



# Rouge Forum

## Testing Versus Relationships

By Willam Boyle

There are many reasons to dislike standardized testing. The most common ones have to do with justice (testing and socio-economic issues), and these are powerful, important arguments. However, as a classroom teacher I'm concerned with the ways such tests reflect and condone a way of imagining learners as objects. That is, content is imagined to be static and learners are regarded simply as objects who are to be stuffed with static content. (Think of Friere's "banking" metaphor.) This is a metaphor with some dire consequences.

Think of learning that you have regarded in your own life as authentic. Consider something that you know well, that you know "in your bones", and has become a part of who you are as a human being, not just an object or one who serves a specific role. I would be willing to bet that this was learned in a relationship. All learning that leads to more learning, that is authentic, occurs in relationship. It occurs in relationship to another person and in relationship to the content being learned. Teachers and students are always involved in relationships, and the way we imagine those relationships determines their quality. Those who value testing fail to consider this. That does not mean that teachers who test are exempt from such relationships. No, sorry, but that is impossible. It does mean that these teachers unconsciously allow testing to help shape and limit the relationships that can occur in a classroom and therefore diminish their own effect as teachers.

My job as a teacher is to know as deeply as possible the hopes and dreams of students, because to work in this way is an attempt to tie the content of my classroom into the deepest longings of humanity. I want the things

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## "Activism-Going Beyond the Isolated Cause"

By: Jorge Dante Hernandez Prospero

Activism is said to be the dynamic force of change. The word can be used to describe an individual (activist), as well as a process (activism). Che Guevara said that it is a form of pure and selfless love, as it asks nothing in return.

However, being an activist and activism should mean more than 'promoter and promotions.' It must go beyond today's semblance of 'images and imaging', and it must go beyond entertain the notion of an event but rather an ongoing process.

Although this world has had activists and activism throughout its history, the concept took center stage during the infamous 60's. The art, music, and turbulent events of the times brought the concept to the forefront. It is my contention that it was during the 1960s and through the 1970s that the term, by certain segments of our population, began to become synonymous with anti-establishment, revolution, communism, black insurrection, unionism, hippie culture, drug culture, and anything/ everything else that spoke of difference from the status quo. It is interesting to observe contemporary institutions that proclaim having fought off the influences of such an

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# CONNECTIONS

## Building Bridges for Challenging Oppression & Building Community: *Creating Schools for a Living Democracy*

By Michael Peterson

An amazing event happened in June of 2000. Some 250 people came together who were concerned about making schools better for children, moving beyond tests, exclusion, and narrow, structured views of teaching. Rather, this group was committed to schooling based on the principles of democracy, schools that involve all children in learning together to explore and impact on their universe, schools where teachers model the struggle for community and against segregation and oppression. Schools that are rare.

At the end of it all, however, in reflection some asked, "Were we together? Was there a community of change agents there or separate, parallel issues traveling related but unconnected paths?" This is an important question.

It's clear. The numbers don't lie. Our society is becoming more controlled by fewer people; corporations control much in the national government, communities, states. "What does the business community say?" is a mantra often repeated when schools and other organizations try to figure what to do. In parallel, our society is becoming increasingly segregated, increasingly unequal. The rich truly are getting very much richer, the poor, poorer, and the middle class along losing ground also.

But what *should* our communities and society be? Some of us who would have communities become more caring, more equal, more democratic. We'd like to see communities where people take care of one another, where we use our resources to support our most vulnerable members rather than locking them in institutions or jails. We'd like to see a place for all people to be productive, sharing what they have with the community.

Which direction will be go? Clearly, schools are contested territory in this struggle. Multiple strategies are underway to get us to accept that corporations *should* rule, that if more people are becoming poorer, it is their fault, that we should not question what is but follow the rules. The politics of control and corporate autocracy are pushed via numerous, simultaneous mechanisms to create schools that will produce obedient, non-questioning employees and citizens. These include:

1. Rigid, narrow teaching – phonics only (follow the rules and you can read all you need to know), textbooks, the 'bunch of facts' curriculum (rather than real thinking and questioning).
2. Standardization of the curriculum and assessment — focus on 'knowing the facts', thinking technically but not critically, being able to answer questions, sorting kids, schools, and communities by those who know and those who don't.

3. Segregation – by race, class, culture, language, ability, behavior. We have an amazing array of mechanisms to sort children so we can easily see who is the 'best and brightest' and who is to be avoided. Special education classes and schools, alternative schools, classes for 'gifted' students assure that we don't build a real, diverse community where people support one another and critically question interests that seek to divide people.
4. Autocratic rule. We say we live in a democracy and most schools say their purpose is to create democratic citizens. However, most schools operate with a top-down, autocratic rule that makes a mockery of these claims.

Many, many people are concerned about at least one of these issues. Parents and teachers concerned about the segregation of children with disabilities have been building a movement towards inclusive education. A growing number of courageous teachers and parents are challenging the rampant growth of high stakes standardized testing that links scores on dubious examinations to the future of children, the funding of schools, teacher's salaries, and real estate prices. People of color and other 'minority' groups have long fought for recognition and respect for

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# School Reform and Social Change In Detroit, Building Hope

By Rich Gibson

Detroit is third world. Ever a race-bordered color-coded one-trade town; the auto trade fled, color barriers remained harsh. The city evaporated. Detroit's economic and social collapse goes far beyond anything in a comparable city. More than half the population, over one million people, left town. There is not a single sizeable retail store. Cultural institutions, like libraries, went to rot. Grocery stores are rare. Vacant lots, boarded buildings, bombed streets, electrical outages, winter snow shutdowns, the worst airport, an earned reputation as Murder City, Chop-shop central, typify the material aspects of the collapse. Generations of unemployment on one hand, intensified police surveillance, brutality, and corruption, on the other hand, sum up the human side. The Detroit police are killing citizens at record pace, ahead of every large city. The city is promising to demolish 1200 vacant homes near schools, as a reform measure. At the heart of the

collapse is racism, and all the economic and social penalties that are attached to it-- in the most severe forms. Racism made Detroit the most segregated of cities, and brittle. All that is left of substance is the school system.

Some elites now want to reclaim at least parts of Detroit. They want their parts right now. Eager to make quick fame and fortunes, they pose as school reformers, downtown rehabilitators, riverfront reclaimers. Like their predecessors, they wind up being takers, not contributors.

There is no fast way out for the forty year collapse that now defines Detroit. Spectacles like casinos and sport venues cannot form the basis of city revitalization. The industrial working class and its organizations, which led the nation in civilizing public life in the 20th century by winning the 40 hour week, social security, the right to organize unions and child labor laws, is no longer positioned to make progressive social change. In Detroit, the sole way out is school reform, the crux of winning young working people with kids back to the city. Schools are now the centripetal point of social life in Detroit. School reform, hope, is only possible in tandem with economic and social reform. It takes time, commitment, and sacrifice--and loving solidarity.

If school and economic reform work reciprocally, it is clear nevertheless that in Detroit school reform will have to take the lead. There is no hint of any economic reform that will benefit most city citizens. School reform from the top is barred now by public policies rooted in arrogance, greed, and fear, policies which seek only profit and social control: the failed (and corrupt) summer school repair program and curricula test-mania for example. Since the schools are the lynchpin of any potential recovery, it follows that heavy-handed school policies ruin hope.

Many of the schools are a horror; understaffed, ineptly led, lacking supplies, functioning in poisoned old broken buildings. Most importantly, the schools replicate the segregation that causes their ruin. Kids are triply segregated, by class within race, by ability or disability. Educators meet a population acutely wounded by an unparalleled series of attacks over the last three decades: mass unemployment, ruined housing, hopelessness, contemptuous school leadership, unscrupulous political officials and police enforcement--the latter deadly.

Detroit citizens know they were stripped of their voting rights by the recent school board takeover which replaced a local gang of

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David Adamany, Interim Chief Executive Officer of the non-elected Detroit Public School Board.

# Whether You Will Be the Hero of Your Own Story is Yet to Be Known.

But You Sure Could be the Hero of a Story in the Rouge Forum News, especially if you write it.

You can see previous editions online at [http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge\\_forum/](http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge_forum/)

You can submit material for the Rouge Forum News by emailing Greg Queen at [rumbagarden@ameritech.net](mailto:rumbagarden@ameritech.net)

We are interested in publishing your work!



## School Days

by Sara (18 yrs. old)

Once inebriated on the joys of learning  
The teachings of life and all its meaning,  
I walk with a hangover of experience.  
Distastefully cringing away  
From the endless nattering of  
Chipper and cherry Cheerleaders.  
Crooning about the cutest pair of Calvin Kleins,  
They have ever seen.  
So similar to the last pair, that any untrained eye  
Would miss the difference in rivets,  
The slightly mottled spot near the bell bottom flares...  
Crawling into the crowded and crazed  
Cafeteria,  
Standing in the assembly line,  
Feigning breathlessly,  
Anticipation  
Eagerness to receive  
The ball of greasy Dog food  
Chock full of nutrients and essential vitamins  
To boost the energy, so that I might keep my head up  
As I listen to the eternal droning  
Of yet another never-ending lecture  
From professionals who have lost  
Hope  
That they will influence and affect the lives of the young.  
Instead living to a paycheck and sneaking around

behind the back of the egotistical administration  
Periodically, working up the courage  
To find something  
"FUN"  
That may catch our attention  
So they can subtly mold us into Pillars of the Community  
As I will soon be  
When I have acquired enough  
Meaningful facts and trivial knowledge  
That strive to enrich my life in a Zen way.  
Failing miserably, but ever increasing  
The digits soon to be on my Paycheck  
Stub  
A timely payoff  
For the boredom of my weekdays.  
Boredom that will sap my individuality  
As I fake their perfect  
Student  
So I can fly free of the corrupted institution  
That was started with such  
Honest Hopes and Dreams  
But ended up  
Becoming all about  
The Money, The Power.  
As most things tend to do.

