sloan's elective course was rooted in getting students to share experiences and personal stories.

When asked to describe the course's impact, one student said, "People like Mr. Sloan make [our suburb] not as much a bubble." Other students said that they now saw their community with new eyes and expressed frustration that its racial isolation had been hidden from them. Some, however, expressed frustration with what they perceived as mixed messages of the course. They pointed out that while Sloan tried to show the humanity of people in low-income neighborhoods, he also warned students about violence and gangs. "I don't know what he really wants," said one student. "Maybe he doesn't know."

At times, Sloan's approach seemed to reinforce and romanticize students' stereotypes of an exotic "other." By the end of the semester, the majority of the students advocated charity over addressing root problems. While presenting the world as either "inside" or "outside" the bubble ("Us" and "Them") may fit the way these students view the suburbs, it does little to challenge how such ideas can limit their critical thinking. "Bursting the bubble" can thus be a powerful framework, as long as the bubble's existence is, itself, examined and critiqued.

Disturbing the Comfortable

The second teacher in my study, Liz Johnson, has worked at her school for more than a decade. The school is an elite private academy located in the heart of a posh urban neighborhood. This academy has an explicit mission to prepare students to be justice-oriented citizens in a multicultural democracy—and charges upwards of $25,000 a year to do so.

Twelve students from Johnson's required Modern American History course participated in the study. None described their community as a bubble. Instead, they talked about how unsheltered they were compared with suburban counterparts and other elite students in the city. Despite the homogeneity of their student body, most of the white, upper-class students described themselves as cosmopolitans who are comfortable in any situation. "I feel like you're exposed to a lot more in the city," said one. "The suburbs are very sheltered. Almost everyone's the same, which is very unfortunate."

Rather than bursting bubbles, then, Johnson's approach was to trouble her students' sense of ease. "You can't just target the oppressed," she explains when asked why she chose to teach at this school. "I mean, I don't think my kids are the oppressors, but they belong to the oppressor class, more or less. … The cages need to be rattled, and that's what I'm doing. I have this motto: 'Disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed.'"

This meant that Johnson focused much of her students' attention on sources documenting historic and contemporary injustices. Students wrote essays, debated and participated in role-playing in order to examine their thinking. Throughout the semester, Johnson assigned readings and written work that demanded reflection from many perspectives.

These lessons were often connected to required social-action projects overseen by a team of teachers. Students divided into groups to address social issues such as the drug war, LGBT rights or religious intolerance. They conducted research to learn more about their topics, then met with local leaders and participated in political activities, such as lobbying the state legislature or soliciting signatures for petitions. Homework assignments included reading manifestos on social action and conducting interviews with community activists.

Most of Johnson's students showed great depth and breadth of knowledge about contemporary social issues. It was not unusual for them to think about and question their own positions on inequality, including a fascinating discussion on the lack of diversity at their own school.

However, some students focused less on their insights about inequality and more on how the course benefited them personally. When asked what he would take away from

the semester, one student said, “Ms. Johnson’s class has taught me how powerful it is to speak without a script and how easy it can be when you just have the confidence to do it. It’s opened up a lot of opportunities to use that skill other places.” Another student said that the academy was the “right kind of segregated upper-class school” because “we know what the lower class is missing out on and what we could help them gain if we, like, worked with them or something.”

“Disturbing the comfortable” can be a valuable framework for working with privileged students who typically have been taught to feel at ease—learning about inequalities can be unsettling. However, teachers should guard against over-emphasizing the need for merely intellectual opinions when they are not backed up by emotional responses. Also, teachers should avoid cultivating a sense of righteous exceptionalism that makes students feel even more comfortable.

Lessons Learned

These case studies show how race and class operate in different contexts. Students from a public school in a middle-class, majority-white suburb demonstrate significantly different thinking about themselves than do kids in a big city attending an expensive private school that serves a mostly upper-class white population. These differences affect how teachers should frame their approaches to multicultural education. Students who see themselves living in a bubble may need to have that bubble burst; students who are confident cosmopolitans may need to have their comfort disturbed.

This is not easy work. In both cases, the teachers’ good intentions did not always work out as planned. Even so, these approaches can be effective. It takes teachers and students willing to investigate more deeply the ways in which their communities are diverse and to question why homogeneity exists. Ultimately, teaching about diversity in places where there seems to be little of it can help students ask why the world is the way it is and, more important, how it can be better.

What Works?

To burst the bubble and disturb the comfortable successfully, keep these do’s (and examples) in mind:

- Do emphasize listening to multiple perspectives and voices of marginalized people. (Collect oral histories tied to racial issues.)
- Do examine local residential patterns in relation to historical and contemporary forces. (Study maps based on census data to understand patterns of white flight.)
- Do connect students’ experiences to the realities of injustice. (Identify and critically reflect on racial segregation within the school and community.)
- Do solicit both cognitive and emotional responses to primary sources. (Assign art projects, poetry, short documentaries and traditional academic essays tied to those sources.)

- Do offer opportunities for students to “re-network” their diverse privileges with people from marginalized groups. (Provide time for students to participate in community projects related to issues of injustice.)

DEFENDING EDUCATION

On Racism and White Privilege

Excerpted from *White Anti-Racist Activism: A Personal Roadmap* by Jennifer R. Holladay, M.S. (Crandall, Dostie & Douglass Books, Inc., 2000)

On Racism

Racism is a doctrine or teaching, without scientific support, that does three things. First, it claims to find racial differences in things like character and intelligence. Second, racism asserts the superiority of one race over another or others. Finally, it seeks to maintain that dominance through a complex system of beliefs, behaviors, use of language and policies. Racism ranges from the individual to the institutional level and reflects and enforces a pervasive view, in white dominated U.S. culture that people of color are inferior to whites.

Racist beliefs include things like “White people are smarter than people of color,” or “White people make better teachers.” Racism can manifest itself in terms of individual behavior through hate crimes, or in institutional behavior through employment discrimination. Racism might manifest in individual language through the use of slurs, or in institutional policy through a school’s selection of Eurocentric textbooks.

Related to these relatively obvious manifestations of racism is a subtle system that also contributes to the maintenance of the racial status quo. That subtle system is white skin privilege.

On White Privilege

White skin privilege is not something that white people necessarily do, create or enjoy on purpose. Unlike the more overt individual and institutional manifestations of racism described above, white skin privilege is a transparent preference for whiteness that saturates our society. White skin privilege serves several functions. First, it provides white people with “perks” that we do not earn and that people of color do not enjoy. Second, it creates real advantages for us. White people are immune to a lot of challenges. Finally, white privilege shapes the world in which we live — the way that we navigate and interact with one another and with the world.

<u>White Privilege: The Perks</u>

White people receive all kinds of perks as a function of their skin privilege. Consider the following:

• When I cut my finger and go to my school or office’s first aid kit, the flesh-colored Band-Aid generally matches my skin tone.
• When I stay in a hotel, the complimentary shampoo generally works with the texture of my hair.
• When I run to the store to buy pantyhose at the last minute, the ‘nude’ color generally appears nude on my legs.
• When I buy hair care products in a grocery store or drug store, my shampoos and conditioners are in the aisle and section labeled ‘hair care’ and not in a separate section for ‘ethnic products.’

• I can purchase travel size bottles of my hair care products at most grocery or drug stores.

My father, who has worked in economic development for 30 years, would explain away these examples of white privilege as simple functions of supply and demand economics. White people still constitute the numerical majority in this country, so it makes sense, for example, that Band-Aid companies would manufacture “flesh-tone” bandages for white people.

Even if I concede to his argument (and ignore the “buying power” of communities of color), it still does not change the impact of these white privileges. As a white person, I get certain perks that people of color do not; I get the bandages and the pantyhose and the shampoo at the hotel that works with my hair. And in a new grocery store, I will not have to scan the aisles for my hair care products. They will be in the section called “hair care.” This is how I experience the world.

These seemingly benign perks also demonstrate a danger on closer examination. Let’s say that I forgot to pack my shampoo for a business trip. When I get to the hotel, I see that the complimentary shampoo is not the standard Suave product to which I am accustomed but rather Pink Oil Lotion for African American hair. I would be surprised and might even think to myself: “Those black folks and all their lobbying … This is so unfair!” I expect these perks. As a white person, I think I am *entitled* to them.

White Privilege: The Advantages

Certainly, white privilege is not limited to perks like band aids and hair care products. The second function of white skin privilege is that it creates significant advantages for white people. There are scores of things that I, as a white person, generally do not encounter, have to deal with or even recognize. For example:

• My skin color does not work against me in terms of how people perceive my financial responsibility, style of dress, public speaking skills, or job performance.
• People do not assume that I got where I am professionally because of my race (or because of affirmative action programs).
• Store security personnel or law enforcement officers do not harass me, pull me over or follow me because of my race.

All of these things are things that I never think about. And when the tables are turned and my white skin is used against me, I am greatly offended (and indignant). The police department in my community, like so many other law enforcement agencies throughout this country, uses policing tactics that target people of color. Two years ago, I was driving down Rosa Parks Boulevard, a street that runs through an all-black and impoverished area of town, at night. I was looking for a house that I had never been to before, so I was driving slowly, stopping and moving as I searched for numbers on residences.

Out of nowhere, this large police van pulled me over, blue lights flashing and sirens blaring, and a handful of well-armed police officers jumped out of the van and

surrounded my car. I did as I was told, and got out of my car. ("Hands above your head; move slowly!") I then succumbed to a quick physical pat-down, as well as a search of my car. The officers had pulled me over -- not only because of my erratic driving -- but also, because, in the words of one officer, I was "a white woman driving down Rosa Parks after dark." They thought I was looking to buy drugs.

When I went to the office the next day, I relayed my story to several white colleagues. They shared my sense of violation, of anger, of rage. These co-workers encouraged me to call our legal department and report the incident. I later told the story to a colleague who is black and who lives on Rosa Parks. "You just never have to worry about those things, do you, Jennifer?" she asked and then walked off. In twelve words, she succinctly challenged my sense of privilege.

White Privilege: The World View

The third thing that white privilege does is shape the way in which we view the world and the way in which the world views us. The perks and advantages described above are part of this phenomenon, but not all of it. Consider the following:

• When I am told about our national heritage or "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
• Related, the schools that I attend or have attended use standard textbooks, which widely reflect people of my color and their contributions to the world.
• When I look at the national currency or see photographs of monuments on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., I see people of my race widely represented and celebrated.

As a white person, I see myself represented in all of these places. And, until a couple of years ago, I never questioned that representation — or why people of color were excluded. After all, people like me have done a lot for this country and for the world. If people of color had done their part, so the theory goes, they too would see themselves represented.

Well, people of color have done more than their share for this country. There is an old saying that the victors of war get to write the history of the world. White privilege works this way, too. Since white folks have been in control for so long, we have determined what is valuable or interesting or useful in terms of education. Greek and Roman mythology, Chaucer, and other canonized works have been selected and revered through the ages as critical components of any "solid liberal arts education."

I rarely have to question the validity of these selections — this is, after all, what is valuable and considered "the real stuff." And I am entitled to a good education, aren't I? I never question how or why some things are valued and others are not — why some things are important to "us" and other things are not. When people begin talking about diversifying a curriculum, one of the main things that opponents say is: "I am not willing to lower standards for the sake of minority representation."

The Black Student Coalition at my college, for example, lobbied the faculty to diversify the readings for the Literature 101 class, a required course for first-year students. One professor objected, saying: “You want me to replace Chaucer with the likes of Alice Walker?” Why *do* we value Chaucer more than the literary offerings of Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, or Audre Lorde? Who assigns that value and on what basis?

Things are starting to change slowly. Perhaps your high school hosted programs during Black History Month or during Asian and Hispanic Heritage Months. Maybe your college offered courses in Black, Latino, Caribbean, Native American, Asian or ethnic studies. These are good places to start, but we should not need separate months or classes. Black history is U.S. history; Chicano literature is valuable literature.

White privilege is a hidden and transparent preference that is often difficult to address. Only on closer inspection do we see how it creates a sense of entitlement, generates perks and advantages for white people and elevates our status in the world.

DEFENDING EDUCATION

RETHINKING SCHOOL ARTICLES

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Teaching Is a Fight • An Interview with Sal Castro

By Gilda L. Ochoa
Rethinking Schools - Winter 2010

Illustration: Joseph Ciardiello

In June, more than 40 years after the Los Angeles Unified School District tried to fire Sal Castro for his leadership of the 1968 Chicana/o Blowouts, it came full circle and named a middle school after him. As a young teacher, Castro was a key organizer of the 1968 student walkouts (called "blowouts" by the youth), when as many as 40,000 Chicana/o students marched out of their schools to demand bilingual and bicultural education, more Mexican American teachers and administrators, relevant curriculum, accurate textbooks, and an end to the tracking that steered Mexican American students into vocational classes.

Branded a dangerous agitator by television news commentators and charged with a series of felonies, Castro was fired by the school district. The community surged to his defense; eventually the charges were dropped and he was rehired. Through his work with the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference, Castro has nurtured generations of students. Since 1963, more than 5,000 students have participated in the conference.

In June 2010, Sal Castro sat down with Gilda L. Ochoa to talk about his passion for educational justice.

Gilda Ochoa: As a way to learn more about the factors shaping your perspective and work, can you begin by sharing a bit about your own family history and schooling?

Sal Castro: My parents came up here during the Mexican Revolution and met in Los Angeles. I guess they fell in love, got married, and I was born. When I was 2½–3, the height of the Depression hit; my old man got deported. They went to his place of work at the bakery—"Out you go." And he was a legal resident. My mother was at home. If she had been at work at the laundry, hell, they would have taken her. He got sent back to

Mexico, so then that started the unique process of my education in that we kept going back every summer because my mother had to keep her papers.

I began school at 5 years of age at Belvedere Elementary School in Los Angeles. But then, the next year, I went to Mazatlán, Mexico, in the summer, and I contracted the German measles. I had to stay there. My mother left me with my aunts. So my first formal school other than the kindergarten at Belvedere was a little private school in Mazatlán. When I was going to start school, they took me to the town carpenter. He measured me because they were going to build a desk for *me* to go to school, chair and all. I still remember those days there. They taught about people such as Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec emperor, and the Niños Héroes of Chapultepec. They really loaded you up. It gave you a lot of pride. I was able to learn to read, and everything around me looked like family.

But then I come back to Los Angeles in the 2nd grade, and the teacher put me in a corner because I wasn't as well versed in English as the rest of the kids. I was always challenging her—"How come I'm over here?"

I thought that she was the dumb one. Because she was older and bigger, she should have known Spanish. She should have been bilingual. I always put the onus on her. You know what happens to the U.S.-born kid, he puts the onus on himself, rather than the teacher. I always did the reverse. I guess that's what made my education unique.

Ochoa: Why do you think you were so strong as a young child—able to realize that you were not the problem?

Castro: I guess that thing about the desk and the fact that I was successful in school early. Then I started being challenged, and I had to learn the language fast. It was the middle of World War II. There was rationing of food and clothing, and you couldn't buy meat except with food stamps and little red chips, and you had to go to the school to get a new book of food stamps. I was the only one who could translate. I could see those people looking at us with disdain that my aunt didn't know how to speak English.

As a little kid, I'd go shine shoes downtown at Clifton's Cafeteria. I was supposed to take the money home, but then I'd go to the movies and buy popcorn. So, I'm sitting there at the Los Angeles Theatre. All of a sudden, the management turned the lights on for the sailors to come in and grab all the cholo kids and haul them out and either pull their pants off or cut them because they used to wear these drape pants. I ran out with my shoeshine box to see what the hell was going on, and I said, "Well, the cops will break all this up." The cops stood there and laughed. I said, "Oh, shit!" and walked home. I was scared because you always think as a little kid, "The police are going to protect me." But when they were part of it, I said, "Oh God!"

Becoming a Teacher, Joining the Fight

Ochoa: What made you decide to become a teacher?

Castro: I got a job working playgrounds. From that job with LA Rec. and Parks, I was able to also get a job with the school district in youth services. Working with the kids, I started thinking: “Man, this is cool. This is fun. These kids are crazy. They keep me crazy. I like kids and they respond to me, too.” At the time, I was a junior at Cal State Los Angeles, and I changed my major to social studies.

I started teaching in ’62 in Pasadena and then continued at Belmont High in LA. They liked what I did as a student teacher at Belmont, and they called me back for the fall of ’63. They wanted me to stay in Pasadena, but I said, “My fight is down there in LA.” I was already thinking fight rather than my teaching.

In fact, I first got into hot water at Belmont in ’63. I was there three months when I started figuring out, “There ain’t no Chicano kids in the student council.” Around 67 percent of the students were Chicanos, and there were no kids on the student council of Latino descent. They were just keeping them out. I also knew that there was a program at Belmont where a bus came, picked up 25 seniors, took them to City College to get college English credit. Not one of them was a goddamn Mexican kid.

I went to the principal and I told her, “You know, Mrs. Lord, more than half the kids are Latino, Mexican kids, and we’ve got no kids in any of the leadership positions or even this program.” She said, “Mr. Castro, the Mexican kid has a charming passivity, and you tell me you want to take that away?” I said, “Oh, shit, I’ve got problems here.”

So I started finding kids who were eligible to run for student council. I said, “Let’s form a political party to run as a slate.”

Two teachers helped me: Mary Mend and Pat Martin. I said, “We’ll all get together and create a constitutional convention to work out who’s going to run for what.” It was raining cats and dogs, but this school auditorium was filled, kids wanting to get involved. They picked the name: the TMs. They started writing the initials TM on the chalkboard of every classroom. TM stood for the Tortilla Movement!

There were speeches that would be presented to the school. I told the kids, “Say a few words in Spanish—just a sentence or so for the foreign students.” What I didn’t know, there was a rule at Belmont that there was not to be foreign language spoken on the stage. When the kids started speaking a few words, boom, they stopped the assembly. They made all the kids go back, and then they started drilling the kids. I said: “You want me. I’m the one that you want, not the kids.” The next day, I found myself suspended. The next semester, I found myself at Lincoln High School, just like that. I wasn’t even a probationary teacher. I was a provisional teacher, which meant I had no rights. How I survived that, I’ll never know. But they did transfer me to Lincoln, and I began all over again.

Ochoa: So you entered teaching with that perspective, knowing that it was going to be a fight.

How did this fit in with your involvement with the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference?

Castro: In ’63, when I was still at Belmont High School, there was an article in the paper about the LA County Human Relations Commission planning a three-day conference for Mexican American high school kids. They needed volunteers. The youth conference opened my eyes. You had 100 to 200 kids coming together from LA County schools, from as far as Pomona, El Monte, La Puente, West LA, the Valley. At the conference, kids were complaining about the same things all over. Kids were trying to survive—there was a fight between the girls about dying their hair blonde so they could fit in or pass. The kids were talking about the bathrooms being locked, the disrespect of teachers toward the kids, and so few students channeled to go to college. So much tracking was being done—the home economics tracking for girls and the industrialized arts for the boys. So, here we are saying, “Stay in school blah, blah, blah,” and they were mad.

Photo: George Rodgriguez
Sal Castro teaching students at Lincoln High School.

I liked the fact that I was able to deal with kids from all around and exchange ideas about what could be done. But the main thing was that these kids had to graduate and go on to college. Any change that was going to happen, that’s the way it was going to be. So the conference continued every year, once a year. I kept going, kept in touch with the people, and stayed with it all the way through today.

Ochoa: So the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference had already started, and then in 1968 were the student walkouts.

Castro: It’s all one big package.

Ochoa: Can you tell me about your role in the walkouts and with the students?

Castro: The last straw was in April 1967. There was an article that came out in *Time* magazine called “Pocho’s Progress,” and they described East LA: “Rollicking cantinas with the reek of cheap red wine and greasy taco stands and the rat-tat-tat of low-riding cars down the avenue.” That’s how they described us! I started feeling a weight on my shoulders, like it was a barbell, and it kept getting heavier and heavier. The more I saw, the more I got into it, and the more I saw how really terrible the situation was. The

minute the kids walked out, the weight went away, and I became cocky. I guess what I was supposed to do, I did.

Ochoa: In addition to the youth conference, what other organizing happened in preparation for the walkouts?

Castro: Everything came together. I started taking the kids from Lincoln High School to other places where we started meeting. We kept in contact with the kids from Wilson, Roosevelt, and a few other schools.

I thought we were going to bluff having a big strike, not doing it but bluffing it to the point that the school board would meet with the kids. Then the kids would give them the demands and say: "You either do it or we'll clean out the schools. Kids are not going to go to school."

That was the original intent because I was worried that kids crossing gang territories might be a problem if they walked out. I didn't want anybody hurt. But just in case, I started going to colleges. UCLA was one of the first I went to. UMAS (United Mexican American Students) had already been created. I told them: "The kids are going to need you. They're going to need you for your heads." They looked at each other. "Well, I guess we're the smart ones." I said, "No, I need you to get your heads in the way in case the cops start swinging their batons; you'll give the kids time to either run back to school or run home." So they wholeheartedly supported it, as did students from other colleges.

The demands were real revolutionary ideas like smaller classes and more counselors. The papers made it seem like these were radical ideas. Today it's called CRRE—culturally relevant and responsive education. That was what we wanted in '68, but what do these Mexicans know?

The Chicano Youth Conference

Ochoa: How do you see the struggles we have faced since the walkouts?

Castro: When President Clinton invited me to the White House in the 1990s, I said: "My President, we're in a crisis. We lead the nation in high school dropouts. We lead the nation in college dropouts, and we also lead the nation in the dubious distinction of teen pregnancies." I could get invited to the White House again today and tell President Obama: "President Obama, you know what I told President Clinton 13 years ago? We still lead the nation in high school dropouts, college drops, and teen pregnancy." Nothing's really changed even though we've got more brown faces, a hell of a lot more brown faces, in positions that should do some good.

Ochoa: How has the Chicano Youth Conference tried to address educational disparities? Which students participate in the conference?

Castro: We've run one conference a year, sometimes two. We generally have about 150 kids from LA city schools, Valley schools, and parochial schools. Most of them are 11th graders, and some are 12th graders. We've had miraculous results from the kids who are doing poorly in school, and the kids who are doing well continue on—to the point that 84 to 87 percent of the kids who go through the three-day conference graduate from college.

Ochoa: What happens during those three days?

Castro: As the kids get off the buses in Malibu, high school mariachis are playing. Then they get broken up into groups of 10 with two college students. The groups are given Native American names such as Yaqui, Chippewa, and Zapotec. They're in groups the whole time they're there. On Friday, there are welcoming speeches and that evening they see the movie *Walkout*. They discuss it, and later on there is dancing. They learn how to polka so when they go to baptisms and weddings they'll know how to dance. We keep them up until about 12:30-1:00.

We wake them at 5:30 with loud mañanitas music. A professor speaks. Sometimes it's Dr. Rudy Acuña or Dr. Juan Gómez-Quiñones, so it's been high-powered people. Not only do the professors talk about intellectual things, but there is also a lot of cultural and historical awareness.

Later on Saturday, they have a college fair. In the evening the college students become models with a fashion show on how to dress for the world of work. The kids go to a Mexican hoedown, and a conjunto from Santa Paula plays for them. At that point, the kids really come home. They dance the polka to the country music. We know that they've gotten the message when they start doing that. Later that evening, there's a dance with a salsa band.

Sunday morning, there's a mass and then testimony of what they've gotten out of the conference. Two or three kids from each of the tribes get up and speak about their experiences. Interacting with college folks and seeing all those PhDs really juices them. A lot of the comments when they leave are, "We didn't know that there were that many PhDs, and we didn't know that our people have done so much." They walk out of there feeling 10 feet tall, and they're very emotional. Boys and girls cry when they leave. They're born again, born again Latinos.

The Role of Students Today

Ochoa: What role do you think today's students should play in trying to effect change?

Castro: Last night when I was speaking at UC Riverside, the college students were telling me, "Hey, we want to go to Arizona." I said: "Let the feds take care of that. Racism in this country has been going on since time immemorial. The changes will

come by you getting a BA, an MA, a PhD. I want to see a room full of PhDs here. Go back to your schools, go and talk to the kids about college because you're giants in the little kids' eyes. Go set up field trips to bring the kids to the college. And you've got to get your degrees. This is the way that we're going to eventually move forward.

Ochoa: So you told them to stay in school. But in 1968 people encouraged you to tell students not to walk out and you didn't listen. Why do you think it's different today?

Castro: They did tell us not to walk out. What do I think is different? For one, the money's not there. Even though some of the things that we asked for were naive, they were things that could happen. Lowering the class size, having more college counselors, those were things they could do. Retraining so that teachers would have a different approach to teaching, there was even money for that. We asked for people in the community to work in the cafeteria and in the offices so there could be bilingual people. So most of the things were really not out of this world. It was affordable.

Today, we have these reactionary feelings that were dormant in '68. One of the reasons why there's a lot of resistance to allotting more money into education today is because white folks think that money is only going to be spent on minorities in schools, and they don't want to spend their tax money on minorities.

In the late '60s, there was turmoil, and there were folks out in the street not only for the Vietnam War but also for civil rights. The climate was ripe because there were attempts to change the path of where the United States was going. There was a hunger for redressing grievances and having the United States accomplish what it really was intended to do. Today, what these folks are talking about is a strict construction of the Constitution as they see it. They never once bother to see Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution that says the government is there to promote the general welfare. Does that not mean Medicare, Social Security, and education for all kids from K-16? To them, a government is there for protecting their individual liberty and nothing else. That's the attitude today. There's no way that you would get positive results [from student walkouts] from what people feel today.

