

No Child Left In The Neighborhood

Before all of this nonstop testing.

Way back in old-school-traditional, neighborhood-protective days; way back in days prior to all of the inflexibly instigated “compassion” of a governmentally legislated testing reform – my instructional craft and my deep love of teaching had expanded rapidly.

I had experienced, in my earliest days of an educator employment, a demanding but rewardingly collaborative work with a broad array of knowledgeable peers. And I had discovered, along the way, that educators willing to initiate actual, true-to-life teaching ideas; teachers willing to go out on a limb and experiment, believing that they could make an honestly effective difference? Could find support. Counting upon the safeguards extended through a professional collaboration and an optimistic leadership, I had ascertained that it was not only imperative, but safe, to reach out to my students. Safe to step out into the unknown, and take interpersonal academic risks.

But, then?

Well, hoo boy.

Wham, bam, *shazam!*

High drama presented itself, suddenly, loudly and unexpectedly, arriving in the form of a Presidentially-initiated educational legislation centered upon a no-excuses answerability. Abruptly, and without building discussion or teacher input, educators employed inside the public arena were summarily introduced to a punitive package wrapped around a retaliatory, test-happy program – a program very decisively entitled NCLB:

No Child Left Behind.

Years later, after the test-fanatic platform of NCLB had had its way with public education for more than a decade – well, there were more than a few voices contending that facets of this test answerability program had strategically shut down and destabilized schools inside poorest and most often culturally-different neighborhoods.

There were those who took pains to point out that this national call for a no-excuses educational reform had conveniently paved the way for the massive re-gentrification and multi-million-dollar land speculation which had then forced out long-embedded low-income, culturally-protective communities.

There were those who protested; there were those who agonized; there were those who worried: that the struggling and often culturally different citizens now unable to afford the newly expensive re-gentrified lifestyles? Had been given no choice but to pack up and vacate previously culturally diverse neighborhoods.

There were those who thought it important to mention (and, well, wasn't this perhaps just a touch ironic) that, paradoxically, as over the years so many of these low-income neighborhoods had been methodically and heartlessly routed, the original understanding of NCLB had been premised upon the idea that, well, gee – in the end?

No low-income, culturally-different child *should*, actually...

Ever be left behind.

Okay, okay.

So, yes, perhaps a small part of the initial equation had somehow been ignored in all of the exciting national fervor for a test-based reform. But now, really, wasn't it such a very small, and surely unimportant, part? Apparently, shoot, it was a part no longer even considered to be all

that relevant. Because; although the original intentions behind the structures of NCLB had recommended that no child should, ever, be left behind – *in poverty*.

Well. I mean, really; you could *see*, right?

That despite earliest-projected, advertised-as-compassionate governmental intentions, rather than genuinely attacking the social, racial and political underpinnings of *poverty*, the consequently created testing configurations of a no-excuses accountability had, well, gosh darn it, so swiftly and compliantly, and with such a slick agility, converted themselves into a conservative capitalist's dream. A dream that a few unusually prescient critics now referred to not as NCLB, but, more particularly, as NCLUT. Evidently, as public school teachers had been quick to discover with the assertive implementation of an immovable NCLB, our nation had entered into a truly modern, statistically dependent world where – in a deepest countrywide empathy?

No child *would*, ever again, be left:

Un-tested.

Proposing a logical delineation for the basic, and, as she understood it, transparently simple purposes of NCLUT, a teaching peer outlined her straightforward equation.

“First,” she detailed, “manufacture an always increasing supply of privileged-class-created, dominant-culture-biased tests.*†

“Then,” she continued, “endlessly and repeatedly administer these tests. *Prove*, through the results garnered from your incessant testing, that the non-standardized, non-assimilated poor and minority children who perform unacceptably on your tests live in an untenable vacuum of deficit. In the name of a benevolent reform, blame their teachers, close their schools, and kick them decisively out of the neighborhood.

“Build a massive Home Depot; sell those cute little just-emptied bungalows to privileged-class, dominant-culture yuppies for a *phenomenal* profit.

“Really,” she concluded, “it’s all so *simple*.”

*The practice of winnowing out those who are unwanted through an affluent-culture-biased testing – that type of testing able to promote and include only those citizens willing to idealize the history and culture of those traditionally in power – has been criticized as being not only a racist, but sexist and elitist “meritocracy.” (And, by savvy critics of test-fanatic days, as our nation’s latest class-dividing devotion to a “testocracy.”)

†While the heavily publicized fact that recent SAT/ACT scores are at a historical “low” has led to an additional public school bashing – reformers expediently ignore the fact that as, over the past decade, an ever increasing number of low-income, culturally-diverse students have been pushed into taking these tests (tests now paid for by more than a few states and mandated for a no-excuses administration on-site to *all* age-appropriate students during the school year at lowest-income schools), these famously expensive and traditionally self-selective, dominant-culture-biased tests are being exposed as being just that: culturally biased.