# Dear Secretary Riley, How Did You Learn To Read?

Dear Secretary Riley,

The effects of the National Reading Report are going to be intense and long-lasting. They will affect every teacher's practice in some way. We can no longer close our doors and teach. This report is not going to end the Reading Wars, but cause more controversy. I've never considered myself to be any kind of a radical. I'm just a teacher who cares about children. When a friend suggested Carol Edelsky's book Making Justice Our Project, for summer reading, and said that the intro blamed whole language teachers for its problems, I picked it up and started to read. Altweiger and Saavedra in the intro state, Whole Language Teachers must become part of a larger educational effort to transform education and society in the direction of equity and social justice.... we must begin to see ourselves not just as whole language educators, but as educational activists with clear pedagogical principles. So I asked myself, how can I do that? At one time I naively thought I had the ear of NICHHD higher ups. Actually, I still don't know if I had any effect. I just knew they needed to be listening to teachers, not just physicists, and scientists, and psychologists. Recently I answered my question by enlisting my students and parents in trying to get the ear of Secretary or Education Richard Riley. I just told them about the report and they answered. Here are some of their thoughtful comments to him.

Dear Secretary Riley,  
My name is Donny. My favorite foods

are Pizza and Spaghetti My favorite color is blue. I really like Pokemon. I learned to read from my parents. Their names are Janice and Tony. They taught me how to read, Noise. It is still in Mrs. Creech's class....

Dear Secretary Riley,  
...How I learned to read? My family taught me. My favorite thing is reading.

Dear Secretary Riley,  
I'm in first grade and do second and third grade work. I learned to read when my mom was reading a book to me and I was watching her read.....

Dear Secretary Riley,  
My name is Matt. I am in the third grade and I am going to be 10 on August 18th. I am doing good in my work. I have two cats and one dog. Their names are Mickey, Mel and Sam. The dog is a boy. I also have a brother. His name is Lyle. My parents helped me read and my friend Danny helped me too,.....

Dear Secretary Riley,  
My name is Kelly and I think that phonics is not what helps children read. I think having people read to them helps. I learned to read by having my parents read to me and by reading.... You can't learn to read words like pterodactyl by dumb phonics! That's pretty hard.

Dear Secretary Riley,  
My name is Dana. I am nine and in third grade. I learned to read by starting out with easy books and going to hard books. Phonics is good, but I would rather do it on my own.

Dear Secretary Riley,  
My name is Krissy and I am seven years old. I learned to read by my mom. I don't need phonics because I know how to read. All the people don't need phonics. They read by reading.

Dear Secretary Riley,  
Through the years I learned to read by sounding out letters and breaking them into syllables and looking words up in the dictionary with my mom, dad and teacher. I started out reading The Hungary Caterpillar and now I am reading anything from chapter books to college books. So you see, kids don't just need phonics. There are many different ways to learn how to read.

Dear Secretary Riley,  
My name is Max. My age is 7. I am in first grade in Mrs. Creech's class. My favorite colors are green, blue and red. My mom helped me to read one sentence and then I read the whole book. I enjoy reading and my favorite books are Dr. Seuss.

Dear Secretary Riley,  
Hi! My name is Sarah and I am eight years old. I learned to read by my mom cheering me on. I like to read. I am also good at art.

These letters were sent off to Riley with pictures of the children and letters from the parents. It was an important lesson to these young children, not only in reading, and writing, but also their role in the democratic process. It took some prodding to get Secretary of Education to realize that though.

# We Hate the MEAP

By The Frogs

See the kids walking down the street  
Fall in line just watching all their feet  
They don't know where they wanna go  
But they're walking in time

They got the MEAP  
They got the MEAP  
Yeah  
They got the MEAP

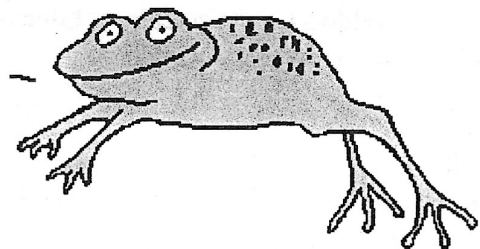
See the kids just walkin' into school  
Teachers can't wait to teach'em to be tools  
Hang around 'til quarter after two  
That's when they jump outta line

Kids hate the MEAP  
They hate the MEAP  
They hate the MEAP  
Yeah  
Kids hate the MEAP

Thinking teachers really help us grow  
No more learning that puts us in a trance  
Changin' the world, we'll take the chance  
That's when we jump outta line

We hate the MEAP  
We hate the MEAP  
We hate the MEAP  
Yeah  
We hate the MEAP

Everybody get on your feet  
We know you can jump outta line  
Jumpin' get down  
Round and round and round



# Enhancing the Enhanced

By John Callaghan  
May 1999

*Editors' Note: John Callaghan (SP?) is a teacher at Dakota High School, Chippewa Valley Schools, Macomb, Michigan. He wrote his letter in response to a district-wide proposal for weighted or enhanced grades for students who take AP classes. It should be noted that in the end, a "compromise" was reached. Students who take the AP exam and score a 3 or better will earn an enhanced grade.*

I read the School Improvement Proposal on enhancing grades for advanced placement and honors' courses. The proposal requested that I please explain, "based on fact and reality," why I may not want to endorse the proposal. Please understand right off that I understand the proposal (we received a slightly different version of it last year) and that I would never question the sincerity of the proposers. At Dakota we have from time to time also questioned the heterogeneity of our classes, and some parents have implied, as the proposal also implies, that we have brought about the "...steady deterioration of the level of academic offerings and opportunities in the district (12)."

Just yesterday I was in a room of 105 freshmen and four teachers (English, science, math and social studies), supervising a project in which students of all ability and maturation levels were working on a project about economics. They were studying maps, drawing graphs, calculating costs and taxes, measuring distances and densities, reading and writing definitions and descriptions. They were also discussing how best to negotiate with the other "nations" in the room in order to get what their "nation" needed without giving up too much of what they already had in natural resources. Everybody was working with an intensity you rarely see in the traditional classroom. I even saw one girl look up from her work and ask, "Where's George? I need him now." She then spotted him watching another group measuring longitude and latitude on a huge wall map. She hollered across the room, "Hey, George, that's not your job. Get over here and help me with this graph." George looked guilty and hustled over to do his job. George's response

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## Enhancing the Enhanced

and motivation wasn't coming from a teacher or even from one of the "brighter" students in the room. It was coming from positive peer pressure and was an example of the kind of negotiation and motivation that goes on in the real world today and will be going on when these kids graduate. of negotiation and motivation that goes on in the real world today and will be going on when these kids graduate,

I tell this anecdote as an introduction to my lack of enthusiasm for the proposal and as evidence that what some people perceive as a lowering of standards may just simply be a new way to get more students involved in real learning. I know other school districts have inflated some of the grades for certain courses. That is why one will see a high school senior in some schools graduate with a four point plus GPA on a four-point scale. I also know that if our district adopts an inflation policy that I can live with it and that I will accommodate as best I can, but I don't think it is necessary. In fact, we would be bowing to pressure from the few, I feel, who want further privilege for their already privileged clients. I could better accept an inflation policy if it gave extra credit or enhancement to so-called non-academic achievements that I feel would better represent our entire student population. For example, I recently saw a wedding cake designed by some of our less "academically" able students that was so impressive I wanted to buy it. I was also impressed with the incredible sophistication of the car design some of our students developed in their CAD classes. Once again the projects involved reading, writing, speaking and listening with math,

English, business techniques, graphics, and both physics and chemistry, all at the same time. It's what we call integration of curriculum.

I am reluctant, therefore, to endorse something that may compromise the development of that kind of integration in our curriculum, especially if we further separate our best students from that integration. I don't think it is fair to the majority of students nor is it really fair to that privileged minority because *they* may miss out on experiencing real life situations that will serve them just as well in the future as academic rewards and accolades. But my concern goes beyond even that; inflating the grades may further increase the polarity I see developing among our have and have-not students, a polarity that resonates with

But my concern goes beyond even that; inflating the grades may further increase the polarity I see developing among our have and have-not students

tension, resentment, and at times, even violence. You can probably tell that I read the proposal on the day after the tragedy in Colorado. At the time, I thought: We educators and parents still don't get it, nor are we likely to get it any time soon. As a nation and as public educators, we on paper are committed to universal education. I'm sure most mission statements in most school districts make some kind of reference to the right all students have to an education. Yet we don't practice what we preach- not *really*: we still organize and structure our courses and curriculum in such a way that "academics"

are primary. And we reward the academic learners in many ways. We not only give them A's, scholarships and public praise, but we also label them "good," "winner ... bright," and "successful." They usually represent 15-20% of any student population. The other 80-85% by our implied definition of "success" become by comparison losers (we use the euphemism "average"),

I am sharing with you my thoughts as a teacher in the district and as a believer in serving as many of our students fairly and equally as we possibly can. Yet I'm not just a teacher in the district. I'm the parent of three "average" sons (two have graduated with unspectacular GPAs and are now in "average" colleges). We have, on the other hand, an 8th grade daughter who is fairly "bright," gets good grades and likes school. She learned many things about school from her brothers, but she was in integrated programs and in thematic classes that her brothers seldom got to experience. She might a few years from now take one of the AP courses here at Dakota. We would encourage her to do so whether the grade is enhanced or not. We would base our encouragement on the content of the course and on the possibility of getting college credit and on nothing else.