The real obstacle is the racism of this country. If racism were eradicated then we really would have liberty and justice.

The Role of Teachers Today

Ochoa: What would you say to today's teachers, given the current conditions for Chicano/Latino students?

Castro: You start with the love of the kids, not the love of your subject matter. You start loving the kids, and know that you're going to go to the wall for them to make sure that they're successful. Then, you better reek of ethnic studies. In history, you talk about the American Revolution, and you throw in Mexican or Spanish surnames: Bernardo Gálvez, the 9,000 Mexican troops that came up here, the money that Mexico donated to

Washington for the revolution, the missions that were collecting money for the revolution.

The kids knew I cared. They knew that I was there for them even if they had already graduated. They saw the love. So they had respect for me.

Ochoa: You've had a long commitment to teaching.

Castro: Thirty years ago, I had offers from UCLA, Cal State Northridge, and other colleges. But I said: "No, no, I started as a teacher. I raised hell as a teacher." Once, in 1975, they wanted me to run for Congress. NEA was going to finance it. But when I realized I would have to go out and beg for money I said, "Nah, I'll beg for money for the kids," which I do for the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference, but not for myself. So I backed out. I said, "I started as a teacher, and they may have to drag me feet first out of the classroom as a teacher."

DEFENDING EDUCATION

Bad Signs

By Alfie Kohn
Rethinking Schools, Spring 2011

Illustration: Randall Enos

You can tell quite a lot about what goes on in a classroom or a school even if you visit after everyone has gone home. Just by looking at the walls—or, more precisely, what's on the walls—it's possible to get a feel for the educational priorities, the attitudes about children, even the assumptions about human nature of the people in charge.

A chart that I created more than a decade ago called "What to Look for in a Classroom" listed some Good Signs along with Possible Reasons to Worry (Kohn, 1999, appendix B). Among the latter: walls that are mostly bare, giving the building a stark, institutional feel; and posted displays that suggest either a focus on control (lists of rules or, even worse, punishments) or an emphasis on relative performance (charts that include grades or other evaluations of each student).

Because I've done so elsewhere, I won't take time here to explain why such lists and charts make me shudder. Instead, I'd like to consider a few signs and posters that are generally regarded as innocuous or even inspiring.

'No Whining'

This sign—which sometimes consists of the word "whining" with a diagonal red slash through it—sends a message to students that seems to be "I don't want to hear your complaints about anything that you're being made to do (or prevented from doing)." To be sure, this is not an unusual sentiment; in fact, it may be exactly what your boss would like to say to you. But that doesn't mean it's admirable to insist, perhaps with a bit of a smirk, that students should just do whatever they're told regardless of whether it's reasonable or how it makes them feel. If *we* might respond with frustration or resentment to receiving such a message, why would we treat students that way? "No whining" mostly underscores the fact that the person saying this has more power than the people to whom it's said.

Of course, the sign could be read more literally. Perhaps it's just a certain style of complaining, a wheedling tone, that's being targeted. Frankly, I don't love that sound either, but should someone's tone of voice really take precedence over the content of whatever he or she is trying to say to us? I'm less annoyed by whining than I am by the

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disproportionate reaction to it on the part of adults. It's fine to offer an occasional, matter-of-fact reminder to a child that people tend to be put off by certain ways of asking for something, but our priority should be to make sure that kids know we're listening, that our relationship with them doesn't depend on the way they talk to us. Besides, young children in particular need to have some way of expressing their frustration. We don't let them hit, scream, or curse. Now we're insisting that they can't even use a tone of voice that's, well, insistent?

Regardless of how whining is defined, going to the trouble of posting a sign about it suggests that our own convenience is what matters most to us (since it's obviously easier for anyone in a position of authority if those being ordered to do something comply without question). It also implies that we're unwilling to reconsider our own actions and uninterested in having students question authority—despite the fact that education at its best consists of helping them to do precisely that.

'**Only Positive Attitudes Allowed Beyond This Point**'

I've seen this poster on classroom doors in a public school in Minnesota, a Catholic school in Indiana, and a quasi-progressive Friends school in Massachusetts. Each time I came across it, I found myself imagining how its message might be reworded for satirical purposes. Once I came up with "Have a Nice Day . . . or Else." Another time I fantasized about secretly removing the poster at night and replacing it with one that reads "My Mental Health Is So Precarious That All of You Had Better Pretend You're Happy."

I've long been convinced that dark stuff sometimes lurks just behind the huge, brittle smiles and the voices that swoop into unnaturally high registers in front of little children. Even apart from the treacly style in which it's often delivered, the compulsive tendency to praise kids when they do something helpful may reflect the pessimistic assumption that the action was a fluke: Children must be marinated in "*Good job!*"s whenever they happen to do something nice; otherwise they'll never act that way again. The more compulsive (and squeaky) the use of positive reinforcement, the bleaker the underlying view of children—or maybe of our species.

Putting students on notice that their attitudes had better damn well be positive tells us less about what makes for an optimal learning environment than it does about the needs (if not neediness) of the person who sends this message. Kids don't require a classroom that's relentlessly upbeat; they require a place where they'll feel safe to express whatever they're feeling, even if at the moment that happens to be sad or angry or scared. They need a place, in other words, where negativity is allowed. Bad feelings don't vanish in an environment of mandatory cheer—they just get swept under the rug where people end up tripping over them, so to speak. What you or I may describe as a negative *attitude*, meanwhile, may be an entirely appropriate response to an unfair rule, an intimidating climate, or a task that seems pointless or impossible. To exclude such responses from students is to refuse to think seriously about what may have given rise to their negativity.

Inspirational Posters

Far more common than any specific message, including the two I've mentioned here, is a whole class of posters that might be described as "inspirational." Taped up in elementary, middle, and high schools across the country—outside the main office, in the cafeteria and the library, on individual classroom walls—we find these earnest, interchangeable calls to greatness, typically superimposed on gorgeous, fading photographs. "You can if you think you can!" "Reach for the stars!" "Achievement is within your grasp!" "Winners make the effort!" "This year I choose success!" And on and on.

At this point I should probably confess that I don't much care for posters on school walls, period. It may seem like a harmless way to cover up painted cement blocks, but there's something impersonal and generic about items that weren't created by, or even for, the particular individuals who spend time in this building. Show me a school that adorns its walls with posters created by distant corporations, and I'll show you a school where it's possible the same could be said of its curriculum.

But if commercial posters in general don't gladden the heart of a visitor, there's something uniquely off-putting about *these* posters, which show up in all sorts of workplaces, not just schools. And it seems I'm not alone in this reaction, judging by the popularity of a series of parodies marketed under the name "Demotivators." One of these posters features a dramatic image of the pyramids along with the caption: "ACHIEVEMENT—You can do anything you set your mind to when you have vision, determination, and an endless supply of expendable labor." Another depicts a leaping salmon about to wind up in the jaws of a bear: "AMBITION—The journey of a thousand miles sometimes ends very, very badly."

Let's not just satirize, though; let's analyze. The exhortatory slogans found on motivational posters, like those in motivational speeches and books, tend to offer a combination of strenuous uplift and an emphasis on self-sufficiency. They tell us that, individually, we can do anything if we just set our minds to it.

Here's the first problem: The assurance that you can achieve anything you desire through hard work stretches the truth beyond recognition. And it's in the neighborhoods where children are most likely to hear about the wondrous results that await anyone with perseverance and a dream that the claim is hardest to defend.

"You can be the valedictorian!" It's not just that being the valedictorian is an unrealistic expectation for most students; it's that this status, like so much else in our schools and our society, is set up as a zero-sum game. If I become the valedictorian, then you can't, and vice versa. In a competitive environment, our dreams are mutually exclusive. This fact the posters somehow neglect to mention.

"You can get into Harvard!" And what happens when I, like 93 percent of the other self-selected and mostly super-qualified applicants, receive my rejection letter from

Cambridge? What if I choose success and reach for the stars and stay true to my goals—only to wind up with nothing? Some students will become angry—concluding, not unreasonably, that they have been lied to. But others will blame themselves.

And that's problem No. 2: "The flip side of positivity is thus a harsh insistence on personal responsibility," Barbara Ehrenreich observed in her recent book *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*. If you fail, "it must [be] because you didn't try hard enough, didn't believe firmly enough in the inevitability of your success."

And who benefits when the have-nots are led to think that way? Suffice it to say that nothing maintains the current arrangement of power more effectively than an approach that ignores the current arrangement of power. Rather than being invited to consider the existence of structural barriers and pronounced disparities in resources and opportunities, we're fed the line that there are no limits to what each of us can accomplish on our own if we just buckle down.

Notice, too, that inspirational posters are almost always generic, the implication being that "success" or "achievement," per se, is desirable; it doesn't matter what one wants to achieve. Any dream will do. But is that a conviction we're really prepared to endorse? And again, as they say in Latin, *cui bono*? Whose interests are served when we look at things that way?

"You can get an A!" For example, what if success is defined in terms of high grades, as is the case in traditional schools? The available research suggests that there are three predictable effects when students are led to focus on bringing home better report cards: They tend to become less interested in the learning itself, to think in a more superficial fashion, and to prefer the easiest possible task. But who is going to bother rethinking the value of rating students with letters or numbers—or the value of the specific tasks involved, like memorizing facts for a test or filling out worksheets, that determine who gets which grades—if the goal is just success, and that's equated with getting an A? Do we want to send the message that this objective is more meaningful than, say, coming up with a novel solution to a meaningful intellectual challenge? (Kohn, 1993, 1999)

The message of the self-help movement has always been: Adjust yourself to conditions as you find them because those conditions are immutable; all you can do is decide on the spirit in which to approach them (hint: We recommend a can-do spirit). To do well is to fit in, and to fit in is to perpetuate the structures into which you are being fit.

Am I being too hard on, or expecting too much from, a simple poster? Well, precisely because they're so pervasive—and accepted so uncritically—I think it's worth digging into the hidden premises of their chirpy banalities. Just because something is generally regarded as uncontroversial doesn't mean it's value-neutral. Imagine if a very different sort of poster appeared in your local high school—one that said, for example, "Some children are born into poverty; others are born with trust funds"—and picture what the accompanying illustration might look like. Or suppose we put up a sign that featured this

remark by the late George Carlin: “It’s called the American dream because you have to be asleep to believe in it.” Undoubtedly some people would complain that these sentiments were too controversial. But where is the outrage over the subliminal values of a poster that airily assures us “The sky’s the limit!”?

One measure of the ideological uses to which inspirational slogans are put is the fact that they seem to be employed with particular intensity in the schools of low-income children of color. Jonathan Kozol has incisively pointed out the political implications of making African American students chant “Yes, I can! I know I can!” or “If it is to be, it’s up to me.” Such slogans are very popular with conservative white people, he notes, because “if it’s up to ‘them,’ the message seems to be, it isn’t up to ‘us,’ which appears to sweep the deck of many pressing and potentially disruptive and expensive obligations we may otherwise believe our nation needs to contemplate.” He adds: “Auto-hypnotic slogans” such as “I’m smart! I know that I’m smart” are rarely heard in suburban schools where “the potential of most children is assumed.”

I’d love to see a research study that counted the number of motivational posters (along with other self-help, positive-thinking materials and activities) in a school and then assessed certain other features of that school. My hypothesis: The popularity of inspirational slogans will be correlated with a lower probability that students are invited to play a meaningful role in decision-making, as well as less evidence of an emphasis on critical thinking threaded through the curriculum, and a less welcoming attitude toward questioning authority. I’d also predict that the schools decorated with these posters are more likely to be run by administrators who brag about the school’s success by conventional indicators and are less inclined to call those criteria into question or challenge troubling mandates handed down from above (such as zero-tolerance discipline policies or pressures to raise test scores).

Good Signs

It would seem unsporting, and perhaps unduly negative, to conclude this essay without suggesting what might replace all of those mass-produced exhortations. Perhaps we can begin with phrases that seem suitable for posting to someone with a more progressive sensibility—for example, “Question authority.” Or imagine a principal’s office with a framed copy of this reminder from researcher Linda McNeil: “Measurable outcomes may be the least significant results of learning.” Similarly, what could be more refreshing than the large sign tacked up in a Washington state classroom that said “Think for yourself; the teacher might be wrong”?

I’d be happy to wander the halls of a middle school where every student has a sign on his or her locker that says “[Name of student] is currently reading . . .” accompanied by a photocopy of the cover of the book in question (Frost). Beyond the specific information being conveyed, compare the cumulative impact of hundreds of such announcements with those well-meaning but insipid reminders to “Read!” that appear in libraries. In fact, I like to see school walls filled with all sorts of information about, and personal mementos of, the people who spend their days there. (And that includes the adults.

When Deborah Meier was its principal, the central corridor of the Mission Hill School in Boston filled a large bulletin board with childhood photos of the school's teachers.)

When I visit traditional classrooms, grimacing at so much of what's on the walls, I find myself wondering why they're not filled with stuff done by the students. The answer to that question, unfortunately, may be that the students haven't been allowed to do much that's worth displaying. Hence my original hypothesis, that the room decor may speak volumes about the theory and practice of instruction. I once spent time in a Long Island elementary school classroom where elaborate animal habitats were being created, and students had posted lists of "problems we faced when designing and constructing" these habitats. The displays gave evidence of complex thought, perseverance in overcoming those problems, class wide cooperation—and the fact that the teacher's priority was to help these kids learn to think like scientists rather than just memorizing scientific facts for a test.

The broader moral is that the best classrooms, regardless of age level or academic discipline, often feature signs, exhibits, or other materials obviously created by the students themselves. And that includes students' ideas for how to create a sense of community and learn together most effectively—as opposed to a list of rules imposed by the teacher (or summarized on a commercial poster).

We're ultimately led to ask a meta-question: "Who decides what goes on the walls?" I'd be willing to bet that just about all of the signs and posters about which I've been raising concerns here were put up by the adults without even consulting the students. (What kid would suggest "No Whining"?) In fact, the exclusion of the people we're there to teach may be the most significant, though invisible, implication of what usually goes on the walls. To reverse this, we'd need not only to rethink what we're posting but also whether the school in which these items are displayed is one that invites students to participate in thinking about what they do as well as the look of the place where they do it.

Action News • Wisconsin Uprising • Justice Is in the Air

Rethinking School, Spring 2011

Photo: Barbara Miner

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker declared war on teachers and other public sector workers on Friday, Feb. 11. Most of us activists knew when the Republicans swept both chambers of the state Legislature and the governorship that things would get bad, but few dreamt they'd get this bad, this fast.

Walker claimed his "budget repair" bill was needed to fill a $137 million shortfall in the state budget, and blamed the crisis on excessive pension and health insurance benefits for public employees. His solution: a frontal attack on the right to organize. His 144-page bill bans all unions in the state university system, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison hospital, and among state childcare workers. It essentially eliminates collective bargaining rights for all other public sector unions, requires that unions have recertification votes annually, and prohibits collecting union dues through payroll deduction. Within 30 minutes of Walker's announcement, the right-wing Club for Growth aired TV commercials in Wisconsin's major media markets. The message: Public employees are the "haves" and others in the state are the "have-nots."

Hours after Walker proposed his anti-worker plan he placed the Wisconsin National Guard on alert. He also asked the Republican-controlled Senate and Assembly to pass his proposal immediately. The legislative leaders, who a week before had approved $117 million worth of business tax breaks, put Walker's proposals on the fast track.

Photo: Barbara Miner

But a funny thing happened on the way to passing the bill.

First, there was just a small picket line.

Then, demonstrations on Tuesday, Feb. 15, at the Capitol and the governor's home inspired the 4,000-member Madison teachers' union to shut down schools and turn out to protest the next day. That evening, Mary Bell, president of the Wisconsin Education Association Council, put out a call for "our members and all citizens of Wisconsin to come to Madison both Thursday and Friday to go to the Capitol for peaceful demonstrations."

So many Wisconsin teachers called in sick on Thursday; we shut down 24 school districts.

In a stunning gesture, the 14 Democratic state senators fled Wisconsin, depriving the Senate of a quorum and bringing deliberations to a halt.

By Friday, teachers had forced the school districts to shut down in Milwaukee, Racine, Wausau, and Janesville. And 20,000 people poured into Madison.

Photo: Barbara Miner

On Saturday, Feb. 19, an estimated 35,000 people gathered at the Capitol and protests spread to dozens of communities across the state. Although most teachers went back to work the following week, tens of thousands of other workers and their families came out to protest.

Capping a second solid week of demonstrations, an estimated 100,000 protesters gathered in Madison—the biggest demonstration in the state's history.

The attacks on Wisconsin teachers and other public employees are part of a national agenda to privatize public institutions and destroy public sector unions, the most robust part of a declining labor movement. Governors in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and elsewhere are watching Wisconsin closely.

But the governor has awakened a sleeping giant: We've been joined by ironworkers, firefighters, nurses, postal workers, retired public employees, private sector unions, hundreds of local elected officials, religious organizations, the NAACP, Voces de la Frontera, and other parent and civic groups.

As we go to press, the mobilizations continue. It's too early to say how this will end, but we wanted to give you a sense of what it has felt like to be part of this extraordinary

movement. On these pages are photos and reflections by *Rethinking Schools* editors and friends.

—Bob Peterson

Photo: Barbara Miner

As a 1st-grade Milwaukee teacher, I have had little sleep since Gov. Scott Walker announced his budget repair bill two weeks ago. That first Monday, I went to work as usual and talked with teacher friends about possibly going to Madison later in the week. The one-sided media reporting and increasing anger among teachers helped me make up my mind. I returned to work on Tuesday and told my teaching partner that I'd be taking a personal day on Wednesday to fight for our rights in Madison. She said: "You go and fight, and you do it for as long as necessary."

At Capitol Square in Madison on Wednesday, we were greeted by an impassioned crowd chanting in support of collective bargaining rights, public schools, health care for poor families, and services for the elderly. The crowd inside the Capitol was as passionate and loud as those outside.

Back in Milwaukee, the superintendent posted an aggressive message to teachers: "Act in good conscience, consider our needy children—many of whom are living in poverty—and report to our classrooms throughout the week as the debate continues in Madison." The media tried to color teachers as selfish, careless, and unprofessional. I knew I was acting in the best interests of public education, but I feared that we might lose our parents as allies. Early Friday morning, one of my parents texted me: "There's no school today. Good for you and good luck in Madison." What a relief! I went off to Madison to fight for her son.

—Kathy Xiong

Last month teachers in Wisconsin were feeling beaten down. Policies like Race to the Top, merit pay, and over-testing had made us feel inadequate and robotic. Projected budget shortfalls left us scrambling to make ends meet. Scripted curricula threatened our professionalism, our creativity, and the joy in teaching and learning.

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Two weeks ago all this changed, and we have Gov. Walker to thank for it. The “union thugs” that you see on FOX News? Many of them are teachers. In Milwaukee, the state’s largest and poorest district, more than 1,000 teachers called in absent and went to Madison to protest on Feb. 18. As teacher Michele Hilbert put it: “I *am* teaching today. This is what democracy looks like.” Teachers around the state have found a voice for ourselves within the craziness: This isn’t about money, or benefits, or pensions. This is about rights, and how those rights affect the future of our students.

—Melissa Bollow Tempel

On the morning of the largest rally in Wisconsin history, my daughter woke me up by saying, “Mommy, you look like an exhausted Cinderella.” Her comment captured the dual nature of our struggle in Wisconsin: incredibly inspiring yet terribly demoralizing.

Photo: Barbara Miner

And yes, exhausting. The state teachers’ union called on 98,000 Wisconsin teachers to leave the classroom and attend the rallies in Madison. And by the thousands, we did. The following week, after a four-day weekend of protesting in Madison, we returned to school, teaching by day and demonstrating in the evenings.

We continue to do our jobs and teach our students. We continue to fight against the deterioration of teaching and learning conditions in our classrooms. And we continue to protest Walker’s awful attempt to destroy our rights without debate.

Even without Walker’s budget cuts and bullying, our schools are facing some of the worst cuts I’ve seen in my 12 years of teaching. My school, like many schools in Milwaukee, will likely have no art, music, physical education, or library next year; class sizes in kindergarten through 3rd grade will double.

Our movement grows each day. As parents realize the extent of plans to slash public education, we expect even more people to join us. As Jesse Jackson told the protesters in Madison, “When we fight, we win.” This is a fight we must win.

—Kelley Dawson Salas

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For 20 years in the classroom, I taught students that they must stand up for their rights. My students joined anti-Klan rallies; immigration rights marches, and picket lines. They did door-to-door voter registration and attended countless forums so they would understand what it takes to make democracy work. Now, as a school board member, I encourage all teachers to teach democracy.

This is an uprising and our students need to know they have a role to play.

How do I know this is an uprising?

This is an uprising because you see high school students leave the building at lunch to carry signs supporting their teachers, then go in for their next class.

This is an uprising because the driver of a pickup with a bumper sticker that says “Don’t mess with my second amendment rights” sees your “Stop Scott Walker” sign and gives you a thumbs up.

This is an uprising because you march for an hour amidst tens of thousands around the Capitol and don’t see anyone you know.

—Larry Miller

The past two weeks have been filled with great excitement! I have been called “Sister” by folks with whom I share little in common, except one big thing—union membership. I saw the number of protesters swell every single day for a week. I have been moved to tears by students who marched out of school to protest side by side with their teachers. I have chanted and cheered until I was hoarse. I led 100,000 people in what has become our rallying cry: This is what democracy looks like!

These past 14 days have also been dark at times. What will happen to our public schools and public services? When did working for government become a crime? When did working for a union make me a thug? What will happen to our schools, our neighborhoods, our state, should we not prevail in our fight to preserve collective bargaining?

But I generally don’t have the luxury of hand-wringing and worry because there is so much organizing to do. We must continue the fight to preserve workers’ rights because, quite simply, our neighborhoods, our schools, and our democracy depend on it.

—Stephanie Walters

Justice Is in the Air

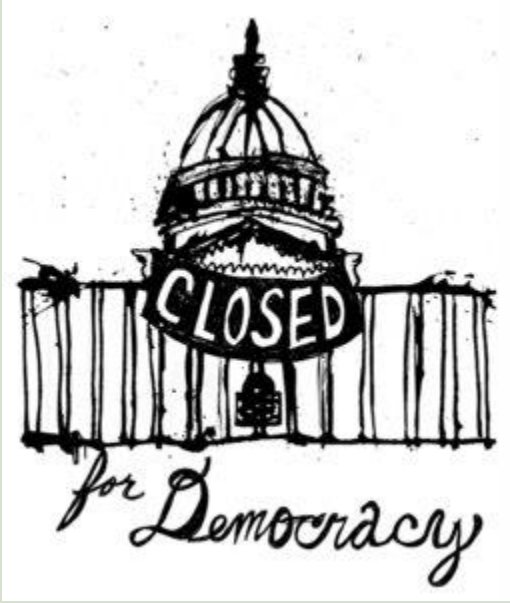

Illustration: www.justseeds.org

***Leia Petty**, a public school counselor in New York City, describes her experience in Madison. A version of this article appeared originally in Socialist Worker.*

Breathe deep, Wisconsin. Justice is in the air!" This is part of a statement written by an Egyptian activist that is read into the "people's mic" inside the Capitol building in Madison. There is a lot in the air in Wisconsin: justice, solidarity, struggle, dignity, determination, generosity. You see it and breathe it everywhere.

When I first set foot in the Capitol the last weekend in February, I am overwhelmed. There isn't a wall that isn't plastered with homemade signs and union placards. The most inspiring is a huge piece of butcher paper: "In the event of a general strike, I vow to support workers"—with hundreds of names signed to it.

It is immediately clear to me that the Capitol has been completely taken over, physically as well as politically. Those who have been occupying the building for two weeks have self-organized a fully functioning 24-hour daycare center, medic station, charging station, food distribution center, lost and found, and "free stores" with donated diapers, sleeping bags, socks, and other basic needs. There is an information station and protest marshals who try to remain up to speed on the latest developments and assist newcomers. Town halls are organized both nights I am there.

At the people's mic, someone says: "As an African American woman, I don't feel safe out there. But I feel safe here. The Capitol building has become the safest place in this country." People leave bags unattended for hours, plug their phones into charging stations and walk away.

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Every service provided by the occupation is deemed “equal opportunity.” This means that homeless people sleep in the Capitol and get free food. There is no reason why they should have to return to the freezing cold streets of Madison. It is their “house,” too.

Political conversations are happening everywhere: every street corner, every restaurant, at the charging station, during cigarette breaks. No one feels like a stranger, and you talk to whoever is sitting or standing next to you. It is just understood that everyone you interact with is on your side. And that a line has been drawn in the sand: It is our side vs. the Walkers and Koch brothers of the world.

At one point, a member of AFSCME from Iowa is standing next to me wearing a button that says “Fund jobs, not wars.” He is an older worker, with white hair and a raspy voice. He says he has tried to form a progressive group in Iowa against the war, but it is small, and he is struggling to keep it alive. He is excited to talk with someone about the war and the insanity of the Pentagon budget.

When I see a sign that says “Outside Agitators Welcome,” I decide that I want a turn on the people’s mic. I help lead chants as I wait in line. Then a group of firefighters on bagpipes leads the crowd in “Amazing Grace” and slowly everyone raises their fists. An older woman across from me and a young woman standing next to me begin weeping. The words, “I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see” have never felt so true.

I feel proud to speak into the people’s mic. Thunderous cheers follow when I say that I am a public school counselor from New York City.

We’re told every day by politicians and the media that we’re “the problem with education” in this country. It’s impossible not to internalize this message, even when you know it’s not true. But here in the Capitol, this feeling has completely left me.

The protests in Madison have brought more than 100,000 people through, and we have tasted democracy. Everyone who comes to this place, everyone who has invested in this struggle, will never be the same.

Review • "But You Guys Wanted Us Here"

By Moé Yonamine
Rethinking Schools, Spring 2012
A film tackles the U.S. occupation of Japan

Photo: Yamazaki Yutaka
Nakamura Hiroshi in front of his painting *The Base* (1957) at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo

ANPO: Art X War
By Linda Hoaglund
New Day Films.
89 min., 2010
newday.com/films/anpoartxwar.html

No more bases! Out of Okinawa!" I shouted along with the other protesters. In 1999, when I joined this march, I was visiting family in my birthplace, Okinawa—although I've lived in the United States since I was 7. We were marching along Route 58 in opposition to the longtime American military presence in Japan, and especially in Okinawa. The demonstration ended, as it always does, with thousands of locals linking arms to form a human chain around the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Ginowan City—singing songs of resistance and calling for peace, an end to war.

Barbed wire fences lined the right side of Route 58 as far as I could see, drawing the base boundary. On the left side, houses and small stores sat close to the busy road—remnants of the bulldozing of the residential area when the bases were created years ago. A grandmother in her 90s came out of her house, walking carefully. She stood with her hands folded gently in front of her, and bowed repeatedly as we marched. I felt my heart squeeze. My friend and I veered away from the group and walked over to her, wanting her to stop bowing and yet not knowing what to say. She grabbed our hands and squeezed tightly. "*Ganbarinasaiyo*," she said. (Don't give up. Keep going.) She let go of our hands and smiled, then began to bow again to the marchers passing by. We bowed back to her and returned to the march. She continued to bow to row after row of marchers until we couldn't see her anymore.

Sunagawa #5 (1955) by Nakamura Hiroshi, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo.

Later that day, I shared this story with another friend of mine, a U.S. marine stationed in Okinawa. Fresh out of high school from Atlanta, he had joined the Marine Corps with hopes that it would help him out of poverty and into college. He was surprised at my marching with the protesters. “But you guys wanted us here. We’re here to protect you,” he said, unaware of both Japanese history and its domination of Okinawa.

He wasn’t alone. I remember statements like his from classmates and teachers: “We won.” “You lost.” U.S. history class was the worst: “You guys dropped the bomb.” And this continued all the way through college. We didn’t want the war, I’d want to scream. We were hurt, too, and still are! Where is the history about the many people in Japan who opposed war? Where are the stories of those who opposed all the bombings—Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki? And where is the history of Okinawa?

The reality is that Okinawa has had a complex relationship with Japan for centuries. Okinawa is the name of the Ryukyus, a chain of islands running far south of the main islands of Japan, which did not officially become part of Japan until the late 1800s. The Okinawan language and culture differ greatly from those of the Japanese, and the ancestry of the people spans the Pacific and Southeast Asia. Since the end of World War II, there has even been an Okinawan/Ryukyuan movement for independence.

Linda Hoaglund’s documentary *ANPO: Art X War* highlights Japanese and Okinawan artists—and their powerful, provocative paintings, photos, anime, and films to show the ongoing resistance in Japan (including Okinawa) to the U.S. military presence since 1945. The film focuses on the remarkable Japanese protests of 1960, when masses of people unified against ANPO, the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty. ANPO, which was passed secretly, allowed U.S. bases and even nuclear weapons to be located in Japan in exchange for U.S. protection. The U.S. occupation continued until 1951 for most of

Japan; in Okinawa it continued until 1972. Unfortunately, the end of the occupation has not meant the end of U.S. military presence. Today, there are 90 U.S. military bases and 40,000 U.S. soldiers in Japan.

American Soldier, Child, Barracks (1953)
by Ikeda Tatsuo, Itabashi Art Museum, Tokyo.

Hoaglund, a filmmaker raised in Japan by American missionary parents, has a unique perspective on this occupation, its many negative effects on the people of Japan and Okinawa, and the nonviolent resistance movement that has endured for half a century in opposition to it. She introduces us to painters, photographers, journalists, and theater directors—all of whom have fought for peace through their art.

For example, journalist Hando Kazutoshi, who survived the war, shares the impact of World War II on the Japanese people: "To be honest, I didn't like America. The way they attacked and burned the working-class area was actually an atrocity. But it's also true when our house burned down and I stood on the ruins, I asked myself, 'Why did Japan wage this stupid war?'"

We meet photographer Shomei Tomatsu, who set out to take pictures of survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: "No matter where I go, I carry the shadow of war. The world knew about the might of the nuclear bombs but very few knew about the enduring damage."

Photographer Ishiuchi Miyako captures images of Japanese women used as "comfort women" through a program, called Recreation and Amusement Association, created by the Japanese government to serve U.S. soldiers after the war. Women were lured or forced into years of sexual servitude, often with the false promise of working in factories or restaurants. Ishiuchi takes us through Yokosuka's backstreets, in an area outside of a U.S. military base, where the walkway is still lit with provocative neon signs in English. "Historically, the country that wins a war can do whatever it wants to the women and children of the country that lost. The Japanese military did it, too . . . against the Chinese and also in Korea."

This is all too familiar for the people of Okinawa. In 1995, the world watched as public outrage ignited over the gang rape of a 12-year-old girl by U.S. soldiers. The massive protests in Okinawa were not due to this single rape alone. Generations of Okinawans

are aware of the hundreds of reported cases of violence toward women and children committed by U.S. military personnel. Many U.S. military troops deploy to war from bases in Okinawa and Japan. As Okinawan activist Ashitomi Hiroshi explains in the film, when soldiers come back from war in Iraq or Afghanistan, “typically they drink until curfew. They wind up committing crimes when they’re drunk. They commit rapes and robberies.” A longtime advocate for the rights of women and children in Okinawa, author Takazato Suzuyo refers to the fences along Route 58: “These fences guarantee complete safety, day and night, for the American soldiers and their families. But these fences guarantee no safety at all for the women and children of Okinawa.”

Okinawan photographer Ishikawa Mao asks: “Why are there still so many U.S. bases on Okinawa?” In her photo series *Fences, Okinawa*, Ishikawa sees the young soldiers on the island through a humane lens. “I’ll often say hello to soldiers in the bar district and ask them to let me photograph them,” she says. On one encounter, she met a young man with a tattoo of his grandmother on his back. She asked if she could see it. She recounts through tears: “He feels his beloved grandmother protecting him. He feels like he’s with his family. When I saw that, it made me so sad. Only yesterday he was just a high school kid messing around. Suddenly, he’s a stone-cold killer. But he’ll also be killed. America puts that whole burden on this young man. I have nothing against the soldiers. But I hate the U.S. military. They’ve done so many bad things. I hate the Japanese even more who let them. And I hate us, who let them, even worse than that.”

Photo: Hamayama Hiroshi (personal archive)
Days of Rage and Grief (1960). Protesters face off against Japanese riot police during demonstrations against ANPO.

Although the current struggles in Okinawa are mentioned, this thought-provoking film fails to emphasize an important point: The burden of ANPO and the U.S. military presence in Japan is not equal. Okinawa, whose island chain comprises less than 1 percent of Japan’s landmass, houses 74 percent of Japan’s U.S. military bases. But no one asked the Okinawans about this presence. Violence against women and children, disregard for the rights of thousands of landowners on whose property the bases were built, and environmental destruction from military training are everyday concerns for the people of Okinawa. Generations of Okinawans have assembled peaceful protests demanding the end of what has been widely felt is discrimination against the island people. Prior to his 2009 election, Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama promised to move the Futenma base off the island. Just months later, stating that he could not find an alternative site, he recommitted Japan to maintaining the U.S. military bases in Okinawa, reigniting generations of frustration.

Meanwhile, many of the young men and women stationed in Okinawa know little about the history or the local sentiments against ANPO and what it symbolizes. My Marine Corps friend believed he was in Okinawa to help the people. He carried with him the ignorance acquired from a lifetime of schooling in the United States. These are pieces of people's history that have not been told.

Here in the United States, I have met sympathetic people both from both Japan and the United States who say that the best solution is to remove the bases from Okinawa. Many, though, suggest moving the bases to Guam. Every time I hear this, I am reminded of the many Okinawan elders who have said to me that they will not support the same burden being shifted to another indigenous island people. They know firsthand the violence against humanity and the destruction of land and sea that prevails from the evils of war and years of military presence.

Continuing to maintain the U.S. military presence in Japan is a costly choice for both nations. The larger question of "Why war?" is one that is being raised currently all over Japan.

ANPO: Art X War encourages us to raise critical questions, questions that I hope teachers have the courage to raise with their students—before these young people travel to another country as soldiers and say, "But I thought you guys wanted us here."

DEFENDING EDUCATION

About Those Tests I Gave You • An Open Letter to My Students

By Ruth Ann Dandrea
Rethinking School, Spring 2012

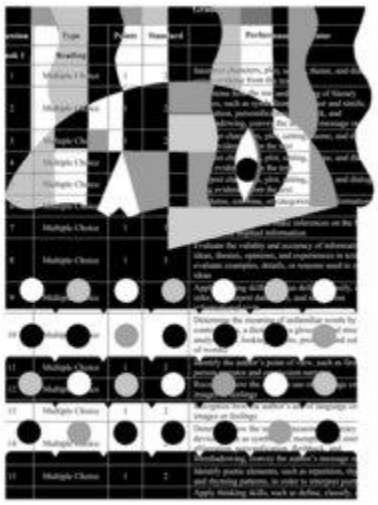

Illustration: David McLimans

Dear 8th Graders,

I'm sorry.

I didn't know.

I spent last night perusing the 150-plus pages of grading materials provided by the state in anticipation of reading and evaluating your English Language Arts Exams this morning. I knew the test was pointless—that it has never fulfilled its stated purpose as a predictor of who would succeed and who would fail the English Regents in 11th grade. Any thinking person would've ditched it years ago. Instead, rather than simply give a test in 8th grade that doesn't get kids ready for the test in 11th grade, the state opted to also give a test in 7th grade to get you ready for your 8th-grade test.

But we already knew all of that.

What I learned is that the test is also criminal.

Because what I hadn't known—this is my first time grading this exam—was that it doesn't matter how well you write, or what you think. Here we spent the year reading books and emulating great writers, constructing leads that would make everyone want to read our work, developing a voice that would engage our readers, using our imaginations to make our work unique and important, and, most of all, being honest. And none of that matters. All that matters, it turns out, is that you cite two facts from the reading material in every answer. That gives you full credit. You can compose a "Gettysburg Address" for the 21st century on the apportioned lines in your test booklet, but if you've provided only one fact from the text you read in preparation, then you will earn only half credit. In your constructed response—no matter how well written, correct, intelligent, noble, beautiful, and meaningful it is—if you've not collected any specific facts from the provided readings (even if you happen to know more information about the chosen topic than the readings provide), then you will get a zero.

And here's the really scary part, kids: The questions you were asked were written to elicit a personal response, which, if provided, earn you no credit. You were tricked; we were tricked. I wish I could believe that this paradox (you know what that literary term means because we have spent the year noting these kinds of tightropings of language)

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was simply the stupidity of the test-makers, that it was not some more insidious and deliberate machination. I wish I could believe that. But I don't.

Illustration: David McLimans

I told you, didn't I, about hearing Noam Chomsky speak recently? When the great man was asked about the chaos in public education, he responded quickly, decisively, and to the point: "Public education in this country is under attack." The words, though chilling, comforted me in a weird way. I'd been feeling, the past few years of my 30-plus-year tenure in public education, that there was something or somebody out there, a power of a sort, that doesn't really want you kids to be educated. I felt a force that wants you ignorant and pliable, and that needs you able to fill in the boxes and follow instructions. Now I'm sure.

It's not that I oppose rigorous testing. I don't. I understand the purpose of evaluation. A good test can measure achievement and even inspire. But this English Language Arts Exam I so unknowingly inflicted on you does neither. It represents exactly what I am opposed to, the perpetual and petty testing that has become a fungus on the foot of public education. You understand that metaphor, I know, because we have spent the year learning to appreciate the differences between figurative and literal language. The test-makers have not.

So what should you do, my beautiful, my bright, my intelligent, my talented? Continue. Continue to question. I applaud you, sample writer: When asked the either/or question, you began your response, "Honestly, I think it is both." You were right, and you were brave, and the test you were taking was neither. And I applaud you, wildest 8th grader of my own, who—when asked how a quote applied to the two characters from the two passages provided—wrote, "I don't think it applies to either one of them." Wear your zeroes proudly, kids. This is a test you need to fail.

I wondered whether giving more than 10 minutes of every class period to reading books of our own choosing was a good idea or not. But you loved it so. You asked for more time. Ask again; I will give you whatever you need. I will also give you the best advice I can, advice from the Nobel Prize-winning writer, Juan Ramón Jiménez. Ray Bradbury thought this was so important, he used it as the epigraph at the beginning of *Fahrenheit 451*: "When they give you lined paper, write the other way."

It is the best I have to offer, beyond my apologies for having taken part in an exercise that hurt you, and of which I am mightily ashamed.

Ruth Ann Dandrea has taught secondary English in upstate New York for 29 years. A freelance writer, she is co-author of *Women on Water*, about women's kayaking, which will be available from North Country Press this spring.

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Outlawing Solidarity in Arizona

By the editors
Rethinking Schools, Spring 2012

Illustration: Alec Dunn

"Banned in Tucson."

As many *Rethinking Schools* readers know, in January Tucson school officials ordered our book *Rethinking Columbus* removed from Mexican American Studies classes, as part of their move to shut down the program. In some instances, school authorities confiscated the books during class—boxed them up and hauled them off. As one student said: "We were in shock. . . . It was very heartbreaking to see that happening in the middle of class." Other books banned from Mexican American Studies classes included Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Rodolfo Acuña's *Occupied America*, and Elizabeth Martínez' *500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures*. We are in good company.

Many commentators focused on the outrageous act of banning books. But the books were merely collateral damage. The real target was Tucson's acclaimed Mexican American Studies program, whose elimination had long been a goal of right-wing politicians in Arizona. Their efforts ultimately found legislative expression in House Bill 2281, passed shortly after Arizona's now-infamous Senate Bill 1070, which mandated racial profiling in immigration enforcement. National outrage focused on SB 1070, with barely any attention paid to HB 2281, a law whose origins lay in the same racial prejudice.

The law's punchline comes in Section 15-112, which prohibits any courses that "advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals." Tom Horne, the former Arizona superintendent of public instruction and the state's current attorney general, sums up the law's curricular dogma: "Those students should be taught that this is the land of opportunity, and that if they work hard they can achieve their goals. They should not be taught that they are oppressed."

Of course, by "those students," Horne means Mexican Americans. To assert that oppression is a myth, especially the oppression of Mexican Americans, one must be historically illiterate—or lying. A few examples: The state of Arizona itself was acquired

by the United States through invasion, war, and occupation—an enterprise justified by notions of racial supremacy. As the *Congressional Globe* insisted in 1847, seizing Mexican territory for the United States "is the destiny of the white race. It is the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race." A 1910 government report, quoted in the now-banned *Occupied America*, concluded: "Thus it is evident that, in the case of the Mexican, he is less desirable as a citizen than as a laborer." Today in Arizona, according to the National Center for Children in Poverty, more than twice the percentage of Mexican American children live in poverty as white children: 64 percent to 30 percent. And Mexican Americans are twice as likely as whites to be incarcerated.

To demand that students think purely in terms of individuals and ignore race, class, and ethnicity is to enforce stupidity as state policy. Moreover, to erase *solidarity* from students' conceptual vocabulary leaves them ignorant of how people have struggled to improve their lives—and have made the world a better place. Proposing that we rise purely as individuals—"I think I can, I think I can"—may be a comforting notion for social elites, but it's simply wrong, empirically as well as morally. Outlawing solidarity benefits only those whose interests are threatened by people organizing for greater equality.

Today's curricular ethnic cleansing in Arizona is the product of a toxic blend of fear and racism. Here's Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal on NPR's *Tell Me More*: "These issues are going to be huge philosophical issues for the United States as we become—as our whole racial makeup changes. And we need to know that there are a lot of serious concerns about how you educate kids, the values that you pass on to them."

Translation: Whites are becoming a minority in this country. If children of color are taught to question structures of wealth and power; to think in terms of race, class, and ethnicity; to learn the history of solidarity and organizing; and come to see themselves as activists . . . well, the United States will be a very different place. In his 2010 campaign ads, Huppenthal promised to "Stop la raza." Destroying Tucson's Mexican American Studies program is one way he intends to keep that promise.

For right-wing politicians like Tom Horne, John Huppenthal, and Gov. Jan Brewer, it's not the failure of the Mexican American Studies program that they fear—it's the program's success. According to Tucson's own director of accountability and research, "there are positive measurable differences between MAS students and the corresponding comparative group of students." Mexican American Studies students score higher on standardized reading, writing, and even math tests than their peers, are more likely to graduate from high school, more likely to attend college, and—a feature that doesn't show up in the data printouts—are more likely to see themselves as activists.

This kind of education is a threat to those who would prefer Mexican Americans as quiet and compliant workers. Mayra Feliciano, a co-founder of the Tucson student activist group UNIDOS and an alumna of the Mexican American Studies program, told Jeff Biggers in an interview, "As long as people like Superintendent John Huppenthal and

TUSD board members are afraid of well-educated Latinos, they will try to take away our successful courses and studies."

Following one of Biggers' fine *Huffington Post* blog posts on the Mexican American Studies program, one respondent, "Tucson Don," directed his comments to a student Biggers had quoted: "Hey Chicka, nobody is stopping you from learning about your own culture. But you now live in the United States, and you can do that on your own time and your own dime! We Americans want you to learn to read (English), write (also in English) and be able to add, subtract, multiply, and divide well enough to complete a business transaction without needing a computer to tell you that a $1.99 Egg McMuffin plus a $.99 hash browns and free coffee adds up to $2.98 before tax." Tucson Don and his ilk echo the century-old words quoted above: the Mexican American is "less desirable as a citizen than as a laborer."

This is the "gutter education," as the youth of South Africa used to call it, that the Mexican American Studies program was designed to supplant. Those who have read the letters and articles online by MAS teachers Curtis Acosta and Maria Federico Brummer, or who have seen the excellent film *Precious Knowledge*, know that this is not a program that teaches hate or "resentment." It sparks curiosity, honors students' lives, demands academic excellence, prompts critical thinking, invites activism, and imagines a better world.

Its ethos of love, mutual respect, and solidarity is expressed in the poem that has come to symbolize the program, borrowed from Luis Valdez' 1971 Mayan-inspired "Pensamiento Serpentino":

***In Lak'ech* (*I Am You or You Are Me*)**

Tú eres mi otro yo.
You are my other me.
Si te hago daño a ti,
If I do harm to you,
Me hago daño a mí mismo.
I do harm to myself.
Si te amo y respeto,
If I love and respect you,
Me amo y respeto yo.
I love and respect myself.

We encourage *Rethinking Schools* readers to join the national solidarity campaign "No History Is Illegal" and teach about this important struggle. In fact, Tucson's program should not only be defended, it should be extended: We should demand that local, state, and federal policies support more multicultural, anti-racist education initiatives. As the U.S. school curriculum becomes increasingly shaped by giant multinational publishing corporations, it's essential to stand up for—and spread—community-

supported social justice curriculum, as exemplified by Tucson's Mexican American Studies program.

In Lak'ech. An injury to one is an injury to all.

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Editorial: Queering Schools

By the editors
Rethinking Schools, Spring 2014

On Nov. 5, Illinois became the 16th state to legalize same-sex marriage. And Sasha Fleischman's skirt was set on fire on an Oakland, California, bus by a 16-year-old student from another school (Sasha is an agender youth[1]). What a contradiction. And what a clear example of the complex state of LGBTQ issues at this moment in history. What does this contradiction mean for students, teachers, and schools?

One reason the tragedy in Oakland is significant is because of what happened after Sasha was seriously burned and the Oakland High junior who set the fire was charged as an adult with two felony hate crimes. Students and teachers at Oakland High responded by mobilizing support for Sasha. They collected money for medical expenses and sponsored a "Stroll for Sasha" along the bus route, which was spontaneously marked by rainbow ribbons. The varsity basketball team wore "No H8" T-shirts with Sasha's name on the back.

Meanwhile, Sasha and Sasha's family stressed education rather than law and order, urging that the accused student be tried as a child, not an adult. Sasha's dad, Karl, who is a teacher at Sequoia Elementary School, focused on how to talk with students. In a letter to the Sequoia community, he said:

None of us can know the mind of the kid who lit a flame to Sasha's skirt. But I have a feeling that if he had seen Sasha's skirt as an expression of another kid's unique, beautiful self, and had smiled and thought "I hella love Oakland," I wouldn't be writing this now.

And that's the question, isn't it? How do we create classrooms and schools where each child, parent, and staff member's unique, beautiful self is appreciated and nurtured? The

terrain, in terms of legal rights and public conversation, is shifting rapidly, creating space for enormous advances in curriculum and school climate. At the same time, homophobia, misogyny, and other forms of hatred are alive and well, and even progressive schools and classrooms have a long way to go in creating nurturing spaces for students, parents, and staff who don't conform to gender and/or sexuality "norms." So how do we move forward?

Build Community

Despite the recent advances in LGBTQ rights, most schools aren't safe for queer students. In a recent survey, six out of 10 LGBTQ teens said they felt unsafe at school and 82 percent had been verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation. In response to a series of high-publicity tragedies, 49 states have passed "anti-bullying" legislation. That's a good first step. But there are serious problems with focusing on bullying rather than social justice.

Talking about "bullies" makes it seem like an individual problem and glosses over homophobia, sexism, racism, Islamophobia—all the critical issues that underlie conflicts among children and adults. As Lyn Mikel Brown explained ("10 Ways to Move Beyond Bully Prevention and Why We Should," spring 2009):

To lump disparate behaviors under the generic "bullying" is to efface real differences that affect young people's lives. Bullying is a broad term that de-genders, de-races, de-everything's school safety.

There are reasons why teachers and administrators are reluctant to adopt school wide approaches that open up discussions of LGBTQ rights and homophobia. We worry about backlash from parents. As the movement has developed past its early "gay liberation" beginnings, it has become more complex; teachers who felt comfortable talking about lesbians and gay men need to wrap their hearts and minds around transgender issues and challenges to the socially constructed gender binary. And when you invite kids to talk openly and ask questions about gender and sexuality, you have to be ready for whatever happens. It's trickier than geometry.

But it's also a critical key to building community where no one is silenced, where everyone's reality is recognized and valued. And it's definitely possible. As Karl Fleischman explained in his letter:

Being agender simply means that the person doesn't feel they are "either a boy or a girl." I realize this is a concept that even adults have difficulty wrapping their heads around . . . so I can't pretend that it's an issue that all young children will grasp. But what they certainly can and should understand is that different people like different things. Different people dress or behave or look differently. And that's a GOOD thing.

The cornerstone of nurturing classrooms and schools is community, where everyone talks out problems, gets to know each other, and feels that they are part of something larger than themselves. Part of this is emphasizing empathy, which is at the heart of both solidarity and social justice teaching, and thus at the heart of creating safe spaces for everyone. This means a school filled with adults who are prepared to talk and listen to children talk about gender and sexuality, as well as other controversial and sensitive topics—adults who are willing to learn from youth as well as lead them. Community is built by working through differences, not sweeping them under the rug.

One beginning step is making sure that school structures support all families. A few examples: forms that ask for information for Parent/Family Members instead of Mother and Father; easily accessible gender-neutral bathrooms for everyone; no lining kids up in girls' lines and boys' lines; gym classes and locker rooms that accommodate a range of gender identities; honorary positions (for prom, homecoming, etc.) that are neutral for gender and sexual identity; diverse representation in posters, curriculum, library and classroom books, speakers, the arts, and school leadership. Equally important is empowering students to participate—at school and in the community—in organizations fighting for all kinds of social justice, including gay/straight alliances.

Safe Adults, Safe Students

A couple of years ago, several of us from around the country participated in a workshop sponsored by Educators' Network for Social Justice in Milwaukee. The topic was teachers coming out at school. It was a good discussion, but the talk kept drifting back to making schools safe for kids. It was hard to stay focused on making schools safe for LGBTQ teachers and staff. Even talking about it felt risky.

But no number of classroom discussions about gender stereotypes and homophobia will create a nurturing environment if teachers and parents are afraid to come out. A school that's a protective community for LGBTQ adults is a school that's going to be safe for kids.

What might that look like? When Jody Sokolower, Rethinking Schools managing editor, came out to her 7th-grade students her first year of teaching, the principal and vice principal accused her of "talking about her sex life" and put a disciplinary letter in her file. When she called the union, her district rep immediately promised that the union would fight for her, and sent letters to that effect to the principal and to Jody's file. That backing was enormously important, both emotionally and practically. Union support is critical.

So is educating and uniting teachers and staff. And mobilizing parents. At many elementary schools, parents have joined together to form LGBTQ parent committees that go into classes to lead workshops and advise teachers. If some parents in the school are worried about LGBTQ content, PTA discussions can be invaluable. *It's Elementary*, a documentary with age-appropriate teaching about LGBTQ issues from kindergarten through middle school, is a great resource.