The proposal claims that we have done a disservice to our children. "Had the district awarded additional points for Honors and Advanced Placement courses all along, hundreds of our students could have received scholarships based on their grade point averages, who did not (12)." I find this claim hard to accept. I suppose that if one can say that some

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## Enhancing the Enhanced

students with higher GPAs got scholarships than those with lower GPAs and that more students would have taken Honors and AP classes if the points were inflated and, therefore, would have higher GPAs and more scholarships, one could draw that conclusion. But I don't see it as a disservice. I see it as more evidence of how we worship at the altar of grades and GPAs and not at the altar of real learning. I agree that kids should take on more challenges but I really can't blame them for taking the less demanding courses because our focus and therefore *their* focus, is on grades, not on learning or on taking a challenge. And shame on any college or university that bases admittance and/or financial aid primarily on GPA. In fact, though, most of the colleges and universities rely on other factors than GPA (such as ACT/SAT scores and social/extracurricular participation) for such things as admittance and financial aid and scholarships.

Let me give you an experience I had as a parent about grades. One of my

sons was in the seventh grade and had a science project that was fairly extensive and demanded some real research (not just the usual regurgitation type most projects demand). He did his experiments and graphed the results; he read passages in books and articles in journals and magazines on the phenomenon he was investigating; and he spent several hours writing up the results and then word-processed his final draft. We participated in many of the activities, sometimes indirectly (hints and suggestions), and sometimes directly ("The assignment doesn't ask for that so don't put it in!"). The one thing we noticed, though, as he developed his data was his growing interest in and fascination with the topic itself. He got an A- on the final result and was proud of himself. But we couldn't help ourselves and had to ask: "What do you feel best about? The grade or what you learned?" His response: "Mom and Dad, you've got to be kidding. The *grade*, of course!" That broke our hearts.

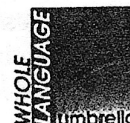
I hope my explanation is based enough on fact and reality to at least let the proposers know where I am coming from and that my objections are not personal, but based on my experience as a teacher and as a parent. If we are going to inflate the grades, let's inflate the grades for all achievement, academic and otherwise. At Dakota we are committed to integration of curriculum (even though our current academic, six-hour schedule makes integration complicated). We are also committed to inclusion, variety and choice, and as much heterogeneity as possible (especially at the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade levels); we know the better students can serve as models for the less able students. That is not just an ideal. I've seen it work dramatically (see above example). It works especially well if we design our assignments and projects in such a way as to include all learning styles and levels. Inflating grades for just the academic student, therefore, compromises our approach to how we can best serve the entire Dakota community.

### Freedom to Teach, Freedom to Learn: Critical Literacy for Caring Democratic Classrooms July 26-29, 2001-- Chicago, Illinois

The Whole Language Umbrella has asked the Rouge Forum and Whole Schooling Consortium to co-sponsor the annual summer conference. This will be a terrific event that builds on the ideas underlying the Education Summit and will work to link issues of literacy, democracy, inclusive education, high-stakes testing, and more. We have an opportunity to build connections among these and other critical issues.

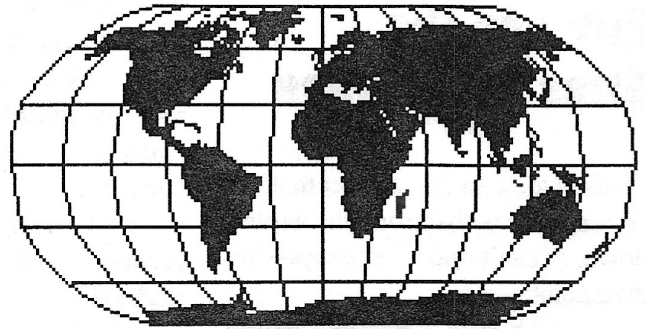
The CALL FOR PROPOSALS is due December 1, 2000.

Use the following website to submit proposals-- <http://www.coe.wayne.edu/CommunityBuilding/BICMain.html>



# Ally and the Atlas Experience

By Amber Goslee



As visitors look around my classroom immediately following lunch, they see children at tables, sitting or lying on the floor, rocking in the rocking chair, sifting through the books in the classroom library, and maybe one or two will be asking an adult to listen to them read. Much of the time, music plays softly in the background. It is D.E.A.R. time. Drop Everything And Read. This is a time for the children to take out something of their choice to read and relax.

Independent reading is a part of the schedule in many classrooms as a specific period of time. It is also a time when many teachers attempt to control the children's reading. They often determine where students read, how long, when, and what they read—perhaps saying no comic books or magazines, or maybe requiring chapter books. My students are free to read just about anything, from comic books and picture books to chapter books and informational books. Some even choose to read the dictionary, Guinness Book of World Records, or the atlas. Since I view D.E.A.R. as a time for students to enjoy reading, that is what I want them to do—be able to enjoy whatever it is they are reading. That freedom along with a flexible teacher seizing the “teachable moment” can have tremendous benefits.

During such a D.E.A.R. period, the kids were reading and, as usual, they could read anything of their choice. Ally decided that she wanted to read the “Atlas” that day.

She came up to me shortly after D.E.A.R. had begun and pointed to an area south of Orlando, Florida. “Ms. Goslee, see this is where I went in Florida. Fort Pierce. It is just below Orlando. It is not on this map. It must be too small.”

I replied, “Well, have you looked through the atlas? Maybe there is another map of Florida and you will be able to find Fort Pierce on there.” She said she hadn't and asked how she would do that. I directed her to the index and she walked back to her seat.

I continued what I was doing and a short moment later, I hear her call out from across the room as she gets up and rushes toward me, “Ms. Goslee! I found it. It is here. Fort Pierce.” She shows me where it says Fort Pierce in the index and she says it is on page 59. She turns to page 59 and stares at the page for a while. Then she looks up at me with a questioning look. She doesn't know what to do.

I ask, “Do you know how to find a city on an atlas?”

“No,” she answered back.

“Ahh, well, would you like to know how?”

“Sure.”

I ask her to get a piece of scrap paper and say “Do you see where it says longitude and latitude? Write those words down and the numbers that are below them.”

She writes them down and

then I proceed to explain what they are and how cartographers use them to locate specific points on the globe. I draw her a few diagrams and make gestures around the globe as I describe them. She is very focused. She really wants to know how to do this. Then I parallel the lines on the globe with the lines on the atlas. She seems to be following, so I continue. “Where are those numbers you wrote down?”

She pulls the paper out. I explain that the lines that run north and south are called “longitude” and the ones that run east to west are called “latitude.” I tell her that each line has a number, and that is what those numbers she wrote down mean. “Look at what it says for longitude.” She reads 80. “Now let's look for it up here,” I say as we run our fingers across the top of the page. “It is difficult to read the numbers, but if you look really close you can see them.”

“I see them,” she says, “I found it! Here is the number we are looking for!” There is excitement in her voice.

“Ok, now run your finger down that line. The city you are looking for will be along or very near that line.” She traces the line with her finger. “Now let us look at the latitude.”

“Oh, I get it. We need to find that number over here.” She pro-

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## Ally and the Atlas Experience

ceeds to look for the number that corresponds with the one she wrote down. "I can't find it," she says with disappointment.

"Ah, Ally. Let us look closely at the numbers. What do you notice 20, 24, 28?" I ask as I point to the numbers next to each line.

"Oh, it is counting by fours. I see. So if I am looking for 27, it would be about here," she says while moving her finger below 28.

"That is correct," I tell her. "Now run your finger along that imaginary line. Do you know what I mean?"

She runs her finger along it and I say that her city will be along that line somewhere. She is clearly understanding how this works and excitedly says, "Oh, I get it! If I run my finger down this line and across this line, I want to find where the lines come together!" She proceeds to do that and when she does so, I notice that Fort Pierce is right above her fingernail. She looks up at me and asks with some puzzlement, "Now what do I do?" She doesn't realize she is pointing right to her city and I ask her why we started doing this. She says she was looking up Fort Pierce and then looks down at the atlas. Her eyes light up and she looks at me with surprise, "How'd I do that?!" She sees that her finger is right on Fort Pierce and she knows that *she* did it all on her own. I guided her verbally, but she did most of it on her own and I did not touch her hand or the map. She is very excited about this discovery and is curious to find other cities. She

returns to her seat and looks up other cities in the index then proceeds to find them on the atlas.