Queering the Curriculum

Educators and scholars of color have argued for many years that multicultural education means moving beyond “heroes and holidays” to integrating the history and lives of people of color into curriculum at every point. The same is true for LGBTQ issues and people. Participating in the Day of Silence can be a good start, but a social justice frame demands an approach to curriculum that integrates queer people—their problems, history, struggles, and contributions—into day-to-day curriculum, K–12, across the subject areas.

In elementary school, for example, does the literature read in the classroom reflect children with gay and lesbian parents, as well as a broad range of other family structures? What is the approach to activities like Father’s Day, Mother’s Day, and “family tree” assignments? (It’s worth noting that the “traditional” mom-dad-and-kids family is a minority, not a majority experience, so many children and their families are affected by what are often oppressive school customs).

Adam Kelley’s article on teaching the school-to-prison pipeline to high school students is an example of the process of queering a piece of curriculum. “Transsexuals, Teaching Your Children” (spring 2010), which looks at queering curriculum in a middle school classroom, includes a great resource: *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*, by Jacqueline Woodson. What about enlarging a study of the Harlem Renaissance to explore the lives and impact of such LGBTQ poets, authors, and musicians as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Angelina Weld Grimké, Ethel Waters, Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Josephine Baker? What about including the Lavender Scare in the study of the McCarthy era? Or the Stonewall Riots as part of the political foment of the late ’60s? Or considering implications of the campaign for LGBTQ acceptance in the military in the context of questioning current U.S. military strategy?

None of this is easy. But every step leads to the next one. A friend of ours was recently mentoring a preservice teacher whose students were changing singular verbs to plural. One student looked at the example in the book: “My mom is swimming.” After hesitating for a minute, the student pulled out a solution: “My parents are swimming.” The teacher moved on to the next child. Later, the mentor suggested gently, “You know, that was an opportunity to mention the fact that some kids have two moms, and that it would be fine to say, “My moms are swimming.”

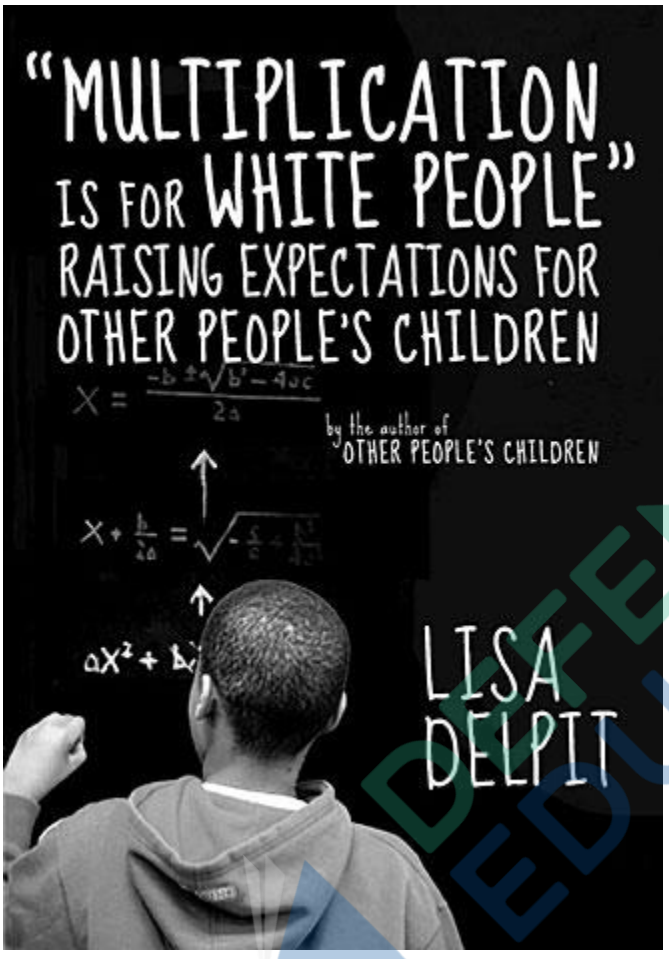
Looking Forward

Meanwhile, Sasha was home for Thanksgiving and back at school shortly thereafter, using media interest in the case as an opportunity to explain different aspects of nonbinary gender identity. Sasha told reporters they probably won’t ride the bus alone for a while, but concluded the interview: “I’m going to keep wearing a skirt. It’s a big part of who I am.”

Sharing current stories of history-making activists like Sasha—or Jeydon Loredo, a transgender student who successfully sued his school district to have his senior picture included in his high school yearbook; Destin Holmes, a lesbian student standing up to abusive treatment by teachers and her principal; or the student body of Waukegan High School, which elected a gay and lesbian duo as their king and queen—can inspire dialogue and understanding as we work to help schools catch up in the march toward justice.

"Multiplication Is for White People"

BY JODY SOKOLOWER
Rethinking Schools, Fall 2012
An Interview with Lisa Delpit



In the introduction to her new book, *"Multiplication Is for White People": Raising Expectations for Other People's Children*, Lisa Delpit describes her response when Diane Ravitch asked her why she hasn't spoken out against the devastation of public schools in her home state of Louisiana and the efforts to make New Orleans the national model. She explained to Ravitch that she has been concentrating her efforts where she feels she can make a difference: working with teachers and children in an African American school. She says her "sense of futility in the battle for rational education policy for African American children had gone on for so long . . . that I needed to give my 'anger muscles' a rest."

But that interchange made her realize that she is still angry, and that anger fuels and defines *Multiplication Is for White People*. "I am angry," she begins, "that public schools, once a beacon of democracy, have been overrun by the antidemocratic forces of extreme wealth." As she continues to enumerate the sources of her anger, the introduction comprises a focused and comprehensive indictment of the neoliberal attack on public education.

Two themes drive *Multiplication Is for White People*: Delpit infuses the interplay between her role as a scholar/activist and as the mother of a child with a unique learning style. And she organizes her text around 10 factors she believes "foster excellence in urban classrooms."

Because children who don't fit the white middle-class norms, especially those with real and/or perceived learning differences, are among the most marginalized by the scourges of corporate education reform, I chose to start my interview with Delpit there.

DEFENDING EDUCATION

Lisa Delpit (PHOTO CREDIT: GLORIA O'CONNELL)

Jody Sokolower for Rethinking Schools: You say in your new book that middle-class children come to school with different—although not more important—skills from children from low-income families. What do you mean? And is this a class difference or a cultural difference?

Lisa Delpit: It is difficult to disaggregate class and culture. Children who have to take on more responsibility in real life will know and be able to do those types of things earlier. The specific responsibilities they take on are cultural—that would be different for Alaskan children as opposed to African American children or Appalachian children. We in middle-class families tend to keep our children young longer, to infantilize them.

This difference has great significance when we think about schools. If we are going to ensure that all children learn to read, I believe we have to turn our notion of "basic skills" on its head. What we call basic literacy skills are typically the linguistic conventions of middle-class society—for example, punctuation, grammar, specialized subject vocabulary, and five-paragraph essays. All children need to know these things. Some learn them from being read to at home. What we call basic skills are only "basic" because they are one aspect of the cultural capital of the middle class.

What we call advanced or higher-order skills—analyzing new information, evaluating the relative merits of concepts and other problem-solving skills—are those that middle-class children learn later in life. But many children from low-income families learn them much earlier because their parents place a high value on independence and real-life problem-solving skills.

So children come to us having learned different things in their four-to-five years at home, prior to formal schooling. For those who come to us knowing how to count to 100 and to read, we need to teach them problem-solving and how to tie their shoes. And for those who already know how to clean up spilled paint, tie their shoes, prepare meals, and comfort a crying sibling, we need to make sure that we teach them the school knowledge that they haven't learned at home.

JS: How does this relate to children who are seen as having learning disabilities or special needs?

LD: The biggest issue for all children is not that we don't see what they *don't* know, but we don't see what they *do* know, what they do come to school with. They learned something in those years since they entered the world.

JS: You quote a young woman who struggled with learning in school who wonders why learning differences are classified as negative attributes—"Can we not focus on strengths and positive attributes?" she asks. How could it be different?

LD: I am not a special education teacher, nor am I a specialist in special education research, so I don't want to position myself as an expert. But I do sometimes ask teachers to identify the students who are considered the most problematic in their class for whatever reason, be it behavior or be it in academic areas, and to write down 10 ways in which they are exhibiting difficulty or challenges. Then I ask the teachers to look at those challenges and see if they can be redefined as strengths, or if they can find other strengths in those children.

One teacher said, "I'm looking at this child who is disruptive and all the other children do what he or she does." She was able to translate that into "This is a leader. I need to give this child leadership roles so that she can assist me rather than detract from what I'm doing." Another child was always tattling: "So and so did such and such." So she reinterpreted that as a way of looking out for others—getting into a fuss with somebody because they did something to another child. So then she was able to translate that into nurturing behavior and to give the child roles that would allow her to nurture without creating a problem.

No matter what the child brings, be they special needs or learning disabilities or whatever label we want to put on them, instead of looking at the label and the problem that the label might represent, we can look at the person and see what strengths are there and what we can build on.

JS: Why do you think there are so many African American children in special ed programs?

LD: I think there are a multitude of answers. The larger society has a view of African American people as being less intellectually capable. It's not something that anybody designed or set out to do, but it's almost in the air that we breathe. And as a result of that, when African American children do poorly, the first explanation is that there's something inherent in them that's keeping them from performing well. In fact, as Beth Harry and Janette Klingner say in their book *Why Are So Many Minority Children in Special Education? Understanding Race and Disability in Schools*, much of the time the reason is external to the child—for example, poor instruction, or maybe something happening in the family or community that caused trauma. But the official explanation tends to be that there's something wrong with the child.

Another piece is that the behavior of many boys, particularly African American boys, is seen as pathological. Some white female teachers from middle-class families (who are,

of course, most of our teachers) are not accustomed to seeing this behavior and so they tend to think of it as something that is abnormal. There may be a higher tolerance for movement within some cultures that teachers again may not be accustomed to.

Another thing we run into a lot is young African American students who have learned what some people refer to as street sense, but their language might seem more mature in many ways. Teachers who are not familiar with the culture of the children actually get fearful and their fear pushes them to direct more African American kids to special education.

JS: With all the pressure on "seat time" and standardized tests, schools have less tolerance for movement than they used to.

LD: Yes, the norms of regular classrooms are often so restrictive that any deviation suggests a pathology. So you get more African American children whose cultural norms may be a little different being directed into special education. Often teachers just don't know how to best reach these kids, how to connect to what they know, how to connect to what their interests are, and that plays a part in it, too. So there are numerous reasons, but I think the largest one is the underlying belief system—and not just among white people, among all Americans, often including black people—that African American students are less capable.

JS: Many of the factors you mention aren't about learning, they are about behavior. So part of what you're saying is that kids are being treated as having learning disabilities when it is actually a question of behavior.

LD: Well, there is a category called behavior disorders. It changes from state to state exactly what the wording is, but there's actually a category for behavior issues. And that's the one that many black boys particularly are referred into.

Even among African American children who are labeled as having learning disabilities, they face the psychological trauma of not having those learning problems specifically defined. When you have a specific learning difference, you can understand that you have strengths and weaknesses as a learner. You can receive help to overcome that specific issue. But many African American children are labeled "slow learners" or "educable mentally retarded/behavior disordered." It's very difficult as a student to see what your strengths are in that context, and many times they don't get the specific help that they might need.

JS: Do you think there is enough emphasis on critical thinking and social justice education in special ed classes?

LD: Critical thinking and social justice issues are factors that everyone in the United States needs to tackle. I also think that the more disconnected the content we teach—the more teachers try to teach skills out of context—the less likely students are to make sense of it. So we have to talk about the big picture, then use aspects of that discussion

to look at specific skills. When we isolate or decontextualize skills or facts, they are just meaningless little pieces that don't make any sense.

In my book, I talk about the work of Petra Munro Hendry, who did oral history with a group of low-performing black kids at a high school in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The students researched the history of their school, which turned out to be one of the first public high schools for black students in the entire southern region of the country. In the context of doing that, they interviewed people, they recorded interviews. If you think about what you have to do when you take an interview and transcribe it, you have to learn spelling, you have to learn punctuation, you have to learn capitalization, you have to learn how to create a real sentence out of what somebody said who may not have spoken distinctly and clearly, or who has had some "um's" and "uh's." In other words, you have to learn what is taught in a remedial class, but it's put in the context of something much bigger and much more important. The students said to themselves: "We are researchers. We are people who are doing the kind of work that one might find college students doing." Not: "We are remedial learners."

And that is the way that we need to go to teach the small pieces like grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, rather than just keep those in isolation.

JS: How important is it to have a diversity of teachers in a school? How important is it for students to have a teacher who looks like them, who comes from their culture?

LD: I think what we need is people who represent the culture of the kids in the school, not necessarily in every classroom, because I think teachers of other cultures also have something to offer. However, I think that the piece that is often missing in our schools is the opportunity for professional learning communities where teachers can share what they know and collectively resolve issues relating to culture as well as other factors. If we can do that and ensure that the people who are most familiar with the culture of the children have the opportunity and the responsibility to share some of that knowledge with other teachers, then we will be doing OK. If the culture of the school is set up so that sharing is important and collaborating is important, the children will be the beneficiaries.

Jennifer Obidah and Karen Manheim Teel wrote a book, *Because of the Kids: Facing Racial and Cultural Differences in Schools*, about a white teacher who was having some difficulty in class and approached an African American teacher for help. The African American teacher spent some time in the classroom, they worked collaboratively and had some arguments about different kinds of things. At the end they were able to figure out what each could learn from the other and the culture piece came to the forefront. They were able to resolve the issues and create a better situation for the children. I don't want to make the claim that all black teachers are better or that every black teacher is good for every black child because, as I mentioned before, many of us have also internalized negative notions about black children. We really have to look at the specific teacher and what the teacher's beliefs are and how the teacher sees the culture

of the children, regardless of the teacher's ethnicity. But black kids need black teachers' presence in the school, and white teachers need black teachers' presence in the school.

JS: You talk about the need to neutralize, educate, or get rid of bad teachers. Can we do that without standardized tests?

LD: There are a lot of pieces to that question. We do need to neutralize, educate, or get rid of bad teachers—that is true. But I think we need to take another look at assessment. If we can create professional learning communities where everyone is responsible to everyone else and we have a joint responsibility for these children in the school, then we can create a situation where teachers can do a lot of peer assessment of other teachers.

Many teachers are not using a quarter of what they know because the school environment is so foul. And we know that the culture of the school very much affects the teaching that goes on in classrooms. So my question becomes not so much whether the teachers at a specific school are good or bad but what is it in this setting that's not allowing them to teach to their full potential. And many times it is the question of trust.

Charles Payne has a great book, *So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools*. One of the things that he brings out is that the level of disorganization and mistrust in a school affects how well a teacher teaches. I don't think we can just look at the individual teaching level. We have to look at the school: What about the school is not allowing teachers to teach to their potential? So the problem may be the environment, or it may be some skills that teachers are lacking, or it may be that it's time for some teachers to look into other areas of work.

One time, I went to visit a teacher's classroom for the first time. He didn't know who I was or where I was coming from. He proceeded—in front of the children—to tell me how terrible these students were. He told me that he had want.ed to be a lawyer but he fell into teaching, and now he thought these kids were not worth the effort. I was in shock. Finally I said to him, "Well, I think it is time for you to pursue your dreams. You need to go to law school."

So sometimes it is important to help folks find where their talents will best be used so as not to destroy children. But most of the current notions of accountability are wrongheaded and will never improve what's going on with teachers and what happens in classrooms.

The Problems with the Common Core

By Stan Karp
Rethinking Schools, Winter 2013-14

This is a revised version of a talk on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) delivered in Portland, Oregon, Sept. 20, 2013. The CCSS have been adopted by 46 states and are currently being implemented in school districts throughout the United States.

Illustration by MICHAEL DUFFY

The trouble with the Common Core is not primarily what is in these standards or what's been left out, although that's certainly at issue. The bigger problem is the role the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are playing in the larger dynamics of current school reform and education politics.

Today everything about the Common Core, even the brand name—the Common Core *State* Standards—is contested because these standards were created as an instrument of contested policy. They have become part of a larger political project to remake public education in ways that go well beyond slogans about making sure every student graduates "college and career ready," however that may be defined this year. We're talking about implementing new national standards and tests for every school and district in the country in the wake of dramatic changes in the national and state context for education reform. These changes include:

- A 10-year experiment in the use of federally mandated standards and tests called No Child Left Behind (NCLB) that has been almost universally acknowledged as a failure.
- The adoption of test-based teacher evaluation frameworks in dozens of states, largely as a result of federal mandates.
- Multiple rounds of budget cuts and layoffs that have left 34 of the 50 states providing less funding for education than they did five years ago, and the elimination of more than 300,000 teaching positions.
- A wave of privatization that has increased the number of publicly funded but privately run charter schools by 50 percent, while nearly 4,000 public schools have been closed in the same period.
- An appalling increase in the inequality and child poverty surrounding our schools, categories in which the United States leads the world and that tell us far more about the source of our educational problems than the uneven quality of state curriculum standards.
- A dramatic increase in the cost and debt burden of college access.

- A massively well-financed campaign of billionaires and politically powerful advocacy organizations that seeks to replace our current system of public education—which, for all its many flaws, is probably the most democratic institution we have and one that has done far more to address inequality, offer hope, and provide opportunity than the country's financial, economic, political, and media institutions—with a market-based, non-unionized, privately managed system.

I think many supporters of the Common Core don't sufficiently take into account how these larger forces define the context in which the standards are being introduced, and how much that context is shaping implementation. As teacher-blogger Jose Vilson put it:

People who advocate for the CCSS miss the bigger picture that people on the ground don't: The CCSS came as a package deal with the new teacher evaluations, higher stakes testing, and austerity measures, including mass school closings. Often, it seems like the leaders are talking out of both sides of their mouths when they say they want to improve education but need to defund our schools. . . . It makes no sense for us to have high expectations of our students when we don't have high expectations for our school system.

My own first experience with standards-based reform was in New Jersey, where I taught English and journalism to high school students for many years in one of the state's poorest cities. In the 1990s, curriculum standards became a central issue in the state's long-running funding equity case, *Abbott v. Burke*. The case began by documenting how lower levels of resources in poor urban districts produced unequal educational opportunities in the form of worse facilities, poorer curriculum materials, less experienced teachers, and fewer support services. At a key point in the case, in an early example of arguments that today are painfully familiar, then-Gov. Christine Whitman declared that, instead of funding equity, what we really needed were curriculum standards and a shift from focusing on dollars to focusing on what those dollars should be spent on. If all students were taught to meet “core content curriculum standards,” Whitman argued, then everyone would receive an equitable and adequate education.

At the time, the New Jersey Supreme Court was an unusually progressive and foresighted court, and it responded to the state's proposal for standards with a series of landmark decisions that speak to some of the same issues raised today by the Common Core. The court agreed that standards for what schools should teach and students should learn seemed like a good idea. But standards don't deliver themselves. They require well-prepared and supported professional staff, improved instructional resources, safe and well-equipped facilities, reasonable class sizes, and—especially if they are supposed to help schools compensate for the inequality that exists all around them—a host of supplemental services like high quality preschools, expanded summer and after-school programs, health and social services, and more. In effect, the court said adopting “high expectations” curriculum standards was like passing out a menu from a fine restaurant. Not everyone who gets a menu can pay for the meal. So the

court tied New Jersey's core curriculum standards to the most equitable school funding mandates in the country.

And though it's been a constant struggle to sustain and implement New Jersey's funding equity mandates, a central problem with the Common Core is the complete absence of any similar credible plan to provide—or even to determine—the resources necessary to make every student "college and career ready" as defined by the CCSS.

Funding is far from the only concern, but it is a threshold credibility issue. If you're proposing a dramatic increase in outcomes and performance to reach social and academic goals that have never been reached before, and your primary investments are standards and tests that serve mostly to document how far you are from reaching those goals, you either don't have a very good plan or you're planning something else. The Common Core, like NCLB before it, is failing the funding credibility test before it's even out of the gate.

The Lure of the Common Core

Last winter, the Rethinking Schools editorial board held a discussion about the Common Core; we were trying to decide how to address this latest trend in the all-too-trendy world of education reform. Rethinking Schools has always been skeptical of standards imposed from above. Too many standards projects have been efforts to move decisions about teaching and learning away from educators and schools, and put them in the hands of distant bureaucracies and politicians. Standards have often codified sanitized versions of history, politics, and culture that reinforce official myths while leaving out the voices and concerns of our students and communities. Whatever potentially positive role standards might play in truly collaborative conversations about what schools should teach and children should learn has repeatedly been undermined by bad process, suspect political agendas, and commercial interests.

Although all these concerns were raised, we also found that teachers in different districts and states were having very different experiences with the Common Core. There were teachers in Milwaukee who had endured years of scripted curriculum and mandated textbooks. For them, the CCSS seemed like an opening to develop better curriculum and, compared to what they'd been struggling under, seemed more flexible and student-centered. For many teachers, especially in the interim between the rollout of the standards and the arrival of the tests—a lot of the Common Core's appeal is based on claims that:

- It represents a tighter set of smarter standards focused on developing critical learning skills instead of mastering fragmented bits of knowledge.
- It requires more progressive, student-centered teaching with strong elements of collaborative and reflective learning.
- It will help equalize the playing field by raising expectations for all children, especially those suffering the worst effects of "drill and kill" test prep.

Viewed in isolation, the debate over the Common Core can be confusing; who doesn't want all students to have good preparation for life after high school? But, seen in the full context of the politics and history that produced it—and the tests that are just around the bend—the implications of the Common Core project look quite different.

Emerging from the Wreckage of No Child Left Behind

The CCSS emerged from the wreckage of NCLB. In 2002, NCLB was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and presented as a way to close long-standing gaps in academic performance. NCLB marked a dramatic change in federal education policy—away from its historic role as a promoter of access and equity through support for things like school integration, extra funding for high-poverty schools, and services for students with special needs, to a much less equitable set of mandates around standards and testing, closing or "reconstituting" schools, and replacing school staff.

NCLB required states to adopt curriculum standards and to test students annually to gauge progress toward reaching them. Under threat of losing federal funds, all 50 states adopted or revised their standards and began testing every student, every year, in every grade from 3–8 and again in high school. The professed goal was to make sure every student was on grade level in math and language arts by requiring schools to reach 100 percent passing rates on state tests for every student in 10 subgroups.

By any measure, NCLB was a failure in raising academic performance and narrowing gaps in opportunity and outcomes. But by very publicly measuring the test results against arbitrary benchmarks that no real schools have ever met, NCLB succeeded in creating a narrative of failure that shaped a decade of attempts to "fix" schools while blaming those who work in them. The disaggregated scores put the spotlight on gaps among student groups, but the law used these gaps to label schools as failures without providing the resources or supports needed to eliminate them.

By the time the first decade of NCLB was over, more than half the schools in the nation were on the lists of "failing schools" and the rest were poised to follow. In Massachusetts, which is generally considered to have the toughest state standards in the nation—arguably more demanding than the Common Core—80 percent of the schools were facing NCLB sanctions. This is when the NCLB "waivers" appeared. As the number of schools facing sanctions and intervention grew well beyond the poor communities of color where NCLB had made "disruptive reform" the norm and began to reach into more middle-class and suburban districts, the pressure to revise NCLB's unworkable accountability system increased. But the bipartisan coalition that passed NCLB had collapsed and gridlock in Congress made revising it impossible. So U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan, with dubious legal justification, made up a process to grant NCLB waivers to states that agreed to certain conditions.

Forty states were granted conditional waivers from NCLB: If they agreed to tighten the screws on the most struggling schools serving the highest needs students, they could ease up on the rest, *provided* they also agreed to use test scores to evaluate all their

teachers, expand the reach of charter schools, and adopt “college and career ready” curriculum standards. These same requirements were part of the Race to the Top program, which turned federal education funds into competitive grants and promoted the same policies, even though they have no track record of success as school improvement strategies.

Who Created the Common Core?

Because federal law prohibits the federal government from creating national standards and tests, the Common Core project was ostensibly designed as a state effort led by the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve, a private consulting firm. The Gates Foundation provided more than $160 million in funding, without which Common Core would not exist.

The standards were drafted largely behind closed doors by academics and assessment “experts,” many with ties to testing companies. *Education Week* blogger and science teacher Anthony Cody found that, of the 25 individuals in the work groups charged with drafting the standards, six were associated with the test makers from the College Board, five with the test publishers at ACT, and four with Achieve. Zero teachers were in the work groups. The feedback groups had 35 participants, almost all of whom were university professors. Cody found one classroom teacher involved in the entire process. According to teacher educator Nancy Carlsson-Paige: “In all, there were 135 people on the review panels for the Common Core. Not a single one of them was a K–3 classroom teacher or early childhood professional.” Parents were entirely missing. K–12 educators were mostly brought in after the fact to tweak and endorse the standards—and lend legitimacy to the results.

College- and Career-Ready Standards?

The substance of the standards themselves is also, in a sense, top down. To arrive at “college- and career-ready standards,” the Common Core developers began by defining the “skills and abilities” they claim are needed to succeed in a four-year college. The CCSS tests being developed by two federally funded multistate consortia, at a cost of about $350 million, are designed to assess these skills. One of these consortia, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, claims that students who earn a “college ready” designation by scoring a level 4 on these still-under-construction tests will have a 75 percent chance of getting a C or better in their freshman composition course. But there is no actual evidence connecting scores on any of these new experimental tests with future college success.

And it will take far more than standards and tests to make college affordable, accessible, and attainable for all. When I went to college many years ago, “college for all” meant open admissions, free tuition, and race, class, and gender studies. Today, it means cutthroat competition to get in, mountains of debt to stay, and often bleak

prospects when you leave. Yet “college readiness” is about to become the new AYP (adequate yearly progress) by which schools will be ranked.

The idea that by next year Common Core tests will start labeling kids in the 3rd grade as on track or not for college is absurd and offensive.

Substantive questions have been raised about the Common Core's tendency to push difficult academic skills to lower grades, about the appropriateness of the early childhood standards, about the sequencing of the math standards, about the mix and type of mandated readings, and about the priority Common Core puts on the close reading of texts in ways that devalue student experience and prior knowledge.

A decade of NCLB tests showed that millions of students were not meeting existing standards, but the sponsors of the Common Core decided that the solution was tougher ones. And this time, instead of each state developing its own standards, the Common Core seeks to create national tests that are comparable across states and districts, and that can produce results that can be plugged into the data-driven crisis machine that is the engine of corporate reform.

Educational Plan or Marketing Campaign?

The way the standards are being rushed into classrooms across the country is further undercutting their credibility. These standards have never been fully implemented in real schools anywhere. They're more or less abstract descriptions of academic abilities organized into sequences by people who have never taught at all or who have not taught this particular set of standards. To have any impact, the standards must be translated into curriculum, instructional plans, classroom materials, and valid assessments. A reasonable approach to implementing new standards would include a few multi-year pilot programs that provided time, resources, opportunities for collaboration, and transparent evaluation plans.

Instead we're getting an overhyped all-state implementation drive that seems more like a marketing campaign than an educational plan. And I use the word marketing advisedly, because another defining characteristic of the Common Core project is rampant profiteering.

Joanne Weiss, Duncan's former chief of staff and head of the Race to the Top grant program, which effectively made adoption of the Common Core a condition for federal grants, described how it is opening up huge new markets for commercial exploitation:

The development of common standards and shared assessments radically alters the market for innovation in curriculum development, professional development, and formative assessments. Previously, these markets operated on a state-by-state basis, and often on a district-by-district basis. But the adoption of common standards and shared assessments means that education entrepreneurs will enjoy national markets where the best products can be taken to scale.

Who Controls Public Education?

Having financed the creation of the standards, the Gates Foundation has entered into a partnership with Pearson to produce a full set of K–12 courses aligned with the Common Core that will be marketed to schools across the country. Nearly every educational product now comes wrapped in the Common Core brand name.

The curriculum and assessments our schools and students need will not emerge from this process. Instead, the top-down, bureaucratic rollout of the Common Core has put schools in the middle of a multilayered political struggle over who will control education policy—corporate power and private wealth or public institutions managed, however imperfectly, by citizens in a democratic process.

The web-based news service *Politico* recently described what it called "the Common Core money war," reporting that "tens of millions of dollars are pouring into the battle over the Common Core. . . . The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation already has pumped more than $160 million into developing and promoting the Common Core, including $10 million just in the past few months, and it's getting set to announce up to $4 million in new grants to keep the advocacy cranking. Corporate sponsors are pitching in, too. Dozens of the nation's top CEOs will meet to set the plans for a national advertising blitz that may include TV, radio, and print."

At the same time, opposing the Common Core is "an array of organizations with multimillion-dollar budgets of their own and much experience in mobilizing crowds and lobbying lawmakers, including the Heritage Foundation, Americans for Prosperity, the Pioneer Institute, FreedomWorks, and the Koch Bros." These groups are feeding a growing right-wing opposition to the Common Core that combines hostility to all federal education initiatives and anything supported by the Obama administration with more populist sentiments.

Tests, Tests, Tests

But while this larger political battle rages, the most immediate threat for educators and schools remains the new wave of high-stakes Common Core tests.

Duncan, who once said "The best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans was Hurricane Katrina" and who called *Waiting for Superman* "a Rosa Parks moment," now tells us, "I am convinced that this new generation of state assessments will be an absolute game-changer in public education."

The problem is that this game, like the last one, is rigged. Although reasonable people have found things of value in the Common Core standards, there is no credible defense to be made of the high-stakes uses planned for these new tests. Instead, the Common Core project threatens to reproduce the narrative of public school failure that just led to a decade of bad policy in the name of reform.

Reports from the first wave of Common Core testing provide evidence for these fears. Last spring, students, parents, and teachers in New York schools responded to new Common Core tests developed by Pearson with outcries against their length, difficulty, and inappropriate content. Pearson included corporate logos and promotional material in reading passages. Students reported feeling overstressed and underprepared—meeting the tests with shock, anger, tears, and anxiety. Administrators requested guidelines for handling tests students had vomited on. Teachers and principals complained about the disruptive nature of the testing process and many parents encouraged their children to opt out.

Only about 30 percent of students were deemed “proficient” based on arbitrary cut scores designed to create new categories of failure. The achievement gaps Common Core is supposed to narrow grew larger. Less than 4 percent of students who are English language learners passed. The number of students identified by the tests for “academic intervention” skyrocketed to 70 percent, far beyond the capacity of districts to meet.

The tests are on track to squeeze out whatever positive potential exists in the Common Core:

- The arrival of the tests will pre-empt the already too short period teachers and schools have to review the standards and develop appropriate curriculum responses before that space is filled by the assessments themselves.
- Instead of reversing the mania for over-testing, the new assessments will extend it with pre-tests, interim tests, post-tests, and computer-based “performance assessments.” It's the difference between giving a patient a blood test and draining the patient's blood.
- The scores will be plugged into data systems that will generate value-added measures, student growth percentiles, and other imaginary numbers for what I call psychometric astrology. The inaccurate and unreliable practice of using test scores for teacher evaluation will distort the assessments before they're even in place, and has the potential to make Common Core implementation part of the assault on the teaching profession instead of a renewal of it.
- If the Common Core's college- and career-ready performance levels become the standard for high school graduation, it will push more kids out of high school than it will prepare for college. The most vulnerable students will be the most at risk. As FairTest put it: “If a child struggles to clear the high bar at 5 feet, she will not become a ‘world-class’ jumper because someone raised the bar to 6 feet and yelled ‘jump higher,’ or if her ‘poor’ performance is used to punish her coach.”
- The costs of the tests, which have multiple pieces throughout the year and must be given on computers many schools don't have, will be enormous and will come at the expense of more important things. The plunging scores will be used as an excuse to close more public schools and open more privatized charters and voucher schools, especially in poor communities of color.

DEFENDING EDUCATION

This is not just cynical speculation. It is a reasonable projection based on the history of the NCLB decade, the dismantling of public education in the nation's urban centers, and the appalling growth of the inequality and concentrated poverty that remains the central problem in public education.

Fighting Back

Common Core has become part of the corporate reform project now stalking our schools. As schools struggle with these new mandates, we should defend our students, our schools, and ourselves by pushing back against implementation timelines, resisting the stakes and priority attached to the tests, and exposing the truth about the commercial and political interests shaping this false panacea for the problems our schools face.

There are encouraging signs that the movement we need is growing. Last year in Seattle, teachers led a boycott of district testing that drew national support and won a partial rollback of the testing. In New York this fall, parents sent score reports on new Common Core tests back to the state commissioner of education with a letter declaring “This year's test scores are invalid and provide NO useful information about student learning.” Opt-out efforts are growing daily. Even some supporters of the CCSS have endorsed a call for the moratorium on the use of tests to make policy decisions. It's not enough, but it's a start.

It took nearly a decade for NCLB's counterfeit “accountability system” to bog down in the face of its many contradictions and near universal rejection. The Common Core meltdown may not take that long. Many of Common Core's myths and claims have already lost credibility with large numbers of educators and citizens. We have more than a decade of experience with the negative and unpopular results of imposing increasing numbers of standardized tests on children and classrooms. Whether this growing resistance will lead to better, more democratic efforts to sustain and improve public education, or be overwhelmed by the massive testing apparatus that NCLB left behind and that the Common Core seeks to expand, will depend on the organizing and advocacy efforts of those with the most at stake: parents, educators, and students. As usual, organizing and activism are the only things that will save us, and remain our best hope for the future of public education and the democracy that depends on it.

Charter Schools and the Future of Public Education

By Stan Karp
Rethinking Schools, Fall 2013

Illustration by Ethan Heitner

Somewhere along the way, nearly every teacher dreams of starting a school. I know I did.

More than once during the 30 years I taught English and journalism to high school students in Paterson, New Jersey, I imagined that creating my own school would open the door to everything I wanted as a teacher:

Colleagues with a shared vision of teaching and learning.

Freedom from central office bureaucracy.

A welcoming school culture that reflected the lives of our students and families.

Professional autonomy that nourished innovation and individual and collective growth.

School-based decision-making that pushed choices about resources, priorities, time, and staffing closer to the classrooms where it matters the most.

But reality can be hard on daydreams, and I got a glimpse of how complicated these issues are when my large comprehensive high school embraced the reform trend of the day and moved to create small theme academies inside the larger school. As the lead teacher of a new communications academy, I soon faced a host of thorny questions: Who would our new academy serve? What would the selection process be? How would the academy share space and resources with the rest of the school? How would our academy team be formed, and what impact would overlapping circles of authority have on teachers' contractual and evaluation processes? What would be the effect of the new academies on the larger school around us, which still opened its doors to everyone?

I think of this experience often as I follow the polarized debate over charter schools. I know there are many committed charter school teachers who share the dream of teaching in a progressive, student-centered school. And I know that, for some teachers, charter school jobs are the only ones available.

But I also know the charter school movement has changed dramatically in recent years in ways that have undermined its original intentions. Although small schools and theme academies have faded as a focus of reform initiatives, charters have expanded rapidly. According to *Education Week*, there are now more than 6,000 publicly funded charter schools in the United States enrolling about 4 percent of all students. Since 2008, the number of charter schools has grown by almost 50 percent, while over that same period nearly 4,000 traditional public schools have closed.[1] This represents a huge transfer of resources and students from our public education system to the publicly funded but privately managed charter sector. Such trends raise serious concerns about the future of public education and its promise of quality education for all.

The Origin of Charter Schools

Charter schools have an interesting history with origins that are often overlooked. The idea of charter schools arose, often with teachers' union support, in urban districts in the late 1980s and early '90s. They were originally conceived as teacher-run schools that would serve students struggling inside the traditional system and would operate outside the reach of the administrative bureaucracy and politicized big city school boards. Charters also drew on early rounds of small school experiments initiated by teachers and community activists, often as alternatives to large, struggling, comprehensive high schools.[2]

But, within a few years, some early supporters grew concerned that the charters and small specialty schools were creating tiers of schools serving decidedly different populations with unequal access. Teachers' union leaders also feared that charters were undercutting the power of their unions to bargain collectively over districtwide concerns and policies.

Still, charters continued to grow slowly and, beginning with Minnesota in 1991, states began to pass laws to promote the formation of charters, partly as a model of reform and partly to build a parallel system outside the reach of both teachers' unions and, in some cases, the federal and state requirements to serve and accept all students as the public system must do. Gradually this charter movement attracted the attention of political and financial interests who saw the public school system as a “government monopoly” ripe for market reform.

In the past decade, the character of the charter school movement has changed dramatically. It's been transformed from community-based, educator-initiated local efforts designed to provide alternative approaches for a small number of students into nationally funded efforts by foundations, investors, and educational management companies to create a parallel, more privatized school system.

Charter laws are different in each state, but in general charter schools are publicly funded but privately run schools. Few justify the hype they have received in films like *Waiting for “Superman,”* and those that do are mostly highly selective, privately

subsidized schools that have very limited relevance for the public system. It's like looking for models of public housing by studying luxury condo developments.

How Do Charter Schools Measure Up?

A 2009 national study of charter school performance by CREDO, a research unit at Stanford University that supports charter "reform," found that only about one in five charter schools had better test scores than comparable public schools and more than twice as many had lower ones.[3] Earlier this year, CREDO released an updated study that looked at charters in 27 states, and little had changed. As the National Education Policy Center explained, "The bottom line appears to be that, once again, it has been found that, in aggregate, charter schools are basically indistinguishable from traditional public schools in terms of their impact on academic test performance." [4]

Similarly, a report from the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education looked at "reform" efforts over the past decade in Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C. The report noted that "expanding access to charter schools" was "a common focus of reforms in the three cities," but "assertions that charter schools improve educational outcomes are not supported by rigorous studies. . . . Charter schools further disrupted the districts while providing mixed benefits, particularly for the highest-needs students." [5]

There are many factors that make charters an unsustainable strategy for improving public education. Unlike most charter schools, traditional public schools accept all children, including much larger numbers of high-needs students. In most states, charters do not face the same public accountability and transparency requirements as public schools, which has led to serious problems of mismanagement, corruption, and profiteering.

Invariably, beneath accounts of spectacular charter success lie demographics that reveal fewer special-needs children, fewer English language learners, and fewer children from the poorest families. This hasn't stopped the cheerleading coming from some quarters, but it does undermine the credibility of charter schools as a strategy for improving public schools overall.

Consider for example, the most recent report on New Jersey charters that CREDO produced in conjunction with the New Jersey Department of Education. The press release announcing this long-delayed study claimed it showed that "New Jersey charter public schools significantly outperform their district school peers." [6] Education Commissioner Chris Cerf (the former head of Edison Inc., once the largest private education management firm in the nation) echoed these claims: "The results are clear—on the whole, New Jersey charter school students make larger learning gains in both reading and math than their traditional public school peers." [7]

But a closer look at the report raises familiar issues (even putting aside the dubious premise that equates school success with test scores). The report showed that 70 percent of the New Jersey charters studied had the same or lower math scores as the

traditional public schools they were compared to; 60 percent scored the same or lower on language arts.

The charters with the best results were clustered in Newark, which includes more selective "no excuses" charters. These schools serve lower numbers of the highest-needs students and have relatively high rates of attrition compared to traditional district schools. Typically, the CREDO report failed to distinguish between levels of student need, lumping students who receive speech therapy with those facing more severe disabilities like autism as "special education" students. "Reduced lunch" students are similarly equated with "free lunch" students facing much deeper levels of poverty.[8]

More importantly, the report failed to identify a single school characteristic—aside from the demographics of the student populations—that accounts for the "success" of the limited number of charters with higher scores. It also fails to account for the "peer effect" of mixing limited numbers of high-needs students with the more selective charter population, while the highest-need students are increasingly left behind in growing concentrations in district schools.

A Return to Segregated Schools?

This is where the flaws of charters as a reform strategy start to come into focus. A plan that relies heavily on serving more selective student populations is not only unfeasible system wide, it has a decidedly negative effect on the district schools left in its wake. Rutgers professor Bruce Baker found that the selectivity of Newark charters is having a predictable effect on non-charter district enrollment. Newark charters now enroll about 20 percent of all students, but serve much lower levels of the highest-need students. As a result, the percentage of children who are English language learners, very poor, and/or severely handicapped in Newark Public Schools (NPS) is growing and, Baker noted, "We can expect that those left behind in district schools are becoming a higher and higher need group as charter enrollments expand." [9]

Another Newark study commissioned by the district focused on 14,000 students being educated in the 30 highest-need elementary schools in the city, both charter and district. Ninety-three percent of these students were in district-run schools and only 7 percent were in charter schools. This is segregation, not reform.[10]

The rapid expansion of charters in large urban districts like Newark is undermining their ability to equitably serve all children. This year fund transfers from NPS to charter schools will top $180 million. Even State District Superintendent Cami Anderson, a strong supporter of charters, admitted to the State Board of Education last year that this was an unsustainable budget trend for the district.[11]

In too many places, charters function more like deregulated "enterprise zones" than models of reform, providing subsidized spaces for a few at the expense of the many. They drain resources, staff, and energy for innovation away from other district schools, often while creaming better prepared students and more committed parents. This is

especially a problem in big city public systems that urgently need renewal and resources but are increasingly being left behind with the biggest challenges.

None of this is meant to deny the reform impulse that is a real part of the charter movement, and no one questions the desire of parents to find the best options they can for their children. But the original idea behind charter schools was to create “laboratories for innovation” that would nurture reform strategies to improve the public system as a whole. That hasn't happened. Although there are some excellent individual charter schools, nowhere have charters produced a template for effective districtwide reform or equity.

This doesn't mean charter school teachers and parents are our enemies. On the contrary, we should be allies in fighting some of the counterproductive assessment, curriculum, and instructional practices raining down on all of us from above. Where practices like greater autonomy over curriculum or freedom from bureaucratic regulations are valid, they should be extended to all schools, without sacrificing the oversight we need to preserve equity and accountability.

Focus on Poverty and Proven Reforms

The current push for deregulated charters and privatization is doing nothing to reduce the concentrations of 70, 80, and 90 percent poverty that remain the central problem in under-resourced public schools.

It's instructive to contrast charter-driven reform with more equitable approaches. In North Carolina, for several decades reform efforts were based on integrating struggling schools in Raleigh with the schools in surrounding Wake County. Efforts were made to improve theme-based and magnet programs at all schools, and the concentration of free/reduced lunch students at any one school was limited to 40 percent or less. The plan led to some of the nation's best progress on closing gaps in achievement and opportunity—until recent rounds of market-driven school reform began to undermine these efforts as well.[12]

Today, charters have become part of a campaign to create a less stable, less secure, and less expensive teaching staff. Nationally, charter school teachers are, on average, less experienced, less unionized, and less likely to hold state certification than teachers in traditional public schools.[13] In a word, cheaper.

As many as one in four charter school teachers leave every year, about double the turnover rate in traditional public schools. The odds of a teacher leaving the profession altogether are 130 percent higher at charters than traditional public schools, and much of this teacher attrition is related to dissatisfaction with working conditions.[14]

Charter schools typically pay less for longer hours. But charter school administrators often earn more than their school district counterparts. Geoffrey Canada of the Harlem Children's Zone and Eva Moskowitz of the Success Academy Schools, two widely

heralded charter school leaders, are each paid close to half a million dollars a year.[15] In New Jersey, charter school administrators are exempt from the salary caps imposed on district superintendents.[16]

Charters raise similar issues in middle-class districts. Last year, an application to open a Quest Academy charter school in my hometown of Montclair, New Jersey, was a finalist after being previously rejected four times. If approved, the charter would have drawn more than $2 million from the district budget. Quest promised to serve a small group of students with “small classes,” “individualized instruction,” and “cutting-edge technology.” But it would have left students at Montclair High School with larger classes, less individualized instruction, and less cutting-edge technology. It would have eroded programs and staff at a high school that sends more than 90 percent of its students to postsecondary education, including more than 90 percent of its African American students.[17]

Parents Weigh In

This is why grassroots parents groups like Save Our Schools NJ have been pushing back against unwanted charter expansion that undermines the quality and budgets of district schools. Because current New Jersey charter policies do not give a voice to local districts and voters in deciding where to open charters and how to integrate them equitably into the public system, they promote polarization among parents and pockets of privilege instead of districtwide improvement.

I've attended too many meetings where groups of charter and public school parents are pitted against each other in contentious, at times ugly debates over resources, facilities, and priorities.

This polarization has its roots, not just in clashing short-term interests and an inadequate pool of resources, but also in conflicting conceptions of the role parents should play in public education. For the charter movement, parents are seen as customers seeking services with no major role in school governance or advocacy for all children. But in a system of universal public education, parents are citizens seeking rights. They are collectively the owner-managers of a fundamental public institution in a democratic society.

To be sure, many of the issues that public school advocates criticize in charters—tracking, creaming, unequal resources—exist within the public system, too. But public schools have federal, state, and district obligations that can be brought to bear. School boards, public budgets, public policies, and public officials can be subjected to pressure and held accountable in ways that privatized charters don't allow. In post-Katrina New Orleans, where this year virtually all students attend unequal tiers of charter schools, there are now students and families who cannot find any schools to take them.[18]

The March Continues

It has become impossible to separate the rapid expansion of charter networks from efforts to privatize public education. Those who believe that business models and market reforms hold the key to solving educational problems have made great strides in attaching their agenda to the urgent need of communities who have too often been poorly served by the current system. But left to its own bottom line logic, the market will do for education what it has done for housing, health care, and employment: create fabulous profits and opportunities for a few, and unequal access and outcomes for the many.

Our country has already had more than enough experience with separate and unequal school systems. The counterfeit claim that charter privatization is part of a new “civil rights movement,” addressing the deep and historic inequality that surrounds our schools, is belied by the real impact of rapid charter growth in cities across the country. At the level of state and federal education policy, charters are providing a reform cover for eroding the public school system and an investment opportunity for those who see education as a business rather than a fundamental institution of democratic civic life. It's time to put the brakes on charter expansion and refocus public policy on providing excellent public schools for all.

DEFENDING EDUCATION

Disabled Education

By Ruth Colker
Rethinking Schools, Fall 2013

Illustration by Robert Trujillo

I have been a legal advocate for individuals with disabilities since 1985, but until 2000 I had little experience with special education. I learned about special education while working as an advocate for my son, Sam, and soon realized the enormous disparities in the system on the basis of class and race. I hope that looking at those disparities will open up a discussion of ways we can better work together as a community of parents, teachers, and advocates on behalf of students with disabilities.

In 2008, a parent I will call Marilyn filed a due process complaint against the St. Bernard-Elmwood Place City School District in Hamilton County, Ohio, on behalf of her son, Kevin, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).[1] Even though Marilyn received no legal help, she managed to navigate the special education system not merely to file a complaint but to request an expedited hearing.

The school district had identified Kevin as being emotionally disturbed and having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) when he was in the 6th grade. Kevin had been taking medication to help moderate his behavior and reduce his symptoms, but he had stopped taking it for a period of time when his mother could not afford it. He also had a behavioral intervention plan to help him maintain appropriate behavior in the classroom. When the school district suspended and then expelled Kevin for violating school policies in 8th grade, his mother filed a complaint with the Ohio Department of Education to pressure the school to recognize that his misbehavior was a result of his disability. If the complaint could not be resolved amicably, a hearing officer would render a decision after a hearing.

Marilyn wanted a more effective Individualized Education Program (IEP) that would address Kevin's educational needs and keep him in school. She also argued that “the school and parent have such a poor or broken-down relationship that the student cannot succeed or learn in the current school setting or that the school has acted in a biased or discriminatory manner towards student and his family to such an extent that the child should be sent to a different school at the local school's expense.” (The record does not disclose what type of bias Marilyn meant—race, class, disability, or other.)

Marilyn initially requested an expedited hearing to avoid having her son face a long-term suspension from school. The hearing, however, had to proceed on a regular schedule because a pregnancy as well as childcare responsibilities kept her from maintaining the pace of an expedited hearing. Marilyn's brother attended the hearing with her, trying to offer assistance even though he was not an attorney.

The hearing officer ruled for the school district, deciding that the school was offering Kevin an adequate IEP and handling his behavioral problems appropriately. In ruling for the school district, the hearing officer noted that the mother “seemed exceptionally frustrated and intimidated by the due process hearing procedures.” Rather than write a brief following the hearing, Marilyn left long voicemail messages on the hearing officer's telephone with the arguments she wanted to make. Then, after the deadline had passed for submitting a brief, she left further messages with statements such as “Just going to let you make decision . . . too stressful on me and my children and my unborn baby.” Despite these messages, the hearing officer had no obligation to try to get Marilyn free legal assistance. The hearing officer—who never received any kind of brief on behalf of Kevin—ruled in favor of the school district.

The factors that caused Kevin to misbehave and what kind of IEP might provide him with an effective education were barely explored. As to the argument about “bias,” the hearing officer noted that one staff member had allegedly said that he did not enjoy working with “parents of her type.” But the hearing officer concluded that she had no legal authority to change the child's placement merely because “the school does not particularly enjoy working with a certain family or parent.” Moreover, she concluded that she could see “in the faces and demeanor of these school officials that they want to continue working with this student and will not retaliate towards either the student or his family for having exercised their due process rights under IDEA.” Looking at complaints filed by parents in five states, however, helped me understand that Marilyn, and nearly all poor parents who try to proceed without an attorney, have little chance of success in getting more services for their children.

At about the same time as Marilyn was pursuing her complaint against her local school district on Kevin's behalf, I was pursuing a complaint under the IDEA against my local school district on behalf of my own son.

Sam was born on Jan. 9, 1997. Soon after he was diagnosed as “developmentally delayed” in 2000, our school district enrolled him in an excellent special education program for preschoolers, where he made enormous progress.

Even with some extra help, Sam continued to face difficulties during grade school. Although he was a great reader, his writing was significantly below grade level, and he often seemed confused about assignments and directions. When Sam was in 5th grade, I learned he had a severe central auditory processing disorder (CAPD). He was not able to comprehend most verbal classroom instruction because he could not separate background noise from foreground speech. His audiologist explained that the consequences in the classroom for a child with severe CAPD are comparable to those for a deaf child because the child misses so much oral instruction. So it was not surprising that he would complain to me that he wished the teachers would not talk so much; they should put directions in writing. The audiologist recommended that the school district acquire a personal listening device (PLD) for Sam to use in the classroom, along with other accommodations. A PLD brings the sound directly to the child's ear through an FM receiver and costs about $1,000.