I know that she learned how to locate cities because she had an authentic interest in doing so and because I took the time to answer her questions. Time that standardized curricula robs from teachers and students.

The next day, Ally decided to read the atlas during silent reading time again, eagerly grabbed a sheet of scrap paper, the atlas, and the globe. As I watched her, she would flip to a page in the index, randomly select a city, then write down the city name and its latitude and longitude. Then she would attempt to meet her challenge. Could she find this city that she never heard of somewhere on a map? Her reward was finding that same name on the map. When she did, you could see the excitement on her face. Soon she ran into a problem that she had difficulty solving. She asked me to come over. She was attempting to locate a city that was located at 21 degrees and 55 minutes longitude. Her trouble was that she was ignoring the minutes and did not realize that meant that her city would actually be closer to 22 degrees than 21. So while going back into the index to check that she had copied the correct information down, I pointed out the minutes. "Do you know what those numbers mean?" I knew she did not, and I proceeded to describe them as minutes, and like the minutes on a clock, there are sixty minutes in a degree as there are sixty minutes in an hour. I then asked her to read the numbers she wrote down. I pointed out the 55. She didn't grasp this idea right away, and I explained that 55 is close to 60, so her city is actually closer to the next degree than the one she had listed. She understand this concept very

well. (She was probably somewhat confused over the name.) Although she said she understood, she did not "get it" right away and needed further guidance. I asked what degree we were at. She answered. Then I asked how many minutes we were at and she answered. "Remember I said that 55 is close to 60 and that means that the city you want is actually closest to the next degree?"

"Yes."

"If you are at 21 degrees, what is the next degree?"

"Twenty-two."

"Yes, Ally, that is correct.

That means your city is closer to 22 degrees than 21 degrees. Let's try that." It was clear she wasn't sure of this, but she was ready to check.

She went back to the page and looked up her latitude and longitude lines. She traced her finger across the lines. When she came to the longitude line, she shifted her finger closer to 22 degrees. Her eyes lit up as she seemed to realize the validity in my explanation, "Here it is!"

I left her again to check on other students as she continued her search-and-find missions. She was quite successful and proud of her efforts. After a few more minutes I hear, "Ms. Goslee, look, the city is not here," she said worriedly as her finger was pointed in the Atlantic Ocean just off the coast of Africa. "I tried it two times and it is not here." She shows me what she did and I realize her error. In all the other maps she had selected, the lines of latitude she needed were already north or south of the equator. None had both on one map at the same time, so when she looked for a degree, it was always the correct one. In this instance, she saw she needed one degree latitude, and she could find the



Continued from page 10

## Ally and the Atlas Experience

one degree south of the equator. She was unaware that there was another one degree latitude, that being north of the equator. So it was time to teach her another lesson.

"Ally, let's look up the latitude and longitude again in the index," I suggest. She does and I point out the "N". "What do you think that stands for?" I ask her.

"North," she replies, not really knowing what that meant.

"Yes," I begin to explain, "On maps and globes the lines of latitude can be north or south." I realize she may not even know what the equator is so I pull the globe over. "Remember how I said cartographers drew lines on the globe to help them locate cities? When they did that they decided that they had to have a starting number and chose to draw an imaginary line around the center of the earth, one that cuts it in half. This line is called the equator," I explain as I trace the equator with my finger. She is excited at this new knowledge and traces the line as well. I point out the word equator next to the line and that it is zero degrees. "Then the cartographers drew latitude lines north and south of the equator and ..."

"I get it!" she exclaims, "The N in the back means it is north of the equator!"

"Yes, Ally, that is right." Before locating the city, we find where zero degrees longitude is and that it is named Prime Meridian. She is so excited at this new information, and she discovers yet another line on the globe.

"What is this line?" she asks pointing to a line I am not familiar

with.

"I don't know, Ally. Let us look and see if there is a name along it. The equator and prime meridian are labeled, so this one should be labeled as well." We trace the line with our fingers looking for its name. We discover that it is called the "ecliptic" and I tell her I am not sure what that is, but remember learning about it in astronomy, so we will have to look that up. She makes several observations about the ecliptic and we write the "clues" down.

Finally, we return to the atlas and finding her city in Africa. We find the equator and this time instead of looking one degree south of the equator, she looks one degree north and finds that she is no longer in the ocean, but right on the city she wanted to find.

Ally's learning about the atlas does not end here, but continues as the boy next to her was hearing all the questions she was asking and the explanations. His curiosity is peeked a bit. He asks a question about the globe, though I do not remember what the question was because Ally immediately jumped up and looked at me, "Can I show him? Can I tell him?!!" Of course I thought that was a great idea and so she did. I watched them as she started out the very same way I started with her, by explaining that cartographers wanted to be able to locate places on earth and so they drew lines and labeled them latitude and longitude.

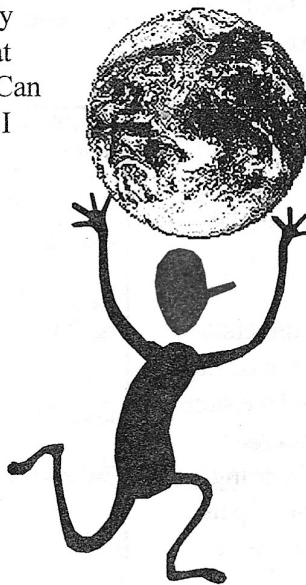
She captured his full attention as she explained and pointed and he followed and asked more questions.

She explained to him latitude, longitude, equator, prime meridian, and more. It was wonderful to watch. Ally knew what she was talking about and he was interested in what she was saying. They continued their explorations together and after several minutes, "Ms. Goslee, Jerome found other lines on the globe. What do these lines mean?" Great! They are continuing to ask questions. This is wonderful! I look at the lines in question. "See, these red ones," she says as she points to lines surrounding the countries in Europe. I explain that those lines indicate the boundaries of different countries.

Ally can still locate cities on the atlas and when other students have a question with a map, I call Ally over to help them solve their problem first before helping. What she learned in those two days was a result of the freedom to choose what she could read during silent reading time, coupled with an authentic interest in learning how to find a city on an atlas. It was a truly meaningful learning

experience to her. s atlas experience reminded me of the importance of letting children have more control over what they learn. It also strengthened my belief that standardized instruction and testing is an alien in my classroom—how it attempts to reduce moments like these and "control" when and what students learn; how it consumes a teacher's time with her students; how it divides students and teachers.

*Continued on page twenty-two*



# Connections

different cultures and ethnic groups, learning across languages. Whole language teachers have built an international movement dedicated to supportive freedom, choice, and empowerment in the learning process.

Yet, those of us whose starting place is one of these agendas don't necessarily connect with our obvious friends and allies. We remain divided, our challenge is weakened, our capacity for creating new alternatives that challenge this regressive, elitist, divisive vision of the world are minimized.

We desperately need to realize that all these issues are *connected*. As those pushing narrow teaching, standardized tests, control of children, segregation, and autocracy have created a multi-dimensional, integrated onslaught, so we too must understand that, at their root, all these issues are connected to a common core – a vision of more caring communities and schools that will support that vision. We must see connections if we are to build such schools. We must join together. We must act together.

Connections are of three essential types:

**1. Conceptual.** We must understand intellectually the common bond among our various issues and build a vision of an alternative to the autocratic, segregated, unequal society being promoted and schools that help us move towards such an alternative.

**2. Relational.** Having ideas that

connect is one thing. Developing relationships, trust, community with people whose starting place is different than ours is another. Doing so, however, allows us to build our overall base of influence.

**3. Practice and Action.** We seek to impact change. Practice and action grow out of our seeing the connections of our issues and developing relationships and a community of change agents with others.

**Conceptual connections:** *Understanding the common core of our issues.*

In 1997, we developed a framework for building better schools which we call Whole Schooling (See elsewhere in this paper for a description). Among other things, Whole Schooling posits that there are inevitable connections between the way power is used in a school, who goes to school together and who gets 'sent away', what is taught and how teaching occurs, the culture of a school, partnerships with resources outside the school – parents, community, university faculty, and others. At is

most basic, we see thrusts towards two types of schooling, each rooted in two very different social purposes – autocratic and democratic schooling. For those of us seeking to build democratic schools, all the issues listed in the box below are necessarily, inextricably linked. For us to move forward, we must first *see the connections*. Let's explore these through a couple of stories.

Cathy and Sean are the parents of Monica, a child with mental retardation. They live in a suburban middle class community. Their school district sends children with their child's label to a 'center' program in a neighboring district. However, they decided they want Monica to attend her neighborhood elementary school with her sister. With much insistence with the principal and special education director, she does but trouble begins at day one. First, the teacher is not accustomed to having a child in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade who is just learning letters and can't read. A couple of years ago, the school began to develop new ways of teaching where kids worked in groups on projects that interested them, read

*Continued on next page*

Autocratic schooling – designed to separate and sort children.	Democratic schooling – designed to promote inclusion, equality, and community.
Standardized testing.	Authentic assessment.
Standardized curriculum – driven by disciplines and bunches of facts to be learned.	Curriculum frameworks that balances government mandates with individual and community interests.
Rigid, direct instruction.	Engaging, authentic teaching
Exclusion and segregation – by race, class, ability.	Inclusive schools – diverse students learning together across ages, gender, class, race, and ability.
Autocracy.	Democracy – in the school and the classroom.

## Connections

books at their own level. However, this year, with increased pressure to raise the scores on the state standardized test, they are mostly using worksheets that are intended to get kids used to the type of items they will have on the test. Even with adaptations, Monica isn't doing well. Cathy and Sean tried to talk with the principal and special education director about this situation but they've not been very responsive.

John is an English teacher in Jefferson High School. He has increasingly become concerned about how much time they spend preparing and drilling kids for the state examination. The administration seems almost frantic. He and some other teachers have begun to meet together with a local university professor to try to take action that will show how standardized tests are harmful to students. However, test scores in this upwardly mobile working class community are a big deal. Real estate agencies publish local test scores on the advertisements of local houses for sale. The new principal was just hired to push this agenda even more and has threatened disciplinary action if teachers tell parents about their rights to exempt their children from the state exams. As John and his colleagues study what is going on, they become aware of the various ways that students have been separated and sorted for years, even before the state exams began to put pressure on people – the special education classes down the hall, the special school for girls who have become pregnant, the alternative school for kids who've gotten into trouble, the tracked classes and separate classes for



students considered gifted and talented. They begin to realize that in many ways they have been co-opted into sorting and segregating kids.

These vignettes seek to illustrate connections between our starting points. As illustrated in the table, two very clear, very different paradigms are represented – one that seeks to sort and control students socializing them into roles where they have technical competence but are disempowered from questioning and changing their social life; another that seeks to model an inclusive, caring community, where children learn to ask questions and create positive change. The individual specific issues are inextricably linked.

### **Relationships for Change and Best Practice:** *Building a community of change agents.*

We start from different personal places and needs. Parents of middle class kids with special needs don't want their kids excluded and marginalized. Teachers don't want to spend their time teaching to a test that doesn't really help kids learn. Parents don't either. Poor people or members of minority groups want to have

opportunities. Since our issues are all linked, however, we can't move ahead without addressing the overall paradigm of separation and control. To move the direction we want, we don't have much choice than to build a community for change with people whose position, role, starting interests are different than our own. Parker Palmer in *The Courage to Teach* describes our coming together as a major decision, a decision to no longer be alone, a decision to make a difference.

Coming together to build a community for change, where people care for and support one another and commit to engaging in change efforts is difficult. Building a community goes against the many trends in our culture that separate, segment. Building a community for change, by definition, means that we struggle with power structures, seeking to build a new power base among people in a growing movement. Can this be done? We believe it can and have been about such efforts over the last few years.

*Continued on next page*



## Connections

In 1997, the Rouge Forum and Whole Schooling Consortium began organizing weekend and evening meetings of teachers, parents, university faculty and community members seeking to impact on schools. We obtained funding for the Whole Schooling Research Project and have been trying to understand seven schools in Michigan who are working towards whole schooling principles. We've offered two national conferences including the Education Summit in June of 2000. Partners from some 15 states have joined and are gathering people together in other locations throughout the country. For example, in Washington state, a parent has begun organizing a group of parents concerned about inclusive education, standardized testing, and good teaching practices. Out of much dialogue we're gradually forming a stable cadre of people who know and care about one another, who provide

help and support. We've had numerous presentations at state and national conferences, inviting people to be a part. At this point, representatives from some 15 states throughout the United States and two other countries are active, developing members of the Whole Schooling Consortium and Rouge Forum.

### **An invitation.**

We are continuing this work of building a community for change and we invite others to join with us. Here is some work in progress.

**Working action groups.** Teachers, parents, university faculty, and others are meeting in the Detroit area once per month to share and organize actions designed to support better school practices. These include helping one another in local school change initiatives, developing seminars on topics such as standardized testing and inclusive education, organizing conferences. If you are a parent,

teacher, faculty member or interested community member, you are invited to join us in building and strengthening these efforts.

**School-based projects.** The Whole Schooling Consortium is connecting with a network of schools who are seeking to implement practices associated with the Five Principles of Whole Schooling. We are seeking new ways to expand and strengthen this network including designing a school renewal model based on Whole Schooling. You may want to explore the involvement of your school or a group of teachers in a project to link with the Whole Schooling Consortium.

If you are interested, contact Michael Peterson, [jmpeterson@mediaone.net](mailto:jmpeterson@mediaone.net). For more information, go to: <http://www.coe.wayne.edu/CommunityBuilding/WSC.html>

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## Testing Versus Relationships

students learn in my classroom to help sustain their humanity. I want to expand the possibilities and hope for my students. Testers don't consider such things. Louis Kahn wrote, "The more deeply something is engaged in the unmeasurable, the more deeply it has a lasting value." How much more difficult is it for me as a teacher to reach for the unmeasurable within my students when my public accountability has to do only with test scores? How much more difficult is it to treat students as wholly human when their value is reduced to a utilitarian test

score? How much more difficult is it to work with students in relationships of quality when my public accountability as a teacher is reduced to the numbers that are produced from the objectified students in my classroom.? The insidious negativity of testing has much to do with how it reduces our humanity to that which can be quantified. Testing has an implicit negative morality tied to it. It is a morality which states that humans (students and teachers here) have only utilitarian purpose that they are judged by. It imagines teachers and students only

as objects, and therefore implies that they are to behave in a manner that reflects such a limited imagination. (See any potential connections to school shootings?) The basic respect for their humanity is taken away. Does this not affect me as a teacher? Of course it does. It reflects a serious degradation of what I do. It imagines learning in such a way that its power is reduced to economics, and this affects the relationships, and therefore the quality of learning in the classroom.



# I Will Be Requesting Waivers Again This Year

Dear School Board Member:

I am a teacher at a local elementary school, as well as the parent of a student at the same school. I'm writing this letter as a parent, to a parent. I am becoming more and more concerned about the emphasis on standardized testing as the criteria of student and school achievement.

When I began teaching at this school last year, I was impressed by the caliber of the teaching going on here. In April, I requested an intra-district transfer for my daughter. She has been at my school since then. Her growth as a reader, writer, and mathematician has been everything I hoped for, and more.

However, that growth can never be measured by the SAT-9. As soon as she sits down to take such a test, her mind freezes up. She completely gives up on the math section, even though it is work she can do. She doesn't want to go to school on test days. She has begged me to stay home. Even she understands that the test does not bear much relationship to what she is learning in school.

Yesterday, the father of one of the students in her multi-age 4th-5th grade class read William Blake's poem that begins "Tyger, Tyger, burning bright." When he asked for comments, my daughter said, "I think the jagged spears are lightning, and the tears of the night are rain." What standardized test would

find this out about how she thinks?

My daughter is a gifted artist. She uses that talent to illustrate comments about books she has read. What standardized test would demonstrate this about her?

Yesterday, she scribbled out math equations on the chalkboard in my room as she waited for me after school. They weren't correct, but they looked like calculus. She was so excited. She said, "Mom, I CAN do math! I can't believe it!" What standardized test would let her feel this way about her developing math skills?

Last year, I decided I could no longer subject her to a test that has no relevance to what she is doing in school. I decided I could no longer subject her to a test that sent her into near-panic at the thought of taking it. I requested a waiver for her, and for her older sister. The relief in their eyes when I said they didn't have to take the test was worth it. I will be requesting waivers again this year.

I urge you to do the same for your child. If you could do this, and state that you are doing this, at a board meeting, it might cause the public to take a second look at this inappropriate tool for assessing children.

Sincerely,

A Concerned Parent

## Education Summit

*People in schools change the world!*

June 26-28, 2000, a remarkable group of some 250 progressive educators gathered in Detroit, Michigan, USA, to share perspectives, develop networks, and form plans of action. We share here some highlights of presentations, presenters, and action plans.

Several key THEMES predominated our discussions. These were used as organizing frameworks in dialogues and planning.

- DEMOCRACY & JUSTICE — schooling and learning to help people learn how to be active agents of the social order.
- AUTHENTIC INSTRUCTION — ways of teaching that engage kids and help them learn.
- STANDARDIZED TESTING — the harm being done to learning and good teaching & organizing against.
- INCLUSIVE EDUCATION — students with differing abilities, ethnicity, culture, age, gender learning together.
- COMMUNITY & PARENTS — real partnerships

Co-sponsored by the Whole Language Umbrella, Whole Schooling Consortium, and the Rouge Forum, this conference was an important Event in building coalitions and in creating new visions of good schools for all students. We all went away energized, filled with new ideas, connections, resources, and plans to do work in our schools and organize locally and regionally.

Available online are some written copies of presentations Go online at:

<http://www.coe.wayne.edu/CommunityBuilding/WSC.html>

# “Why Are You Doing This To These People?”

At last years IEPC Matt’s speech pathologist asked “Why are you doing this to these people? There are people trained to teach Matt at other schools.” She was very frustrated that I was asking that my six year old son, Matt, be included with his peers at his neighborhood school. No one at our school seemed to think that it was reasonable to include an active child with Down syndrome in his neighborhood school, even with support.