The school district agreed that Sam was disabled and far behind his peers in some subjects, but refused to provide him with a PLD. After a year of being stonewalled, I filed a due process complaint against the district under the IDEA. Even though I was a lawyer who taught a course in special education advocacy, I hired a lawyer to help conduct the three-day hearing. I also retained two expert witnesses. On the Friday before school was to start, and two years after the audiologist recommended Sam have a PLD, the hearing officer ruled in Sam's favor, concluding that the evidence demonstrated that he needed a PLD to access oral communication. She gave the school district 30 days to acquire a device and implement a revised IEP. The school district ultimately complied, and Sam's performance in school began to improve dramatically. He is currently in 10th grade and earning good grades in the regular curriculum. Despite his earlier deficits in writing, he spends much of his free time writing science fiction stories.

Disparities in Access

The class-based difference in treatment that Sam and Kevin received is typical of the experience of families within the special education system. As a middle-class parent, I could afford to take Sam to an audiologist who diagnosed him with CAPD and helped him get a PLD. Even though my school district fought me over the PLD issue, they did give Sam lots of support to improve his performance and were patient when his behavior was sometimes socially awkward.

Kevin, who grew up in a poor household, by contrast, was labeled as having ADHD and being emotionally disturbed. Kevin did not get the academic support he needed and was both suspended and expelled when he violated school rules. Although I do not know Kevin's race, that kind of labeling and treatment is typical for African American boys under the IDEA.

As a parent, I found the experience of fighting with the school district to meet Sam's needs extremely stressful, but I was able to hire a lawyer and two expert witnesses. The phone messages left by Marilyn show her high level of stress in dealing with the

process, but even though the hearing officer was aware of the problems that Marilyn faced, no system was in place to provide Kevin or his mother with a free advocate. While Sam eventually flourished in school, Kevin was suspended.

Why is the IDEA process so heavily biased against low-income parents like Marilyn, in comparison with a middle-class mother like me, who can afford to spend the time and money to advocate for my son? Why do families have to make advocacy a full-time job in order to support their children?

A Little History

Many of these problems were foreseeable. In 1974, when Congress held hearings to consider the proposed Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, the precursor to the IDEA), Lloyd Dunn testified in opposition to the proposed statute because he predicted that “these bills, if enacted, would do more harm than good for the very children they are committed to serve better.” This testimony was especially troubling because it was Dunn's work in the field of special education that had led to the creation of a federal special education law. He had argued in 1968 that the practice of segregating “slow” students into special education classes was a “sham of dreams” because it resulted in “poor and minority students” receiving inferior educations. Congress, unfortunately, failed to heed Dunn's advice in fashioning the new federal law.

Thus, 30 years later, books such as *Racial Inequality in Special Education, Why Are So Many Minority Students in Special Education?*, and my own book, *Disabled Education*, ask: What is so special about special education for children whose parents are poor, children of color, children who are English language learners? Validating Dunn's predictions, the authors argue that these children often receive “inadequate services, low-quality curriculum and instruction, and unnecessary isolation from their nondisabled peers” (Losen and Orfield).

Historically, the IDEA (and its precursor, the EAHCA) marked important steps forward in the treatment of children with disabilities. Since 1975, 90 percent fewer children with developmental disabilities are living in institutions. In 1975, more than 1 million children with disabilities were excluded from public school; today, virtually no child with a disability is excluded from public school.

Nonetheless, the enactment of the EAHCA may have also increased educational inequity by steering the most vulnerable children to the most stigmatized special education categories and then providing them with inadequate resources within the special education system. Congress has never fulfilled its promise to provide 40 percent of the dollars needed to educate children with disabilities; instead, federal underfunding of special education has exacerbated an inequitable allocation of education resources.

Disparities in Diagnosis

Racial disparities in disability classification have always plagued the special education system. As has been true since the early court cases in the 1970s, African Americans are overrepresented in the categories of intellectual disability (formerly called “mental retardation”) and emotional disturbance, and underrepresented in the categories of autism and other health impairments (typically ADHD). In 2010, African American children constituted about 14 percent of the school-age population and 21 percent of those classified as disabled; they represented 32 percent of the students identified as intellectually disabled but only about 14 percent of the students identified as autistic.

Latina/o children reflect a somewhat different pattern of disproportional representation. In 2010, they constituted about 22 percent of the school-age population but only 9.6 percent of the students in the category of “developmental delay,” which is used to get children extra assistance at ages 3 to 5, before they enter kindergarten.

White children, who represented 55 percent of the school-age population, were overrepresented in the categories of autism and other health impairments but underrepresented in the category of intellectual disability. They constituted 69.7 percent of students identified as autistic and 68.4 percent of students identified as other health impaired (typically ADHD).

From these numbers, one can predict that an African American boy who “acts up” in class because he has trouble sitting is likely to be classified as emotionally disturbed, whereas a white boy with similar characteristics is likely to be classified as having ADHD. Similarly, a very withdrawn African American boy is likely to be classified as emotionally disturbed whereas an equally shy white boy is likely to be classified as autistic. An African American preschooler who is having trouble keeping up with age-level expectations is likely to be classified as intellectually disabled; her white counterpart is likely to be classified as being developmentally delayed. And a Latina child who has missed developmental milestones is unlikely to receive early intervention services for the developmentally delayed.

Why are intellectual disability and emotional disturbance “black” categories while autism is a “white” category? As Tom Parrish, managing research scientist at the American Institutes for Research, asks: “Can Connecticut, Mississippi, North Carolina, Nebraska, and South Carolina be in compliance with special education and civil rights law when black students are over four times more likely than white students to be designated as mentally retarded? Those stark discrepancies strongly suggest racial bias in classification.”

Although these racial statistics are available on a broad level because the IDEA requires school districts to report disability classification by race to the federal government, the lack of information available on race and class disparities is actually quite frustrating. For instance, the broad data on disability classification does not track students on the basis of class or their status as English language learners. In Ohio, I often help students who live in rural counties and I suspect that many poor white

children also face disability misclassification. But there is no data to support or refute my hypothesis.

While reading hearing officer decisions, I try to pay attention to evidence that students are English language learners. I have noticed that hearings for these students are rarely successful in getting more services for them, but the hearing officer is not required to report their status as English language learners. In addition, it is nearly impossible to follow race and class disparities through the stories found in individual hearing officer opinions because those opinions rarely mention a student's race or class. Thus, we have some broad macro data on racial classification, none on class disparities or status as an English language learner, and no way to see the implications of that macro data through individual stories in hearing officer opinions.

Disparities in Services

In addition to being subject to disability misclassification, children of color and English language learners often receive far less effective special education services than white children. Examining data from California, Parrish found that white children are more likely to be mainstreamed than black children but, when black children do require more intensive services, they are less likely to receive speech, occupational therapy, and physical therapy than white students. And black children are more likely than white children to be placed in special education self-contained classrooms but less likely to be placed in the most costly special education programs and schools. (Again, one can speculate about class disparities, but the available data does not track services on the basis of class.

Special education has led to higher rates of segregation for black students than for white students. That is problematic, especially when one notes that black students in those segregated programs are not necessarily getting the services they need. But the situation is complicated by the fact that whites disproportionately gain access to the most segregated but also often the most desirable programs—costly special schools designed specifically for students with disabilities. The comparatively higher rate of autism classification for white children is a reflection of this placement pattern; many of the children in these expensive and segregated programs are autistic.

When I read decisions in which the hearing officer notes that a translator was present, I often find that the record is riddled with inconsistencies and apparent errors in relaying the facts. School districts have little legal responsibility to translate documents for parents or engage in effective communication in their native language. These communication problems make it nearly impossible for many parents to participate as equal partners in the IEP process.

The regional variation that is permitted under the IDEA is also problematic. I recently tried to help a family who moved from California to Ohio with their 3-year-old who is deaf. They were shocked to learn that Ohio would not provide them with the services that were considered routine in California. Another parent, who moved from California to

Connecticut, told me that services that were unavailable in California were routinely provided in Connecticut. Parents should not have to worry that their children are sacrificial lambs in this regional variation when they move across state lines.

Looking Forward: So What Can We Do?

The flawed nature of the IDEA does not relieve each of us of responsibility to help as many children as possible. As a lawyer, I can act as a pro bono advocate for children. I can talk to parents, I can attend meetings, and I can train law students to act as advocates. And, even within the existing structure, I think teachers and school staff could do more to assist children. Clearly, we need a national dialogue on how to improve education for all children, including children with disabilities. This short piece cannot begin to describe all the possible solutions to this deeply entrenched problem. But the following three suggestions would be a useful starting point for such a conversation:

1. Make it easier for parents and others to be effective advocates for children.
2. Support teachers and other school staff to act more effectively as part of IEP teams.
3. Reconfigure special education law to help overcome the education system's intrinsic race and class bias.

Support Parents and Other Advocates. The IDEA seeks to empower parents by giving them the right to attend a wide range of school-based special education meetings. On paper, it values their input as experts on their child. But it is also based on assumptions that reflect race, class, and language biases. It assumes that all children have parents who have the time, childcare, employment flexibility, and commitment to act as advocates (or money to hire someone to do so). It assumes that parents can understand the lengthy documents sent to them, even when their primary language is not English or they themselves have a disability. It assumes that parents won't be afraid to participate in meetings at schools out of fear of deportation or other adverse consequences. It assumes that teachers have the job security and working conditions to enable them to attend and speak honestly at meetings. And, of course, it assumes that school districts have the resources to implement appropriate educational plans.

Ideally, we could educate parents and other childcare providers so that they can be better advocates on behalf of children. Each state has a pamphlet in a variety of languages titled something like *Whose IDEA Is It?* But those pamphlets often number 100 pages and are filled with dense descriptions of the special education process.

When states provide services to families with disabled preschoolers under what is called an Individualized Family Service Plan, the services come directly to the family in the home. Surveys suggest that parents are more satisfied with those services than the assistance that is provided to school-age children. One factor that appears to improve parents' satisfaction is the opportunity to work with social workers who are sensitive to

their cultural background. Perhaps more culturally sensitive home-to-school involvement would improve the ability of parents to work effectively with school districts.

Having attended IEP meetings for many years, though, I can report that virtually no parent can be an effective advocate at such meetings alone. I have attended meetings with 15 or 20 school personnel and one parent. The parent is lucky if he or she can even identify who was present, let alone describe the issues considered at the meeting. Parents need an advocate to assist them at meetings. The mere presence of an advocate often makes an enormous difference.

For example, a parent called me in tears because the school district refused to classify her son as learning disabled when he could barely read in 4th grade. The school district brought truancy charges against her when she could not convince her son to sit through a day of mind-numbing boredom caused by his inability to access the curriculum. Somehow, when I showed up, the school district "saw the light" and started giving him some individualized services.

Another parent patiently asked me whether her 7th-grade daughter, who was reading at a 1st-grade level, could receive technological support to hear her textbooks. After months of the school not returning the parent's phone calls, my involvement led to numerous meetings and significant improvement in her daughter's education, including the use of technology.

Another local school said it was suspending a child with emotional disturbance from the bus—but not school—to avoid triggering his procedural protections under the IDEA. When an advocate got involved in the case, his transportation magically reappeared.

Thus, all parents need access to a trained and culturally sensitive advocate. Of course, an advocate cannot be successful all the time. Nor can an advocate solve all types of problems. On a national level, numerous disability rights organizations have been fighting the use of seclusion and restraint on children, including children with disabilities. These practices typically exacerbate a child's situation and make it more difficult to provide an appropriate education. Disability rights organizations have also been fighting highly segregated educational placements, overuse of suspension of children of color, attempts to move children out of special education through vouchers and online education, and a lack of appropriate procedural safeguards. We can rarely solve these kinds of systemic practices one child at a time, even with strong advocacy. To be successful, we need a movement—a broad, collective effort by parents, teachers, lawyers, and community organizers.

Support Teachers and Other School Staff. I am not a public school teacher and I am reluctant to tell teachers how to do their jobs better. I welcome dialogue on this subject, including in the pages of *Rethinking Schools*. But I have a few ideas based on conversations and experiences with teachers.

Occasionally, I get phone calls from teachers who want to meet me in an obscure location to talk. They are being asked to sign documents they consider dishonest. They attend meetings where school district personnel try to convince parents to leave the public school system by accepting a “voucher” for a private school or having their child join a work program instead of continuing in the public education system to age 22. These teachers are afraid they will lose their jobs or find their working conditions unbearable if they speak up. They want me to promise to represent them if they get fired or mistreated. Unfortunately, I can't promise to “save” them. I am not so naive as to think those problems don't exist. Yet, I encourage them to speak up anyway out of a sense of moral responsibility.

When teachers are committed to supporting all children with special needs, what do they do? One teacher told me that she tries to sit with the parent at IEP meetings, sending the message that she is on the parent's side, rather than sitting with the school personnel. She tries to talk to the parent privately before the meeting to get a fuller picture of the student at home and school.

Another teacher learned to read the psycho-educational reports presented at IEP meetings so she can better understand students' learning strengths and challenges. Most teachers tell me that they walk into IEP meetings “cold” without having seen any of the supporting documentation beforehand. If documents were shared in advance, these teachers know they could be more effective.

When I attend IEP meetings as a stranger to the school district, I often wonder what would happen if the teachers organized more effectively as a community on behalf of the student. I usually get the sense that the teachers have not shared their observations about the child among themselves, that their days are so busy they cannot take the time to work as a team. Although in some schools teachers have a common planning period to enable this kind of discussion, I rarely see evidence that effective communication has occurred among the teachers in advance of the IEP meeting.

One of my biggest wishes is that teachers would see me as on the side of the student rather than as an adversary of the teacher or school. When I present data that a 7th grader is reading at a 1st-grade level, I am not trying to attack the teachers in the room. I am trying to get the student the resources she needs to make progress. I know that teachers often have day-to-day evidence that supports the data, yet they rarely share useful anecdotes at the meeting, perhaps out of fear of retribution. It would be so much more effective if teachers and advocates could work together.

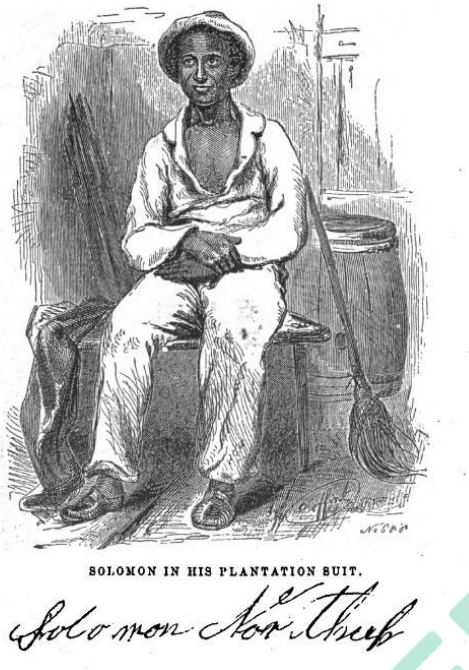
Reconfigure Special Education Law. Special education law is a microcosm of the broader race and class inequities within our educational system. As long as we primarily fund schools through property tax revenue and Congress underfunds the IDEA, it is unlikely that special education resources will be equitably allocated in our society.

Fundamentally, effective special education can only unfold in a society where the basic needs of students and their families for health care, housing, food, shelter, and

education are met through broad structural reform. Special education law is a conservative, individualistic approach that requires each of us to put forward enormous energy to help one child at a time in a resource-starved context. As we work together to help these children, one at a time, we should not lose sight of the need for structural reform. Only then will Kevin have the possibility of a truly meaningful education in a community of respect.

12 Years a Slave: Breaking Silences About Slavery

By Jeremy Stoddard
Rethinking Schools, Summer 2013



"I apologize for my appearance. . . . I have had a difficult time these past several years." This quote is uttered very near the end of *12 Years a Slave*, the award-winning 2013 film that tells the story of Solomon Northup, a free black man kidnapped in 1841 and enslaved for a dozen years before his escape. It is a major understatement.

Based on Northup's autobiography of the same name, *12 Years a Slave* charts Northup's experiences from his happy life in Saratoga Springs, New York, with his wife and children, to his kidnapping in Washington, D.C., and transport to New Orleans. There he is sold and enslaved in Louisiana by multiple plantation owners over the next decade. Northup, played by Chiwetel Ejiofor, is finally reunited with his family after escaping from bondage with the help of white friends from New York. In between are almost two hours of powerful scenes of violence—physical, psychological, and sexual; endurance; and resistance on the part of Northup and those enslaved with him.

David Thomson's review in the *New Republic* praised *12 Years a Slave* as "a film that necessity and education demand seeing." This is not the first film that has garnered praise in its attempts to portray slavery. *Roots*, the groundbreaking television miniseries that tells the story of historian Alex Haley's ancestors, was described in the New York Times as "a sociological phenomenon of major significance" even while it was critiqued for its many historical inaccuracies. *Glory* (1989) and *Amistad* (1997) were similarly lavished with praise for their cinematic depictions of marginalized or silenced aspects of the history of slavery.

When my colleague Alan Marcus and I surveyed high school teachers recently, *Glory* and *Amistad* were among the most widely used films in secondary history classes, particularly in suburban schools. However, we found that many teachers used the films as a way to teach a part of the history they were not as familiar with or comfortable teaching, and they did little beyond having students view the film.

This approach to using media in the classroom has serious consequences. Slavery is a particularly heavy topic in U.S. history, and students need clear, supportive leadership to be able to think, write, and discuss the issues. Also, simply showing a movie can

serve to reinforce the representations in the film and thus perpetuate ongoing myths about slavery. Despite their strengths, Edward Zwick's *Glory* and Steven Spielberg's *Amistad* avoid many of the most troubling and silenced aspects of the history of slavery and the antebellum (pre-Civil War) period in U.S. history—as do most history textbooks and high school history courses in the United States.

They also fall into an almost universal trap for films portraying marginalized historical groups or events: Both are told from the perspective of a white male protagonist. This is an unfortunate narrative decision. There are ample first-person accounts and historical evidence to tell the stories from African American or African perspectives. For example, two of Frederick Douglass' sons fought with the 54th Massachusetts, the all-black regiment depicted in *Glory*. Both films also consign representations of slavery to flashbacks or innuendo—the scarred back of Denzel Washington's character in *Glory* or the flashback to the Middle Passage in *Amistad*. Both films raise issues about racism in the North and the economic benefits of slavery for the whole country, but with little depth or detail.

This does not mean that these two films are not important. As film critic Roger Ebert noted: "What is most valuable about *Amistad* is the way it provides faces and names for its African characters, whom the movies so often make into faceless victims." *Amistad's* scenes of the Middle Passage do depict the horrors of the slave trade as rarely seen in a major film, and also show the resistance of captured Africans to their white captors. Of the more than 400 Civil War movies produced to that point, *Glory* was the first to tell the story of African American soldiers.

When Making a Blockbuster Isn't the Goal

12 Years a Slave was directed by Steve McQueen, a British director of Grenadian descent, who is well known for taking on controversial historical events and issues. He was not intent on making a Hollywood blockbuster or box office success, which led to some of the weaknesses of *Glory* and *Amistad*. Instead, McQueen decided to use the largely unknown story of Northup to challenge many of the misrepresentations of slavery in popular history, which have their roots not just in schools and textbooks but also in films such as *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

Northup is not only the protagonist and narrator. His is the perspective through which the audience experiences the horrors of captivity, and witnesses slavery as an institution and economic system in antebellum society. We follow Northup as he accompanies two men on their way to Washington, D.C. He has been promised high wages in return for performing with them along the way. Once in the nation's capital, however, they get Northup drunk and sell him to a slave trader who quickly sneaks his captives out of the capital.

The transaction between the two kidnappers and the slave trader is not shown. Instead, we go from an image of Northup thanking his two companions for their generosity as

they pour him large glasses of wine to his awakening in chains in a dark room—disoriented and hungover.

Soon Northup and the other captives are aboard a ship en route to New Orleans to be sold at auction. During this voyage we are introduced to aspects of the history of slavery often left in the silences of history and classroom discussion. One man tries to talk Northup and others into a revolt on the boat—he is murdered when he tries to stop a member of the crew from raping a mother who was captured along with Northup. This woman is later separated from her children at auction, and eventually is whisked away from the plantation, so psychologically distraught by the separation from her family and the sexual violence she endured under her former master that she is disturbing the wife of the plantation owner.

Tight shots throughout the film reveal the psychological impact of enslavement. McQueen shows us up close the sweat and heartache of a man who went from living the relatively privileged life of a musician and well-respected member of society to being called a “dog” and “property,” and seen as livestock. McQueen uses these images not to show the black characters as victims, but to illustrate the system of dehumanization that accompanies bondage. We see Northup being slowly broken over the years, from a man with only limited experience with the institution of slavery, to one who is driven to whip a fellow slave almost to death in order to save the lives of everyone else enslaved by their pathological master. This scene, the breaking point for Northup, is one of the most powerful in the film.

McQueen uses episodes from Northup’s experience to challenge many of the misrepresentations and silences in film portrayals of slavery. He presents a slave market, not in a city square but in a fashionable New Orleans home. He portrays the complex and integrated lives of the slaves, plantation families, and white workers. The plantations where Northup lives and works are not large estates, and Northup himself is not owned by the plantation owners but is mortgaged on credit, and thus regarded as both property and a debt to be paid. He works not only in steamy cotton fields but also clearing timber, cutting sugar cane, and on tasks such as construction, sometimes for his owners and sometimes contracted out to other plantations. Instead of the textbook image of wealthy Southern society, we see the often isolated lives of plantation existence.

The plantation owners range from empathetic to insanely cruel. McQueen holds nothing back in portraying one owner’s rape and obsession with one of his female slaves, and the tension and violence this relationship causes.

We witness through Northup’s eyes the many psychological and social pressures that kept slaves from attempting to escape, including hanging and the threat of punishing family members. Northup’s experiences illustrate the extreme torment experienced by slaves and how it affected their beliefs about themselves and caused them to become mistrustful of others.

By no means are those enslaved portrayed as powerless victims. From the opening scene we know this is a different portrayal of slavery. Multiple forms of resistance are shown. In one of the first scenes, Northup is shown trying to write a letter on stolen parchment with a stick pen and blackberry ink. He and others physically resist and even assault overseers, and contemplate escape.

One More White Savior

Although *12 Years a Slave* goes to great lengths to more accurately represent slavery and challenge common perceptions, it should still be viewed critically. There is still a white savior, a poorly cast Brad Pitt. Pitt's character, a Canadian carpenter, is Northup's channel of communication to friends and family back in New York—who eventually come to help get him home. There is little illustration of the complicity of Northern institutions in slavery or the economic benefits of slavery for the entire United States and the global economy.

12 Years a Slave makes major concessions to a traditional Hollywood ending. Audience members may believe that this was a common outcome when free men and women were kidnapped and enslaved; on the contrary, most cases did not end in freedom. The ending simplifies the complexity of the events leading to Northup's release and diminishes the significance of what he accomplished afterward. The impact of his book, on which the film is based, and his abolitionist work, are well documented historically but not in the film, which ignores the powerful work of black abolitionists in general. Instead, the film ends with an apology and a family reunion.

Age-Appropriate for High School Classrooms?

This article arose from a conversation I had with my own students, all of whom were social studies teachers in training. Many had powerful reactions to the film, so I invited those who had seen the film to participate in a discussion about the film itself and whether or not it should be used in the classroom.

A couple of the students had studied the antebellum South and slavery while undergraduates and focused on what they saw as a more accurate portrayal of the institution. They felt that clips of the film could be used to illustrate these ideas and the complex economic and societal role of slavery—or as a case study for how slave traders and owners attempted to dehumanize those who were enslaved. Others questioned the violence in the film and their own discomfort watching it. One summed it by saying, "It was a hard film to get through."

With the National School Board Association now involved in distributing an edited version of the film, a copy of Northup's book, and curriculum to schools across the country, I have no doubts that it will be shown in classes. I hope that teachers who choose to use the film watch it carefully beforehand and work with colleagues to reflect on its strengths and weaknesses, the questions it raises, and those that remain silenced. Especially important to take into account are the potential emotional

responses of students pushed by McQueen to imagine the experiences of those in bondage.

Disarming the Nuclear Family

By Willow McCormick
Rethinking Schools, Summer 2014
Creating a classroom book that reflects the class

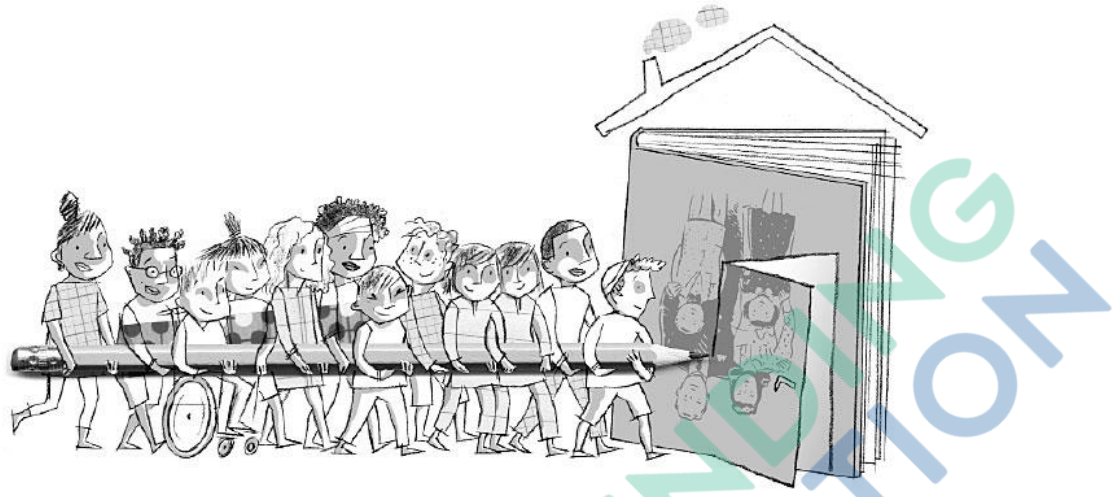


Illustration by Christiane Grauert

I have more than 1,000 books in my classroom library, cobbled together from garage sales, used bookstores, and the collections of former students who have outgrown their picture books. As a social justice educator, I try to fill my primary classroom library with books that feature characters from a variety of cultures, traditions, classes, and backgrounds. And yet, despite my efforts, I'm dismayed by how many of the thoughtful, well-written books in my collection feature the nuclear family unit, be it human or animal. Even my favorite authors default to the nuke.