During our many meetings, I have thought - why do I want to place my child in a school in which he is so obviously unwelcome? It sure would be easier to avoid the negative battering I take at each meeting. I would love to be spared the list of deficits that the adults present to describe Matt. Last year and this I’ve heard that others, in distant building, are qualified to teach ‘these children’. I am repeatedly told that segregated education works for the teachers. Why choose our home school? My answer always comes down to; “This is where Matt lives”.

Last year when Matt started kindergarten and stop leaving the neighborhood on a bus, he finally gained membership in his neighborhood. This is where Matt is greeted each

day by enthusiastic welcomes, hugs and high-fives from his classmates. Where the kids he sees at school are the same kids he now plays with on our sidewalks and playground.

The kids are the same kids that for the first time last year came to the door to ask if Matt could come out to play. This is where classmates invite Matt to their birthday parties. They’re the classmate’s who say gleefully “Matt’s in my class”. This is where the kids help Matt learn the subtle and not so subtle aspects of typical behavior and communication. This is where all the differences the adults are focused on are ignored or accepted by the kids.

This is where he lives; this is where he belongs. Even social groups outside of school don’t have the same influence on ‘belonging’ that being in class

together all day affords Matt. My daughter, Suzanne, attends a religious school but participates in our neighborhood scout group. During one scout meeting the girls were singing a school song. When Suzanne asked about the song, several girls replied in unison that she didn’t need to know because she didn’t go to their school. Suzanne does not have a developmental disability or difficulty in communicating nor does she accept any barriers to belonging. It’s not that easy for Matt. It never will be.

When I struggle during school meetings that challenge my decision to have Matt at his neighborhood school and not disappearing on a bus everyday, I focus on how Matt eagerly leaves for school everyday saying; “I go to my class”. He belongs here; this is where he lives.



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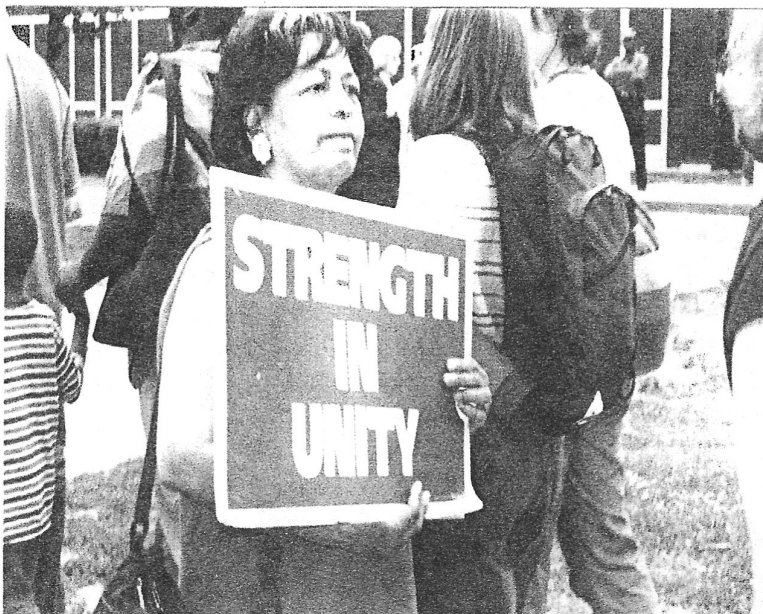
# School Reform and Social Change

bunglers with presumptuous and benevolent suburbanites, each with their own selfishness in full bloom. Desperation for reform offered the takeover board months of good will which they squandered by duplicating the ineptness and dishonesty of the old board. They failed at every turn: the bogus summer construction program, failed teacher hiring efforts, meetings held in secret or behind police riot squads. 20,000 students, 12% of the district, left Detroit schools from Fall 1999 to Spring 2000. That will cost the district about \$130 million in revenue in 2000, a financial hit the district cannot take. It may well be that another 10,000 students left the Detroit system between Spring and Fall 2000.

Now the schools face another assault: the voucher movement which would place education in the hands of irrational religious profiteers. Vouchers appeal to voters due to the apparent failure of the schools to deliver—in the midst of a total social debacle. Vouchers charm ministers because students can mean steady income. To pass vouchers in Detroit would mean that no major employer could lure its workers to

live in the city. While it appears at this writing that the voucher movement will fail, the assault on the Detroit schools will continue nevertheless.

Research is clear about school reform. Changing schools requires addressing the surrounding society. School reform requires solidarity between leaders and rank and file school workers, community people, parents, and kids. School reform requires deep democracy, mass involvement. Involvement must



most commonly be linked to economic revitalization, but in some instances education has stripped ahead of attacks on poverty, gone before economics, as in the Mississippi Freedom Schools. Precisely the opposite, in every area, is afoot now. The takeover school board is occupied by avaricious individuals who know little about either Detroit or education, and who have no vision of social change.

The superintendent of the board, a new arrival from a small town in Colorado who is to be called "CEO" now, made his plans clear in his first meeting. Outlining his goals,

he said, "Students need to understand they are the workers in this system. The bosses and foremen are teachers and principals. Students must learn that their future is learning the discipline to work plants like Ms Bravo's here." Bravo owns a small minimum wage plant in southwest Detroit. The CEO has already instituted a plan for weekly standardized tests in the schools—and hired many of his friends to serve as area directors at salaries over \$150,000.

What could be done is not being done, and the possibilities are daily being undone. What to do and who can do it? Hope cannot be manufactured from the mists, it rises out of a solid grasp of current conditions. There is no reason to believe that corporate wealth wants to reform schools in order to raise wages; rather the powerful want Detroit back, but they want the property without the problems of the citizenry. The only

people who have a stake in real school and social reform are parents, local citizens, students, and teachers. Teachers and other school workers are best positioned to take initial leadership in real reform, the stable force in the mix.

The teachers cannot rely on their union, the DFT, to foment change. The union has proven itself to be part of the problem, the leaders entrenched and corrupt, supporting racist testing and segregation, but more importantly, the union structure

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# School Reform and Social Change

(excluding parents, students, and community activists—addressing only the narrow needs of the workforce at the expense of the community) can only retard serious change.

Detroit educators must produce a new organization of rank and file school workers, parents, students and community people. This organization must have a clear vision: to revitalize the city from the bottom up, through democratic change for a more equitable society. This group will need to address the relationship of school problems and community problems, recognizing that one is directly tied to the other. That means, in part, community organizing to make

demands on local elites for the simple necessities of school: in the words of last year's strike, "Books, Supplies, Lower Class Size."

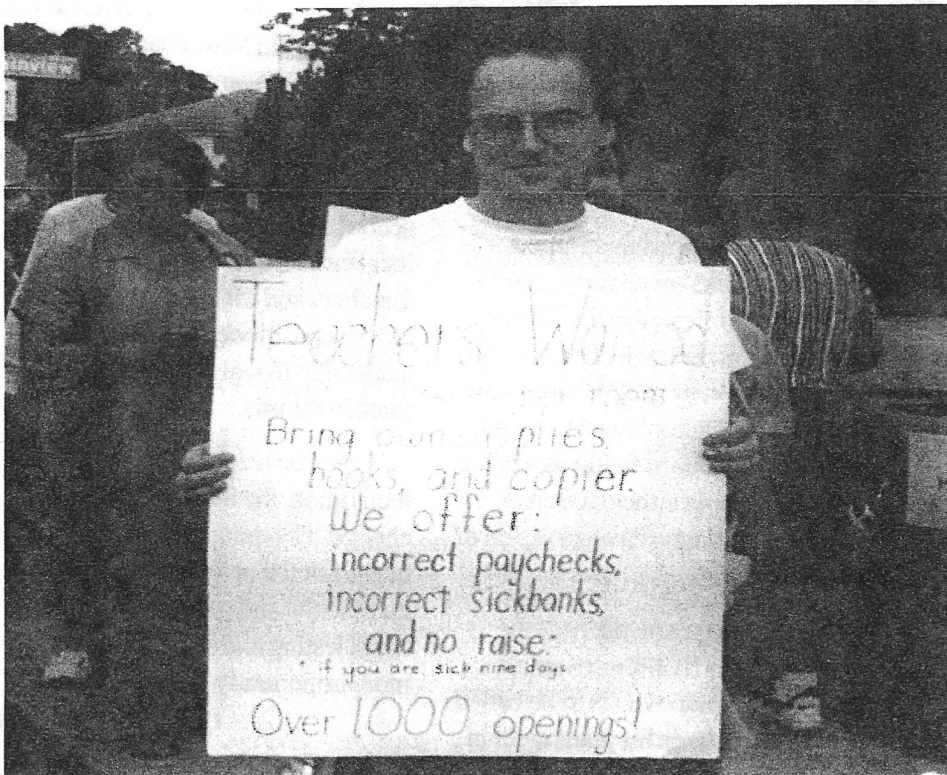
The group will need to be wisely action-oriented to enforce these vital demands, marching on casinos (a vulnerable weak link for elites) for example. The group will need to be anti-racist, integrated, listening to and taking leadership, more often than not, from the community. On the other hand, the group will need to sharply oppose the moronic drive for more and more testing and standardization in schools, and explore what it is to teach well in the midst of a socio-economic crisis. Such an organization could draw mission-oriented educators from around the country, and demand (and win) free local housing for them as incentive. When it must, this group will need to recognize that some of the best learning in the U.S. took

place in the Freedom Schools of the south, during the civil rights movement, when formal schools were closed. The Rouge Forum and the Whole Schooling Consortium, and Detroit Summer on the east side, fledgling groups in the city, can serve as partial local models, starting points.

The Rouge Forum has held mass discussions on the campus of Wayne State University, addressing the crisis in the schools and the role of standardized tests in segregating kids as well as educators. The Whole Schooling Consortium is involved in action research projects in the city as well as throughout the state, addressing democratic and inclusive schooling that is linked to communities. Detroit Summer is now a year around project that connects youth, educators, and seniors in community projects that make the streets safer, provide

resources and collective actions from their in-city farms, and conducts educational all over the metro area.

Before a June 2000 Board of Education meeting, Detroit Public Schools employees and community members let it be known that they are against school reform as designed by outside elites who want to increase their control over the money and minds inside the city.





## Activism- Going Beyond

era. I wonder if this is a self-indulging compliment or an apologetic regret.

Certainly, history shares with us countless examples of those who because of their activism lost their personal freedom and lives. While many of the most world-renowned activists's share the historical center stage, countless individuals become activists and are involved without ever considering themselves to be one. Such individuals become involved because of the common thread that connects all activists and the process of activism - A Cause. Most times, it is an isolated cause. By this, I mean a cause that come to the attention of the activist-to-be by way of a personal connection and/or relationship. What occurs is that there is awareness, a heightened sense of urgency, a need to correct a current condition or issue that requires attention, a promise or document that speaks of one problem but is not respected nor honored. Such circumstances lead to a time when more assertive language, behavior, insistence, and/or resistance begin to evolve. What is clear, to the acknowledged or unacknowledged activist, is that something is wrong or unjust and needs to made right and just.

The problem that arises, from my perspective, is that most activists and the form of activism that they generate are often tied to a highly personal isolated cause. The following examples may best demonstrate what is meant by the isolated cause.

A colleague often shares with me materials regarding "Animal Rights." The articles and information regarding such a cause are endless and most of them quite interesting. The most significant message is: [*animal (an - i - mal) n. a living being, capable of feeling.*] Ergo, be kind, be just, be aware, be giving, be compassionate, be donating, be adopting, and be for their being. The only concern I have with this animal activist is that upon approaching the topic of Diversity, Multiculturalism, and inclusion, her ears, eyes, heart, mind and soul shut down. She refuses to consider any conversation having to do with race, discrimination, and bias. As she says, "At least animals never deal with negative subjects."

Another isolated activist is very much into raising funds, walking, writing, and requesting of others to get involved in the fight against AIDS. The efforts to get people involved in his cause are relentless. To walk at his elbow during marches and to donate funds has never been a problem. However, before the last march, I introduced the fact that perhaps some of the effort and money should be going to Africa where there is an incredible need in the fight against AIDS. It did not take long to discover that his activism was centered on the efforts in Detroit - not Africa. He explained that he had already too much to ponder with just getting people to sign up for the local cause. As I clarified his activism, he also did not want to walk with me into any discussion about Diversity, Multiculturalism, and/or inclusion. It seems that such words to him meant sharing a classroom with children with learning disabilities, as he had to do as a child. His parents and he felt that such children got all of the attention via special services and that he paid

the price by not having anyone pay attention to his needs.

Several years ago another example of isolated activism occurred when a mother of a high school girl forced the administration of a local public school to notice that her daughter was practicing volleyball at six o'clock in the morning because the boys basketball team needed the gym after school. She also noticed that while the boy's football team had received new uniforms, none of the girls' teams had received any for quite some time. The case made the local TV and newspapers. Quickly the girls' teams of that school received new uniforms, they stopped practicing at six a.m. and a rotating schedule for practices was established. It was also interesting to note that the school that the girl attended had also been cited in the news for having had the very few students of color on the team and some of the maintenance personnel receiving hate mail left on their lockers and cars. In this case, it was the parents of the students of color who were the activists and were talking to reporters about the lack of dialogue, sensitivity, programs, and awareness. Two sets of parents and students - two sets of activists in the same school - each with their own cause for which to fight but neither offering support or acknowledgement of the other.

The last example has to do with my thirty two years of experience as a Spanish teacher which involved participating in a vast number of Foreign language Teaching/Learning professional organizations, conferences, institutes, and workshops. The discussions were often filled with literary analysis. I remember debating

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## Activism-Going Beyond

the critical significance of whether a poet should have used the subjunctive or the conditional tense within the confines of a poem. Another enlightening lecture centered on a professor who had spent time analyzing the significance of Sancho Panza riding a burro rather than Rocinante, which his master Don Quijote proudly rode. But I discovered that my well read compadres would carpool it out of the lecture hall whenever asked to discuss the victimization and genocide that had taken place at the hands of the Spanish explorers and conquistadores.

My concern with activists who are driven by isolated causes is that often the passion, energy, and process is vertical in nature and does not connect with a greater horizontal awareness. Isolated causes run the risk of having a beginning, process, and quick resolution. Isolated causes also are focused on a limited perspective.

The problem when we center on isolated causes is that we lose sight of what I feel is the central focus that must be maintained. Such focus always must center on the core values, the guiding principles, and ideals that have been established. Such ideals in our country are based around democracy, pursuit of the truth, and justice. All three of these concepts are ever present and excellent lenses by which to view activism.

Another concern with isolated causes is that the isolation could be as finite as one human being taking care of his/her child. Nothing wrong with taking care of one's own, but each resolution for each individual cause does contain the power of influencing others to achieve a solution or resolution that can go far beyond one individual. There is a desperate need in our country, and particularly in our schools, to be aware of the greater picture and the greater good. Our association with the human condition connects all of us.

To fight for the rights and well being of animals but ignore human rights - to fight for a daughter's uniform but ignore the problems of the girls of color who also wear them - to walk for AIDS but not remember all of AIDS victims - to deal with the Spanish culture from a literary point of view and avoid discussions of the murder and horrifying victimization of millions of indigenous people- is to run up and down a vertical continuum that ignores - not only the plight

of other human beings, but misses the premise and the foundation that are the core of activism.

Activism requires an awareness of the legacy of victimization, its components, and an ever-present vigilance on any form of current victimization

Most societal sins and victimization are grounded on Social Identifiers/Qualifiers/Labelers. An understanding of these begins the process of letting go of isolated causes as one can begin to understand the natural connection between activism and victimization. Such Social Qualifiers are:

**Ability:** learning process, learning differences, social, psychological, emotional, and physical attributes - issues of access, accommodations, inclusion, services

**Age:** chronological, developmental, generational stages

**Class:** class differences, social orientation, and educational background

**Ethnicity:** national origin, linguistic background, and immigrant status

**Geographic Region:** national, regional, or state origin; urban, rural, or suburban orientation

**Language:** fluency with written and spoken language(s), ability to communicate, accents, and dilaes

**Marital Status:** single, married, divorced (more than once)

**Physical Appearance (lookism):** observable characteristics that cause negative reactions, such as stature, weight, wearing braces, thick glasses, hair style

**Race:** traditional anthropological categories such as Caucasian, European, Asian, African, Hispanic; includes biracial identity

**Religion:** major religions as well as the degree of cultural and religious observance

**Sexual Orientation:** gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual

**Situational Factors:** death/loss of a family member, transient family patterns, chronic illness, family or individual dealing with emotional and/or psychological challenges

**Racial Profiling:** negative presumptions based on preconceived stereotypes leading to confrontation

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# Activism-Going Beyond

**Gender:** male or female identity

**Digital Divide:** lack of access to information, hardware, and software, the Internet

Social Identifiers are fueled by Social Malignancies. The Social Malignancies are learned starting the first day that mom brings us home from the hospital. A societal curriculum keeps the fires burning. The Social Identifiers are:

Biases

Bigotry

Control [Networks within the workplace]

Delusions of grandeur [the ego]

Dominance

Denial [personal, professional, national]

Entitlement(s)

Fear(s)

Hate - hate crimes

Innocent Ignorance [the very young only]

-isms

Narrow Mindedness

Nepotism - Professional Incest

Neutrality

Paranoia

Power [personal, national, and institutional]

Prejudice(s)

Professional Incompetence

Unconscionable Incompetence

Religion when used to subjugate, control, use, and direct scripture against another religion or group of individuals - religious cleansing, - 'We are the chosen ones - by God!'

Competition - seeing others as losers, second class, not worthy, feeling good at the expense of others. Seeing 'the other' as the opponent rather than as a collaborator

Unhealthy Athletic Programs - 'Win at all cost' - The use and abuse of athletes, particularly of color, as mercenaries and commodities.

Racism [personal]

Racism [institutional]

Racism [national]

Racism [international]

Racism [by the well-intended]

Racism [aversive by egalitarians]

Racism [but I teach at the Lower School]

Racism [but he/she is only in pre-K-3]

Racism [but I'm highly religious]

Racism [but I'm an educator]

Racism [but I'm in the Arts]

Racism [but the past is dead]

Xenophobia

White Passports

White entitlements(s) - privilege(s)

White supremacy

Social Identifiers and Social Malignancies are the enemy of activists. Regardless of the circumstances and causes, they are the targets.

Activists that are involved for short spurts of time in isolated causes are defined by the following characteristics.