Kevin Henkes is a perennial favorite in primary classrooms across the country. The mice that populate his books cope with universal struggles of young children—separation anxiety, teasing, loneliness, empathy. Unfortunately, Henkes' books present something else as universal as well: a doting mother and father plus a sibling or two waiting at home to soothe and support the struggler.

Trudy Ludwig has written an excellent collection of books, including *Trouble Talk and Sorry!*, that dig into the power dynamics among children and offer strategies on how a child can transition from being a target to a self-advocate—with a little help from Mom, Dad, and brother in a tidy, suburban home. The message of empowerment is a noble and essential one, which is why I read these books to my class every year. But another message is being conveyed as well when these books are read back to back: two-parent heterosexual families are the norm.

When a book does acknowledge the existence of other family structures, the difference is often the focus of the story—how Addison has two fancy houses instead of one in Tamara Schmitz's *Standing on My Own Two Feet: A Child's Affirmation of Love in the Midst of Divorce*. If you want to read a story featuring children in foster care, you'll have to look long and hard for anything other than guides for making the transition in or out of care. It takes a lot of work to find books that include same-gender parents, step-parents, foster or adoptive children, or other nontraditional families as background in an adventure tale, a friendship parable, or a holiday romp; nontraditional families are either the topic of the story or, more likely, not included at all.

When two-parent, heterosexual families are presented as the norm in story after story, year in and year out, an insidious message is conveyed: Families that don't conform to this structure are not normal. And, of course, the message is reinforced in the majority of movies and television shows geared toward children. Shame, secrecy, and evasion can result from this incessant messaging.

I see it play out in my classroom. Two years ago, I had a student with divorced lesbian moms, step-siblings, half-siblings, and a close-knit extended family. I doubt any children's book out there includes a family like hers. They were a loud and loving family, and Marie was a loud and loving girl. Yet she rarely divulged that she had two moms and, in fact, fabricated an absentee dad at one point early in the year. Another boy, Andrew, didn't want anyone to know he was adopted, afraid they would think he was "weird." He said it was hard enough having brown skin when his parents and most of his classmates were white; he didn't want kids to think of him as different in another way, too. I pride myself on having an accepting and appreciative classroom community, but the undermining effect of the dominant family system in children's books and media slips into our snug community like toxic smoke.

What is a 2nd-grade teacher to do? Dispose of all Kevin Henkes books, and deprive 7-year-olds of the pleasure of repeating "Chrysanthemum, Chrysanthemum, Chrysanthemum" as they root for the main character to embrace her unusual name and accept herself? Give periodic rambling qualifiers before read-alouds, trying to explain the heteronormative paradigm in kid-friendly language? Build a library where every family structure is represented equally, thus ensuring a library of 100 books or fewer? I've considered all of these scenarios in moments of exasperation, but nothing seems realistic.

Susan Kuklin's *Families*

Luckily there are resources out there that shine a light on a path forward. A few years ago I discovered a beautiful book by Susan Kuklin simply titled *Families*. Kuklin puts family structure in a larger context of diversity of all types. To create the book, she interviewed children aged 4 to 14 from a variety of family structures, mainly in New York City, but also in rural communities. She then worked with the children to select a page's worth of text describing their family members, religious traditions, household, hobbies, and studies. A family portrait accompanies each page; the children themselves chose

the location, clothing worn by all family members, pets, and props. The net effect is a refreshingly matter-of-fact look at 16 very different families. Ella is a summer camp aficionado who was adopted by her two fathers as a baby. There's also Kira and Matias, biracial children who live beside a creek and love catching fish for dinner. Yaakov, Leah, Miriam, and Asher are Orthodox Jews who make themselves laugh with goofy invented languages. Chris, Louie, and Adam are close-knit brothers whose parents come from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic; they discuss food and language, only mentioning in passing that Louie has Down syndrome.

We Make Our Own Book

This book has all sorts of potential for classroom use. I use it as a mentor text for writing our own class book of families. Each day I read aloud one family story to the class. The straightforward tone of the book leads easily to a straightforward discussion afterward. I ask the kids to make connections between the family we just met in the book and their own families, or the families of their friends or neighbors. What do they have in common? What are some differences? The class often starts with the goofy languages—they make up silly words, too!—or the hobbies or study habits they share with the children in the book. But it's not long before the conversation gets more personal. Finn mentions his gay aunts, two children of divorced families compare how they split up—or don't—their time between households, devout Christian Isaiah notices that he and a Muslim boy in the book both consider themselves servants of God.

Over time, we begin to craft our own narratives. First we brainstorm themes that came up again and again in the book—food, religion, traditions, sports and hobbies, descriptions of family members—and the kids start to make lists from their own lives that fit into these categories. Then they write, each in their own style. Ramona tells how her cousins came to live with her family as foster children. "My mom wanted to know how long they would be staying, but now we're all glad they came." Isaiah tells us that religion is the biggest part of his family's life. Marie writes about her two moms, and Rory explains that he doesn't have a dad or siblings, but his uncles and pets fill in, and he and his mom have an extra special relationship because it's just the two of them. Andrew, after a few fretful conferences with a couple of trusted peers and me, decides to include his adoption in his narrative:

Hi, I am Andrew. I am 8 years old. I have one sister and no brothers. I live in Oregon. I was adopted because my birth mom could not take care of me. My dad was at work then the phone rang. Somebody said into the phone, "Jon, do you want to be a dad?" "Yes!" After one day my mom and my dad came to the place where I was. My new mom and dad took me home.

Once the narratives are crafted, the kids bring in photos to use as illustrations, or direct me to photograph them doing things they love at school. They paste their narratives and photos to oversized construction paper to create their own page in our classroom edition of *Families*.

To draw the project to a close, I host a writing celebration in the classroom. The children lay their pages out carefully on the tables and we spend the hour rotating from desk to desk, reading stories and leaving notes of praise and connection. “My family goes hiking on Easter, too!” “You have two moms?! You are sooo lucky!”

At the end of the day, I collect all pages and bind them together. Now there’s at least one book in our classroom library where all of my students can find themselves. When I think about how intently the majority of my students read and respond to the writing of their peers, I realize that, even if my classroom were fully stocked with high-quality literature featuring a complete spectrum of family structures, I’d still want this book, our book, at the center of my library. It is satisfying for the students to see themselves reflected in the books and other media that surround them. But it is also powerful—and comforting—for children to see and be seen by their own peers. Ultimately I want both for my students: a world in which they feel they belong, and a classroom community in which they feel known.

DEFENDING EDUCATION

"Aren't You on the Parent Listserv?"

Grace Cornell Gonzales
Rethinking Schools, Fall 2014

Illustration by Bec Young

When I visited my current school in San Francisco to do a demo lesson in a dual-immersion classroom, I was excited by the diversity that I saw. The bilingual Oakland school I had worked in before had been anything but diverse, either racially or socio-economically—98 percent of the students identified as Latina/o, 95 percent were eligible for free or reduced lunch, and about 86 percent were classified as English language learners. Everywhere it seemed that segregation in public schools was becoming more entrenched. Yet here I was, awkwardly clutching my bag of demo lesson materials, facing a sea of kindergarten faces that seemed to buck this trend. There were Latina/o students, African American students, white students, all chattering away in Spanish. I was elated. Could I have found a place where the interests and needs of many different populations converged—a public school that worked for everyone?

Then, in September, after starting my new job as a kindergarten teacher, I went to a PTA meeting. The parents at the meeting were excited to be there and dedicated to making the school a place that would serve their children. They were also almost entirely white, and—as I would learn as I got to know parents personally in our small school community—almost entirely middle- or upper-middle-class native English speakers. On paper, our school was about 50 percent Latina/o and 20 percent African American. Yet, in that first PTA meeting, with about 40 people in attendance, I saw only a handful of Latina/o parents. There were no African American families present. Later in the year, one African American family did frequently attend, but the number of Latina/o parents who came and used the interpretation services quickly dropped to zero. In addition, most of the parents involved came from the Spanish immersion track. The general education track, composed largely of students of color, was essentially unrepresented.

At my previous school, where the majority of families were recent immigrants, I had seen the positive impact of parents who were empowered to advocate for their children, although most were not native English speakers and many were unfamiliar with the structures of the local school system. The English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC) and School Site Council (SSC), the two required decision-making bodies with parent members, were run in Spanish by parents, and there was no such thing as low family involvement due to the demographics of the community. Parents felt at home and knew

that neither their native language nor unfamiliarity with the school system would be barriers to anticipation. Where were these families at my current school?

As I watched the PTA set fundraising goals, choose art enrichment programs, fund teaching positions, allocate money for books, determine what technology would be purchased, and select what types of paraprofessionals to hire, I became more and more concerned about whose voices were being heard and whose children were being advocated for.

I quickly began to see these inequities play out in my own classroom. The three mothers who signed up to be room parents were middle-class professionals, all white native English speakers. They all knew each other because their children had gone to the same bilingual preschool. The majority of families at Back to School Night were also white and English speaking. In the first two weeks, emails were sent, Google docs created, and listservs were joined, all in English. One half of the classroom parent community got to work, humming right along on rails that hissed by the other half by miles.

This was worrisome for a number of reasons. At my school, the stakes for parent participation are high because of the sorts of decisions the parent groups are responsible for. The PTA and SSC manage the budget, and the PTA brings in more than $100,000 a year. These groups work together to decide everything from whether or not there should be combination classes to what types of after-school intervention are available to struggling students, from field trip budgets to whether there are art enrichment classes and for whom.

I was also concerned about this pattern for another reason: As teachers we see the direct impact of parent involvement on our students—families who feel comfortable with and included in the school community can advocate for their children's needs, check in about their progress, get tips on how to help them at home, and stay informed about programs and opportunities that will be beneficial to their family. Attendance goes up and children benefit from seeing their parents as involved in their school community. When parents and teachers talk, children's behavior and motivation improves as they begin to understand the ways their home and school worlds are connected. I was going to have to do something quickly or risk losing those benefits for many of my students, and instead see my classroom duplicate the same sort of inequitable parent involvement that I saw at that first PTA meeting. The story of how I attempted to shift those dynamics is one of tiny victories, but it also shows how what we do in our own classrooms to address equity in parent participation can ripple out to affect the school as a whole.

Overcoming Communication Barriers

From the first week, when emails began to fly around in English asking parents to volunteer for important school roles, it became clear that communication was the key.

Out of my class of 19 kindergarteners, 11 were Latina/o, two were African American, and six were white.

Right away, assumptions about both language and technology use created dividing lines. For example, five of my Spanish-speaking families had limited to no English, yet most parent-to-parent communication was happening without translation. This was especially ironic at a dual-immersion school where ostensibly everyone had committed to elevating the status of Spanish and making it the primary language. The other key problem related to the medium of communication. Only about half of my families regularly used email and at least one family did not have an email address at all, yet nearly all parent communication was happening via electronic means. I asked the advice of other teachers and talked to my room parents, and we started to negotiate some guidelines:

All communication must be bilingual, and Spanish always goes first. This applied to emails, letters home, handouts, homework packets, and sign-up sheets. This rule was championed by the most experienced bilingual teacher on my grade-level team, and we helped each other stick to it. For my room parents, it meant asking a bilingual parent or myself to translate or, in desperate situations, using Google translate and hoping someone could give it a quick look-over. Putting Spanish first was of symbolic as well as practical significance—it served to remind us all that we are committed to a bilingual environment, and that means that native English speakers have to get used to not having their language always come first. Also, it helped to elevate the status of Spanish in our school community, which is essential because children are sensitive to issues of language and power and will sometimes be resistant to learning and speaking languages that they perceive to be low-status.

Important communication cannot just be through email. As convenient as sending out notes through email may be, important communication must also go home in paper form in the weekly homework folders. This included invitations to classroom events, field trip notifications, notices about school or class policies, and invitations to volunteer. Often this meant that I used the same text, reformatted, for both an email and a letter attached to the homework packet. I also usually printed these out and taped them to the classroom door.

Sign-up opportunities have to be fair. This is especially important because there are usually limitations on how many parents can go on the bus or enter a field trip location for free. I had to think a bit about the best way to give parents equal chances to sign up for those spots. I settled on this routine: I would create a paper sign-up sheet and hang it on the door of the classroom. The sign-up sheet would have spots for parents who needed to ride on the school bus and spots for parents who volunteered to drive and pay for themselves. Then, at the morning circle, I specifically approached families I thought might not see the sign-up sheet on the door (because they didn't pick up their kids in the afternoon) and who I knew didn't use email. If they wanted to go, I signed them up on the sheet myself. Then I sent out an email advising parents that there was a

sign-up sheet on the door. I also told parents that the spots that guaranteed free transport and entrance were reserved for families who needed them.

Teacher to parent communication needs to fit the family. I spent a good deal of time figuring out the best way to communicate with the families in my classroom, both by asking parents what they preferred, and through trial and error. For some families, email really did work best. For others, the best way to get a hold of them was a call home. For still more parents, text messages were the most effective. This can be tricky because not all teachers give out their personal cell phone numbers. Although it worked for me, other teachers might choose to use parent liaisons to text the families more easily reachable in that way. Also, services like Google Voice and some smartphone apps enable teachers to make calls or send group texts without giving out their personal information. By creating a profile in my mind of how to communicate best with each family, I was able to reach out in appropriate ways and ultimately get more families involved.

Determine which families require more concerted effort. Over the course of the year, I identified a couple of families who were trickier to loop into classroom communication in traditional ways, either because of work schedules or because home language literacy levels made reading print notices a challenge. So I tried to catch up with these families frequently in person—snagging them at any opportunity to just check in about how things were going, to personally invite them to important events, and to help, if necessary, with filling out forms and permission slips.

These strategies paid off in visible ways. Some of my native Spanish-speaking parents were the most involved, chaperoning all of the field trips and consistently coming to classroom events like writers' celebrations, birthdays, and family reading parties. This was also the case for my three African American families. In fact, one of those families never missed a classroom event all year, and four generations showed up for our promotion ceremony.

However, when it came to the room parents, the parents who participated in the PTA or SSC, and the parents who came in weekly to volunteer in class, the majority were still from the same affluent group who dominated the school wide parent committees. Although that represented significant missed opportunities, it did fuel some interesting interactions that helped begin to shift the tone of parent dialogue.

Building Awareness

Throughout the year, I tried to be as explicit as possible about the reasons why I communicated with parents the way I did. I talked with my room parents about the importance of bilingual communications and about the necessity of sending paper copies of announcements home in the homework folder. When I wrote emails about the field trip sign-up sheets, I explained that I posted them on the door in order to give access to families who did not use email. As I worked through issues of equitable parent

participation myself, I tried whenever possible to include parents in those conversations, even when I myself was not sure I was doing the right thing.

Near the end of the year, something interesting started happening. The parents in my class who were most explicitly involved in the operations of the school—the ones who were room parents, PTA members, and committee leads—started to bring up issues of equity themselves. One mom who was a fluent Spanish speaker approached me, wondering how she could help get more Spanish-speaking parents in to volunteer in the classroom. One of my room parents asked about how I thought she could best utilize phone trees and texting to reach the parents who were hard to get by email. Several parents who were active in the PTA wanted to talk about recruitment and retention of Latina/o families in the immersion program.

These conversations extended out into interactions with other parents as well. For example, during the last room-parent meeting of the year, one of the room parents from the other immersion classroom suggested that we coordinate the potluck on the last day of school through a Google Doc sign-up sheet. One of my room parents replied: “I don’t know about your class, but in our class we have a lot of families who don’t use email. Let’s print out a sign-up sheet to hang up on the doors as well, and also send something home in the folders. We want to make sure everyone can participate. I can volunteer to do the translation into Spanish, as long as someone will look it over.” I was so happy that the same parent who hadn’t thought twice about communicating entirely through English emails at the beginning of the year was now advocating for the diverse communication needs of the families in our class.

I came to realize that many of these parents had come to our school because they wanted a diverse environment for their children, but they didn’t necessarily know how to navigate within that environment themselves. The insensitivity to issues of equity wasn’t necessarily intentional. Sometimes it didn’t occur to the parents involved that their way of doing something might be alienating to other families. The conversations that we had in my classroom were a step, albeit a small one, toward opening up wider dialogues about these issues at the school level.

Missed Opportunities

Looking back on the year, I wanted to celebrate the victories without losing sight of the things that I would choose to do differently in the future. For instance, I had learned from other teachers that in many dual-immersion schools all classrooms must have a room parent who is a native Spanish speaker to partner with an English-speaking room parent. This simple expectation would have made an enormous difference in my classroom. It would have facilitated translation and made the classroom parent community feel more inclusive to a wider range of families. It also would have made it easier to do volunteer outreach to Spanish-speaking families and bring in more Spanish-speaking classroom volunteers to work directly with the kids. Especially in a bilingual program, there is so much need for students to have Spanish-speaking role models, and it is even better if they are from the parent community. It’s also important

for these parents and their children to understand what an asset their language skills are in our classroom.

But, most importantly, I was acutely aware that the majority of those vital conversations I had with parents about equity happened with my room parents and a few other regular classroom volunteers, most of whom were from white middle-class families. Here I realized I was swayed by my own issues. As a white teacher, I felt more comfortable bringing up equity issues with the more privileged parents, particularly white parents, and those parents felt more comfortable bringing them up with me. If real changes were going to take place, however, everyone would need to be involved in the conversation.

New Beginnings

Armed with the knowledge of what had gone well and what had gone wrong during that first school year, I entered the current school year with a different set of priorities. My first priority was to find room parents who were native Spanish speakers. My second priority was to begin to have the conversations that I had avoided the previous year.

Instead of waiting for parents to volunteer for the room parent slots, I approached a couple of Spanish-speaking parents individually before Back to School Night and asked if they would be room parents. One accepted; the other politely declined and offered to volunteer in another way. At Back to School Night, I asked for volunteers and got one native Spanish speaker and one English-speaking parent. Thus, I had my team of three: one mother from Argentina and one from Mexico, both bilingual native Spanish speakers, and one white parent who spoke some Spanish.

That night I also sent around a list asking parents to specify how they wanted to be contacted—phone, text, or email. Then, my room parents and I set up contact lists and divided them up. One room mother would send bilingual emails, one would text, and the third would call the families who requested to be contacted by phone, all of whom happened to be Spanish speaking.

Mercedes, my room parent from Mexico, has been an extraordinary resource. Because she is willing to call the Spanish-speaking families to ask for volunteers, I've ended up with many Spanish-speaking volunteers doing classroom work—three who read with children during reading workshop and two who help out during art class. Thus, my students have Spanish language models from their community during the school day, and the Latina/o parents in my classroom are getting to know my room parents and each other through phone calls and working alongside each other in the classroom.

This system—that of divvying up the task of contacting families among my room parents—has led not only to increased involvement but also to a model of family engagement that is more sustainable for me as a teacher. When I need to get a piece of information to parents, whether it's an invitation to a class party, a call for volunteers, or a reminder about parent conferences, I simply contact my room parents and they reach out to the others through phone calls, emails, and texts. As teachers, we have enough

on our plates already, and finding a system of parent involvement that is both equitable and sustainable is a real boon. Partnering with bilingual room parents is even more crucial for teachers who are not bilingual themselves but work in communities where many families speak other languages.

Beginning with my own room parents, I started to have explicit conversations with parents of color about equity and involvement at our school. One of my Spanish-speaking room parents suggested creating a network of PTA/ELAC parent volunteers who could call Spanish-speaking families to invite them personally to the meetings. With the help of other bilingual parents, we were able to coordinate this before the first PTA and ELAC meetings of the year for about half of the classes in the school. There is talk about expanding this in the future to include all classes and also to reach out to African American families in a similar way. I also recently began attending a series of morning meetings with parents about increasing family involvement, hosted by my principal. That has given me the chance to talk to Latina/o and African American parents about how both the teachers and the parent community could be more welcoming; they have shared ideas that range from making sure that the Wednesday folders go home consistently, alternating PTA meeting times between morning and afternoon, advertising translation at meetings, and reminding teachers how important it is to smile and say hello to parents when they see them in the mornings.

Ripples of Change

Although we have a long way to go, these conversations with parents across our school community seem to be bearing some fruit. At the end of the first year, a parent from my classroom volunteered to head a committee focused on recruiting and maintaining Latina/o families at our school. Another made a presentation in Spanish at our new kindergarten family orientation appealing to Spanish-speaking families to volunteer in classrooms and join the PTA. I committed to presenting at a staff meeting to share with other teachers the strategies I had used for parent communication and engagement. This year, parents are talking about holding some PTA meetings in Spanish with English translation, and about changing the structure of the PTA meetings to allow for small group break-out sessions to foster more participation. Also, as I have become more involved with the SSC, I have been able to connect and brainstorm with parents of older students who have been thinking and talking about these issues for a while.

There is still a lot to be done, both in my classroom and at the school level, to rectify the exclusive patterns of parent participation I observed at the beginning of last year. As long as the PTA focuses exclusively on fundraising and pressures parents to make large personal donations, many families will continue to feel alienated and decide not to participate. As long as the SSC has no African American members and includes mostly parents from the school's immersion track, many of the students at our school will have no one to advocate for their needs. And, although it is important to reach out to Spanish-speaking Latina/o families, it is essential that we also focus time and attention on including and empowering African American families and other families of color.

It’s not easy, but I think that substantive change is possible if we begin to talk about these issues instead of leaving them unexplored. At the beginning of the year, a friend of mine who is also a public school parent reminded me that, especially in elementary school, teachers train parents what to expect when it comes to how they should and should not be involved in their children’s schools. Those lessons shape how parents interact with future teachers and future school communities. This serves as a constant reminder to me that we are always communicating, through the phrasing of every note home, through the positioning of every sign-up sheet. We are communicating about who we expect to be involved and how. We are either opening up dialogues with parents or closing them off. And all of those decisions, both the small ones and the large ones, reach beyond our classrooms. If we want equitable schools, we need to be as intentional about how we involve parents as we are about how we educate their children.

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Characteristics of a Culturally Responsive Teacher

SOCIOCULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS so that the teacher understands that one's way of thinking, behaving and being is influenced by race, ethnicity, social class and language: teachers must critically examine their own sociocultural identities and the inequalities between schools and society that support institutionalized discrimination to maintain a privileged society based on social class and skin color.

AFFIRMING ATTITUDE TOWARDS STUDENTS FROM CULTURALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS that affirms and respects all cultures and includes education related to the culture of the students.

COMMITMENT AND THE SKILLS TO ACT as agents of change; confront barriers/obstacles to change and develop skills for collaboration and dealing with chaos; assist schools in becoming more equitable over time.

CONSTRUCTIVIST VIEW of learning; belief that all students are capable of learning; provide scaffolds between what students already know through their own experiences and what they need to learn; promotes critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration and the recognition of multiple perspectives.

LEARNING ABOUT STUDENTS to understand their past experiences, home and community culture and world both in and outside of school.

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The Culturally Responsive Classroom is . . .

From Professor Geneva Gay	From Teaching Tolerance
Validating --acknowledges the legitimacy of cultural heritages as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes and approaches to learning as well as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum	Respect for the legitimacy of different cultures
Comprehensive --develops intellectual, social, emotional and political learning by using cultural referents to impart knowledge	Empowering students to value all cultures, not just their own
Multidimensional --involves many things such as curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional strategies/techniques and performance assessments	Incorporating cultural information into the curriculum, instead of simply adding it on; addressing the spectrum of learning styles
Empowering --enables students to be better human beings and more successful learners	Relating new information to students' life experiences
Transformative --helps students to develop the knowledge, skills and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions into effective personal social, political and economic action	Teaching to the whole child and treating the classroom like a community

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The Culturally Responsive Classroom Transforms the Curriculum!

Level	Focus	Curriculum	Instructional Strategies
Exclusive	*--lowest level* *--diversity restricted to one part of the course* *--gender and diverse groups discussed in relation to stereotypes* *--activities limited to the four Fs: food, folklore, fun, and fashion*	*--materials focus on authors who perpetuate and confirm the myths*	*--lecture* *--question and answer* *--teacher-oriented* *--assignments focus on content; avoids social dynamics*
Inclusive	*--adds diversity content but retains the traditional, original structure* *--diversity discussed through-out the course*	*--materials include authors with varying, significant, diverse viewpoints* *--social view are discussed but not elaborated upon*	*--wide array of assessment methods* *--teacher-centered, but variety of methods to relate new knowledge* *--students are encouraged to construct their own knowledge and use critical thinking skills in conjunction with peer learning*
Transformative	*--challenges traditional views and encourages reconceptualization and new ways of thinking*	*--presents content from diverse perspectives* *--project-based; open-ended* *--content-related vignettes that require application and examination of values*	*--student-centered* *--students self-evaluate through projects and assignments that contribute to real-life changes* *--students learn from each other*

Six Instructional Strategies Used in a Culturally Responsive Classroom

1. Explicit, strategic instruction that shows students what to do, why, how and when; think-aloud method that takes advantage of modeling.