- Temporary activists come to the forefront whenever they have a cause that they feel needs immediate attention and change.
- Temporary Activists get involved because of identity with a cause. There is usually a direct and personal connection. - language, injustice, racial, cultural, ethnic, gender, condition, association, etc.
- Temporary activists do not make the crossover to other causes.
- The energy and passion subsides once the cause has received proper attention or the problem has been resolved.
- The temporary activist is thrown into the process by a set of circumstances that need to be addressed rather than by choice and design.

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## Activism-Going Beyond

Visionary Activists go beyond isolated causes and are represented by the following:

- The visionary activists are in “the struggle” and “the work” for the long haul - regardless of the solutions to any one concern, there are other problems to solve and banners to raise.
- Visionary activists consider themselves “agents of change” and “difference makers.”
- The visionary activist is not self indulgent and ego driven but has come to terms with self serving ventures and recognizes the value of selflessness in fighting and representing the voiceless and invisible.
- The visionary activist does not consider any job to small or insignificant. He/she realizes that there is a world of work to do and that it will take countless number of hands to push, drag, claw, dig, build, and lift.
- The visionary activist keeps in mind all of the children. Those who are not here with us because of victimization, those who honor us today with their presence, and those yet unborn.
- A typical and conventional political agenda or ideology, other than whatever may improve or enhance the human condition does not drive the visionary activist.
- The cornerstones of a Visionary Activist are truth, justice, democracy, humility, compassion, commitment, tangible support, and benevolence.
- The visionary activist is focused on the truth regardless of where the truth may take him/her. Veritas is the only word on the crest of an activist.
- The visionary activist can relate to other causes ever looking for the opportunity to create alliances so that the process of change and growth can help the momentum of all causes.
- The visionary activist defines inclusion and democracy in the broadest manner possible embracing all causes dealing with the victimization and degradation of the human condition but anticipating and acknowledging any unknown societal tragedy and/or movement.
- The visionary activist believes that any injustice

upon any human being is an injustice to all of us.

- The visionary activist can relate and understands why there are isolated causes and the reasons that lead to “ethnocentrism, politicalcentrism, culturalcentrism, and religiocentrism fervor.”
- Those who may not acknowledge his/her efforts or contributions to their cause do not thwart the visionary activist.
- A visionary activist is ever challenging those of his/her own ideology so as not to fall victim to only isolated causes and isolated perspectives.
- A visionary activist understands that his/her work may not resolve the problems within his/her lifetime. Nevertheless, such activists are committed to making a significant difference while they breathe on this earth.
- The visionary activist finds the time to become involved in the fight against injustice regardless of the cause.
- The visionary activist who is an educator, has gone far beyond classifying schools as public, parochial, independent, magnate, charter, private, etc. Such activists understand that what matters is what is good for children -all of them.

To become a visionary activist is a demanding process. It is a process of not letting go of isolated causes but rather finding the place of such causes within the more complex paradigm of the history of humans - past, present, and to be. What needs to be understood is that feeling of possession and competition for just one cause and for that cause to be seen as the ultimate and most important - it is just one of many.

To become a visionary activist is a matter of understanding that we are part of a “living history” some of which must never be repeated; a history that must be discussed and constantly evaluated.

Activism is not an event or a single lightning bolt. To treat it as such is to be left with only with patches of scorched earth and smoke. Activism is a matter of dealing with an ongoing process - a process fueled by realistic idealism, love, and courage.

Perhaps one day we will reach a time when activism becomes a concept associated only with a memory of a time when to be a human being was not necessarily associated with having achieved humanness.



## Ally and the Atlas Experience

Had I limited her to reading choices to “chapter books” or in some way control what she read, this opportunity would never have occurred. Likewise, had I pushed her away because it was reading time, not “social studies” time (when longitude and latitude are *suppose to be taught*) and tried to teach her about longitude and latitude at some other time, separate from genuine interest, she may not have been as successful. Instead, I identified the moment as a potential learning opportunity, took the time to guide her, and she experienced joy along with purpose in

learning about latitude and longitude.

As state-mandated standardized curricula play a greater role in the classroom, teachers may feel so much pressure to teach what is going to be on the test that they forget that their students are children, feeling a need to control every aspect of the day and hope that nothing strays from the plans. Teachable moments become nuisances and learning becomes mechanized. Is that what should education should be about? Turning children into robots to complete tasks so that they can regurgitate information for a test score? Or should it allow for more students to be treated as human beings, make connections, and be able to have opportunities such as Ally and the Atlas Experience?

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## The Rouge in the Rouge Forum

By Rich Gibson

Part of the “Rouge” in Rouge Forum is taken from the proximity of our first meeting in Detroit to the Ford Rouge Plant (for a full explanation of the name, see the [www](#) site). The Henry Ford (author of “The International Jew, Source of the World’s Problems,” recipient of the Iron Cross from Hitler, etc) made the bulk of his early money from the plant, and Ford still controls most of the politics of the area that the plant sits in.

Not that long ago, the plant employed more than 100,000 workers, fashioning everything that went on a car, tires to iron to steel, and assembling all of it. The plant was the site of some of the most famous battles of labor history, like the Battle of the Overpass. People died to form the union there. The Rouge was the locale of one of the most militant, left-led, labor unions in the country.

The plant sucked the environment dry, as well as its workers. The Rouge River became a fetid sewer. In 1999, a major explosion killed workers in the plant. On that day, the UAW leadership literally embraced Henry Ford, saying it “must be the worst day in his life.” The UAW now believes it is a “partner in production” with Henry Ford.

That is one reason we formed the Rouge Forum, to address what some of us believe is the fact that the unions are mostly irrelevant, sold out, and incapable of dealing with our problems—in schools and in the factories. Moreover, we recognized the shift in schools (rising regimentation, segregation, testing, curricula control, etc) was related to the rise of social inequality, a shift that people like the inheritors of Henry Ford enjoy.

(Take a look at this site reporting on recent State of Michigan/Ford actions related to the plant: [http://www.auto.com/industry/rouge3\\_20001103.htm](http://www.auto.com/industry/rouge3_20001103.htm))

While the presidential election is interesting (particularly the recent little Rat-F— in memory of Donald Seghretti) it is a diversion from the rest of the activity that is going on beneath the surface, which is in fact determinative.

Gore/Bush AND Nader will not quarrel with the use of state power to defend the profits of Ford Motor Company, and most certainly they will defend the source of those profits: the exploitation and alienation of the work force—which then leads to the use of state power, not as a neutral, but as a weapon of those who hold power, the employing class, the rich.

While they disagree about tactical maneuvers within this framework, each candidate seeks to imbue us with a bogus sense of nationalism, a belief that we are all in the same boat, when every signal we get from the real world says we are not. We are offered an endless stream of irrational disconnections between people, racism/nationalism/sexism/ableism, etc., except the one disconnection that makes sense: class, and the source of class struggle, the fact that bosses never pay workers the full value of our labor.

The beacon-issue, the one that should guide reasonable reform efforts that seek to make our lives a little better, including the abolition of high-stakes testing, the issue that no candidate will voice, should be: How do we abolish the wage system? Because anything less than that is only at best a temporary measure.

If voting really mattered, they wouldn’t let us do it. Look at Peru. (Hell, look at our job sites, the most important place in our lives, where you have NO real democratic rights at all—other than those won in the streets led by people like those who formed the early Rouge UAW local).

I Participate. You Participate. He, She, or They Participate. We All Participate.

They Profit. But Things Change! Join Us.

## The Rouge Forum



**The Rouge Forum  
is interested in teaching  
and learning for a  
democratic society. You  
are invited to join us.**

The *Rouge Forum* is a group of educators, students, and parents seeking a democratic society. We are concerned about questions like these: How can we teach against racism, national chauvinism and sexism in an increasingly authoritarian and undemocratic society? How can we gain enough real power to keep our ideals and still teach—or learn? Whose interests shall school serve in a society that is ever more unequal? We are both research and action oriented. We want to learn about equality, democracy and social justice as we simultaneously struggle to bring into practice our present understanding of what that is. We seek to build a caring inclusive community which understands that an injury to one is an injury to all. At the same time, our caring community is going to need to deal decisively with an opposition that is sometimes ruthless

We hope to demonstrate that the power necessary to win greater democracy will likely rise out of an organization that unites people in new ways—across union boundaries, across community lines, across the fences of race and sex/gender. We believe that good humor and friendships are a vital part of building this kind of organization, as important as theoretical clarity. Friendships allow us to understand that action always reveals errors—the key way we learn. We chose Brer Rabbit as a symbol to underline the good cheer that rightfully guides the struggle for justice. Every part of the world is our briar patch.

We had modest success in defeating the standardized test, the MEAP, in Michigan. We work in faculty organizations and unions to deal with the racism and sexism in academia. We try to press forward questions of class size, curricular freedom, anti-racist pedagogy, real inclusion, and a just tax system. As part of the *Whole Schooling Consortium*, we have sponsored forums in the U.S., uniting hundreds of people for democracy and equality.

There are no dues to join the Rouge Forum. Just email [elethinker@yahoo.com](mailto:elethinker@yahoo.com)

Visit [http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge\\_forum/](http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge_forum/) for updates