2. Interdisciplinary units include and connect content area learning and language arts and culturally diverse literature.

3. Journal writing provides opportunities for students to share their personal understanding.

4. Open-ended projects allow students to contribute at their level of ability.

5. Classroom atmosphere that respects their individuality and culture.

6. Use of ongoing and culturally-aware assessments.

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About Tim Wise

Tim Wise, whom scholar and philosopher Cornel West calls, "A vanilla brother in the tradition of (abolitionist) John Brown," is among the nation's most prominent antiracist essayists and educators. He has spent the past 20 years speaking to audiences in all 50 states, on over 1000 college and high school campuses, at hundreds of professional and academic conferences, and to community groups across the nation. He has also lectured internationally, in Canada and Bermuda, and has trained corporate, government, law enforcement and medical industry professionals on methods for dismantling racism in their institutions.

Wise began his career as a Youth Coordinator and Associate Director of the Louisiana Coalition Against Racism and Nazism: the largest of the many groups organized in the early '90s to defeat the political candidacies of white supremacist, David Duke. From there, he became a community organizer in New Orleans' public housing, and a policy analyst for a children's advocacy group focused on combatting poverty and economic inequity. He has served as an adjunct professor at the Smith College School of Social Work, in Northampton, MA., and from 1999-2003 was an advisor to the Fisk University Race Relations Institute in Nashville, TN.

Wise is the author of six books, including his highly-acclaimed memoir, *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, as well as *Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority*, and *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity*. His next book, *Culture of Cruelty: How America's Elite Demonize the Poor, Valorize the Rich and Jeopardize the Future*, will be released in early 2015. He has contributed chapters or essays to over 25 additional books and his writings are taught in colleges and universities across the nation.

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Wise has been featured in several documentaries, including "White Like Me: Race, Racism and White Privilege in America" (from the Media Education Foundation), which has been called "A phenomenal educational tool in the struggle against racism," and "One of the best films made on the unfinished quest for racial justice," by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva of Duke University, and Robert Jensen of the University of Texas, respectively. He also appeared alongside legendary scholar and activist, Angela Davis, in the 2011 documentary, "Vocabulary of Change." In this public dialogue between the two activists, Davis and Wise discussed the connections between issues of race, class, gender, sexuality and militarism, as well as inter-generational movement building and the prospects for social change.

Wise appears regularly on CNN and MSNBC to discuss race issues and was featured in a 2007 segment on 20/20. He graduated from Tulane University in 1990 and received antiracism training from the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, in New Orleans. He and his wife Kristy are the proud parents of two daughters.

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Reading List from Tim Wise

General Race, Racism and Privilege

Ani, Marimba. Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior.

Baldwin, James. The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States.

Churchill, Ward. A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present.

Cohen, Mark Nathan. Culture of Intolerance.

Degruy-Leary, Joy. Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.

Doane, Ashley W. and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, eds. White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism.

Dyson, Michael Eric. Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster.

Emerson, Michael and Christian Smith. Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America.

Feagin, Joe and Hernan Vera. White Racism.
— and Karyn D. McKinney. The Many Costs of Racism.

hooks, bell. Killing Rage, Ending Racism.

Jensen, Derrick. The Culture of Make Believe.

Jhally, Sut and Justin Lewis. Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences and the Myth of the American Dream.

Johnson, Allan. Privilege, Power and Difference.

Kendall, Francie. Understanding White Privilege.

Kivel, Paul. Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Equity.

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Kozol, Jonathan. Amazing Grace.

Lewis, Michael. The Culture of Inequality.

Lipsitz, George. The Possessive Investment in Whiteness.

Massey, Douglas and Nancy Denton. American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass.

Perea, Juan, ed. Immigrants Out! The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States.

Robinson, Randall. Quitting America: The Departure of a Black Man from His Native Land.

Singley, Bernestine. When Race Becomes Real: Black and White Writers Confront Their Personal Histories.

Steinberg, Stephen. The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?

Thandeka. Learning to Be White: Money, Race and God in America.

Trenka, Jane Jeong, et al. Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption.

Winbush, Raymond, ed. Should America Pay? Slavery and the Raging Debate On Reparations.

Wise, Tim. Speaking Treason Fluently: Anti-Racist Reflections from an Angry White Male.

History of Race, Racism and Whiteness

Allen, Theodore. The Invention of the White Race, Volume I and Volume 2.

Blackmon, Douglas. Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War Two.

Brodkin, Karen. How Jews Became White Folks.

Brundage, W. Fitzhugh. The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory.

Dray, Philip. At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America.

Drinnon, Richard. Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building.

Guglielmo, Jennifer and Salvatore Salerno, eds. Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America.

Horsman, Reginald. Race and Manifest Destiny.

Ignatiev, Noel. How the Irish Became White.

Jordan, Winthrop. The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States.

Loewen, James. Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong.
— Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism.

Rodney, Walter. How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.

Roediger, David. The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class.

Rubio, Philip. A History of Affirmative Action: 1619-2000.

Takaki, Ron. A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America.

Taylor, Gary. Buying Whiteness: Race, Class and Identity from Columbus to Hip-Hop.

Washington, Harriet. Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present.

White Anti-Racism

Aptheker, Herbert. Anti-Racism in U.S. History: The First Two Hundred Years.

Brown, Cynthia Stokes. Refusing Racism: White Allies and the Struggle for Civil Rights.

Braden, Anne. The Wall Between.

Curry, Constance, et al. Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement.

DeCaro, Louis, Jr. John Brown: The Cost of Freedom.

Fosl, Catherine. Subversive Southerner: Anne Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South.

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Schultz, Debra. Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement.

Segrest, Mab. Memoir of a Race Traitor.

Smith, Lillian. Killers of the Dream.

Stanton, Mary. Freedom Walk: Mississippi or Bust.
—From Selma to Sorrow: The Life and Death of Viola Liuzzo.

Stringfellow, William. My People is the Enemy.

Thompson, Cooper, Emmett Schaeffer, and Harry Brod. White Men Challenging Racism: 35 Personal Stories.

Thompson, Becky. A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism.

Wise, Tim. White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son.

Responding to the Right

Armour, Jody David. Negrophobia and Reasonable Racism: The Hidden Cost of Being Black in America

Brown, Michael K. et al. Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society.

Fischer, Claude, et al. Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth.

Graves, Joseph. The Race Myth: Why we Pretend Race Exists in America.

Race and Education

Anyon, Jean. Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education and a New Social Movement.

Blau, Judith. Race in the Schools: Perpetuating White Dominance?

Calderon, JLove and Marcella Runell Hall. Love, Race and Liberation: Till the White Day is Done

Derman-Sparks, Louise and Carol Brunson Phillips. Teaching/Learning Anti-Racism: A Developmental Approach.

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Feagin, Joe, Hernan Vera and Nikitah Imani. The Agony of Education: Black Students in White Colleges and Universities.

Freire, Paulo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

Gutstein, Eric and Bob Peterson. Rethinking Mathematics: Teaching Social Justice by the Numbers.

Hilliard, III, Asa, ed. Testing African American Students.

Kailin, Julie. Antiracist Education: From Theory to Practice.

Perry, Theresa, Claude Steele and Asa Hilliard III. Young Gifted and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African American Students.

Pollock, Mica. Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School.

Steele, Claude. Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do.

Van Ausdale, Debra and Joe Feagin. The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism.

Wise, Tim. Affirmative Action: Racial Preference in Black and White

Race and Economics

Conley, Dalton. Being Black, Living in the Red: Race, Wealth and Social Policy in America

Gilens, Martin. Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy.

Marable, Manning. How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America.

McDermott, Monica. Working-Class White: The Making and Unmaking of Race Relations.

Mills, Charles. From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism.

Oliver, Melvin and Thomas Shapiro. Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality.

Ryan, William. Equality.

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Race and Criminal Justice

Cole, David. No Equal Justice: Race and Class in the American Justice System.

Harris, David A. Profiles in Injustice: Why Racial Profiling Cannot Work.

Mann, Coramae Richey. Unequal Justice: A Question of Color.

Miller, Jerome. Search and Destroy: African American Males in the Criminal Justice System.

Reiman, Jeffrey. The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison: Ideology, Class and Criminal Justice.

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An Updated Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books

Posted by ***Anti-Bias_Education*** on ***Thu, 01/10/2013 - 5:17pm***

by Louise Derman-Sparks

In 1980, the Council on Interracial Books for Children published the book* Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks. *"Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Racism and Sexism," a shorter version of the book in pamphlet form followed. One of the first guides written for teachers and families, it became an invaluable tool for hundreds of thousands of people. Both the book and pamphlet have been out of print for several years. Rethinking Schools published their adaptation of the original Guidelines in 1994. Here is another adapted version of the original pamphlet.

Children's books continue to be an invaluable source of information and values. They reflect the attitudes in our society about diversity, power relationships among different groups of people, and various social identities (e.g., racial, ethnic, gender, economic class, sexual orientation, and disability). The visual and verbal messages young children absorb from books (and other media) heavily influence their ideas about themselves and others. Depending on the quality of the book, they can reinforce (or undermine) children's affirmative self-concept, teach accurate (or misleading) information about people of various identities, and foster positive (or negative) attitudes about diversity. Children's books teach children about who is important, who matters, who is even visible. Consequently, carefully choosing quality children's books is an indispensable educational and child-rearing task.

It is important to offer young children a range of books about people like them and their family—as well as about people who are different from them and their family. All of the books should be accurate and appealing to young children. Fortunately, there are some good anti-bias children's books, which

are available as a result of the ongoing activism of many individuals and groups over many years. However, while choices have improved over past decades, the lack of quality multicultural kid's books currently being published has frustrated many communities. The number of children of color in the United States continues to rise, but the number of books published by or about people of color stays the same or even decreases.

Check the Illustrations

Look for Stereotypes: A stereotype is an oversimplified generalization about a particular identity group (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, ability/disability), which usually carries derogatory, inaccurate messages and applies them to ALL people in the group. Stereotypes dehumanize people. So, too, does misinformation. ***(See Box 1 for a list of common, harmful stereotypes).***

Unfortunately, all of us absorb socially prevailing stereotypes about a range of people, even if we do not consciously subscribe to them. To alert you to stereotypes in children's books, as well as other media, it is useful to list all the stereotypes you know about various groups of people as precondition for critically reviewing children's books. The books you choose should depict people compassionately and as real human beings. Also consider if images depict all people as genuine individuals with distinctive (rather than stereotypical) features. Books containing stereotypes require you to engage children in critical thinking, but should probably be eliminated from your collection.

Look for Tokenism: This is the "one only" message. Regularly seeing only "one" person of any group in a book teaches young children about who is more or less important. Examples of tokenism include books with only one African American child among many white children or having only one book about children with disabilities among many other books. Tokenism also becomes stereotypical. It only allows children to see one view of a group of people, rather than the diversity that exists among all groups.

Look for Invisibility: What children do not see in their books also teaches them about who matters and who doesn't in our society. Invisibility in their storybooks—as well as in textbooks as they get older—undermines children's affirmative sense of themselves and reinforces prejudiced ideas about people who are not seen ***(See Box 2 for examples of groups who tend to be invisible)***. The booklists on this website include a great variety of books with groups who are often excluded. (The titles are vetted by Teaching for

Change's Busboys and Poets Bookstore and can be ordered right from the list).

BOX 1: Common Harmful/Undermining Stereotypes

Strong, independent girls and women are "manlike"
Book-loving or nonathletic boys and men are "effeminate"
Latino men talk funny, are lazy, gang members, or wear oversize sombreros,
Latina women are earth mothers or subservient
African American men are gang members, oversexed, or underemployed
African American women are too independent, oversexed, or "welfare moms"
Arab and/or Muslim men are terrorists
Arab and/or Muslim women are voiceless and passive
All Muslims are Arab
American Indians live in teepees, carry bows and arrows, or are half-naked in winter
People with disabilities are not independent or are to be pitied
LGBTQ people are invisible or sexual predators
Poor people are invisible or depicted as passively needing help from others

BOX 2: Examples of Groups of People Who Are Often Invisible in Children's Books or Mainstream Media

Families who live in rural areas
Blue-collar workers
Musicians, artists, and writers
Families with two dads or two moms
Single mothers or fathers
Homeless families
Families with an incarcerated parent
People of Arab descent and/or families who practice Islam
Transgender adults and children

Check the Story Line and the Relationships Between People

Even if a book shows visual diversity, the story line may carry biases related to how it handles power relationships among people of various identities. Are whites or male characters the central figures with people of color or female characters in essentially supporting roles? To gain acceptance and/or approval does a child of color, a girl, or child with a disability have to exhibit extraordinary qualities or be the one to understand, forgive, or change? Are the achievements of girls and women based on their own initiative and intelligence, or are they due to their looks or relationship with boys/men?

Are people of color, women, low-income families, or people with disabilities depicted as needing help or in passive roles, while whites, men, and "able-bodied" people are in leadership and action roles? How are problems presented, conceived, and resolved? Who typically causes a problem and who resolves it? Your book collection needs a balance of different people in "doer" roles.

Look at Messages About Different Lifestyles

Do the lives of people of color or people living in poverty in the story contrast unfavorably with the norm of white, middle-class suburban life? Are negative value judgments implied about ways of life that differ from the dominant culture or economic class (e.g., people are to be pitied, or the story is about one person who "gets out" of the less desirable way of life)? Do images and information go beyond oversimplification and offer genuine insights into the lifestyle of the characters in the story? Does the setting reflect current life—or past assumptions about life? Does your book collection depict diversity among people within a specific racial/ethnic group, such as a range of family structures, living environments, socioeconomic conditions and types of work, and male/female roles within the family? (Remember that every racial/ethnic group has diversity, including people who self-identify as white).

Consider the Effects on Children's Self and Social Identities.

In addition to specific books, also examine your book collection. Do your books reinforce or counteract messages that teach children to feel inferior or superior because of their skin color, gender, family income, able-bodiedness, or type of family structure? At school, will all of the children you serve see themselves and their family's way of life reflected in your book collection? Will all children of color, including those with mixed heritage, girls, and children from the many types of family structures, children living in poverty, and children with disabilities see one or more characters with whom they can

readily and positively identify? If they are visible in your book collection, are the illustrations and information accurate and respectful? Does your overall collection balance the backgrounds of all the children in your program? Does it also show diversity within the social indentity groups to which the children belong (e.g., a range of ways to be female and male, families reflecting different kinds of jobs within a racial/ethnic group). Does your book collection also include a balance between diversity within your classroom and beyond your classroom?

At home, does your book collection reflect diversity among the groups to which your family belongs? Does it have stories about people like you who have contributed to creating a more just world? Does it also include a range of books showing diversity beyond your family and neighborhood?

Look for Books About Children and Adults Engaging in Actions for Change

To fully develop a strong sense of self and a disposition toward cooperation and fairness, children need to know how to stand up for themselves and others when faced with unfairness. They also need to know about people from all social identity groups who have—and are currently—working for justice for all. In addition to previous criteria, here are more items to consider: The story line should be about children and adults working together, rather than perpetrating the myth that change happens because of special, individual people who do it by themselves. Does your book collection include a balance of people who have made important and honored contributions to American life as well as the world community—and not just the traditional white, male "heroes?" Do some of your books about important people include struggles for justice? Do they show people who were/are poor or from racial/ethnic groups of color? Are people with disabilities engaged in these struggles for justice?

Consider the Author's or Illustrator's Background & Perspective

All authors write from a cultural as well as from a personal context. In the past, most children's books were by authors and illustrators who were white and members of the middle class. As a result, a single cultural and class perspective dominated children's literature. There are now excellent books by people of color from a range of backgrounds—although not nearly enough. Consider the biographical material on the jacket flap or back of the book. What qualifies the author or illustrator to deal with the subject? If the book is not about people or events similar to the author or illustrator's background, what specifically recommends them as creators of the book?

What is the author's attitude toward her/his story characters? Are the images accurate and do the illustrators respectfully render the people in the story? Do you have books reflecting a balanced range of author and illustrator identities and experiences?

NOTE: Teaching for Change is interested in hearing from organizations, authors, and individuals who are organizing or campaigning for more children's books by authors of color. If you are interested in possible future collaborations, please email.

Watch for Loaded Words

A word is loaded when it in any way demeans or makes people invisible because of any of their identities. One example is the generic use of the word "man" to stand for women as well as men (although the opposite never occurs). This traditional terminology is now questioned by many because of its sexist implications. Here are some examples of ways to avoid sexist language: community instead of brotherhood; firefighters inserted of firemen; human family instead of family of man; ancestors instead of forefathers; chairperson instead of chairman. Examples of adjectives applied to people of color that carry racist messages include: "savage," "primitive," "superstitious," "backward," "inscrutable" and "treacherous." Always consider the context in which a word is used and to whom it applies.

Look at the Copyright Date

Copyright dates indicate the publication year, not the time of its writing, which might be two to three years before the copyright date. Although a recent copyright date is no guarantee of a book's relevance or sensitivity, copyright dates are useful information. More children's books began to reflect the reality of a pluralistic society and nonsexist and non-ableist perspectives in the 1970s. Since then, the range of accurate, respectful, and caring books reflecting diversity has increased significantly (unfortunately the diversity of books published in the United States still does not accurately reflect the actual diversity of the people living here). When considering new books for your collection, begin with most recently published ones and then continue with descending copyright dates.

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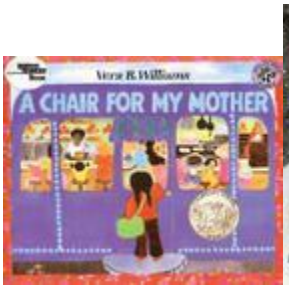
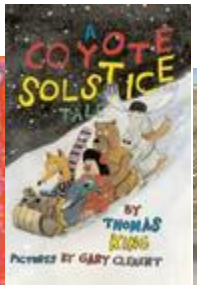
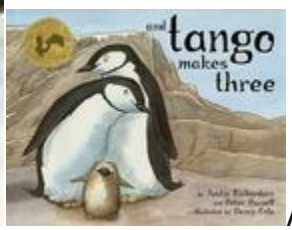
Assess the Appeal of the Story and Illustrations to Young Children







Although these guidelines focus on the messages about diversity and equality reflected in children's books, it is also important to take quality into account. Be sure the book is a "good read." If children find the story or illustrations boring, a book will not hold their attention, even if the book adds a specific kind of diversity you need. Check for active, interesting story lines where different kinds of people are integral to the people in the story, not the main topic. For example, in *A Chair for My Mother*, a young child tries to save money to get a comfortable chair for her waitress mother. Although the book shows a single parent, working-class family, and a resourceful girl, it is not didactic. Also look for illustrations that are colorful and recognizable to young children. Although they enjoy a range of styles, illustrations that are too subdued or abstract may not hold their attention.

Check for age appropriateness. Most booksellers list any picture book as appropriate for early childhood even if the story line is really for primary grade children. Sometimes a book for older children will work if you simplify the story or "tell" the story rather than read it. In some cases, this is the only way to get books that present specific groups of children (e.g., stories with Cambodian children or children with learning disabilities). Some additional issues to consider:

- Many children's books use animal characters instead of people and there are some excellent books that explore diversity with animal characters (e.g., *And Tango Makes Three* or *A Coyote Solstice Tale*). Children enjoy these. However, such books are not a substitute for exploring issues of diversity and anti-bias fairness with people as the main characters.

- Some early childhood teachers wonder if it is necessary for every book in their collection to show diversity. Every book needs to be accurate, caring, and respectful. However, you will want individual books about specific kinds of people (e.g., a biracial family or a family with adopted children). Diversity becomes essential in the balance of your book collection, where you want to avoid invisibility or tokenism of any group.

REDLEAF PRESS EDUCATION

- Folk and fairy tales have long been a mainstay of children's literature. In the cultures from which they come, folk and fairy tales were used to teach important lessons and values related to their culture of origin. Children love them in their original versions—not their commercially sanitized adaptations. However, folk and fairy tales also carry messages that convey sexism, classism, and racism and must be used thoughtfully as part of introducing young children to diversity and anti-bias values of quality and fairness.

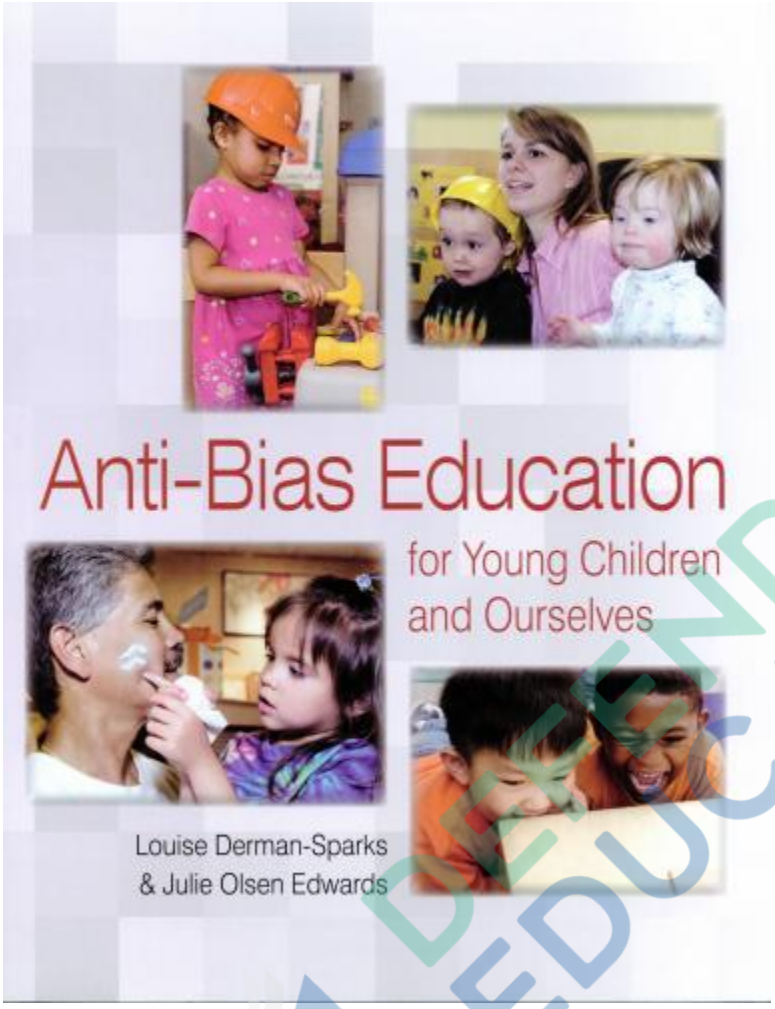
- Overuse of folk tales to "teach" about a specific ethnic/cultural group leads to misinformation and confusion. They are about animals and occasionally people from a mythical past and are designed to teach core values and beliefs in their culture of origin. They are not about how people actually live in contemporary society—and that is what young children need to understand. Information and images about how people really live now is what enables young children to build connections to people who are from different cultures while countering stereotypes that children have already absorbed (e.g., how American Indians really live).

- Finally there is the somewhat sensitive issue of what to do about "classic" or "well-beloved" children's books. Many of these are wonderful as children's literature, but unfortunately they often convey values of sexism, racism, ableism, or even colonialism. People who love the books that pose this dilemma argue that it is OK to use them because they "reflect their times," which they imply somehow excuses their biased messages. For example, I adored the Babar series of books as a young child and was unpleasantly shocked to realize as an adult how much the images and story lines reflected messages of European colonialism in Africa. I chose not to use them with my own children, wanting them to learn accurate information about how people in Africa really live. Not sharing childhood favorites may sadden some, but it is far better than the harm caused by reinforcing messages of racism and colonialism.

In a nutshell—as you choose books or critically examine your current book selection, always keep in mind the power of books—their words and their images—to nurture or, conversely, to undermine a child's sense of self, positive attitude toward others, and motivation to act for fairness.

Additional Resources

- Creating an Anti-Bias Library
- *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards
- Booklists from Teaching for Change
- *From Cover to Cover: Evaluating and Reviewing Children's Books* by Kathleen Horning
- *Brown Gold: Milestones of African-American Children's Picture Books, 1845-2002* by Michelle Martin



Louise Derman-Sparks is an internationally respected anti-bias educator and author (along with Julie Olsen Edwards) of *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*. She has co-authored additional books with Dr. Carol Brunson Day and Dr. Patricia Ramsey. Derman-Sparks and Olsen Edwards (along with Ramsey) have also co-authored *What If All the Kids Are White?* She speaks throughout the United States and abroad. Louise has a lifelong commitment to building a more just society for all people. Her children Douglass and Holly, now grown, were her inspiration. A Pacific Oaks College faculty member for 33 years—when its mission and pedagogy reflected anti-bias education principles—Louise is retired. She served on the NAEYC Governing Board from 1998 to 2001.

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Journal Notes

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Split Identity
You and your race are sitting at a table, who gets noticed first?

To See or Not to See

If we stopped seeing race, would racism go away?

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The Elephant in the Room

If race affects everyone, why is it so hard to talk about?

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How to be an American

What does it take to blend into society? Do the same rules apply to everyone?

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Got Privilege?

The Promise: A Lesson in White Privilege

Reflection:

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We wish you the best on your journey.....