

What's the IDEA?

A publication of the Georgia Chapter of the National Association for Multicultural Education



Education Policies & Politics

FREEDOM SUMMER/FREEDOM SCHOOLS

by Les Etienne

Education as successfully practiced in Freedom Schools, situated within Freedom Summer, was intentional about circumnavigating social policies and practices meant to oppress and constrain. Rather Freedom Schools transformed schools as sites of freedom and agency. This summer marks the 50th anniversary of the Mississippi Freedom Summer, or as it was officially named the Mississippi Summer Project; a mass mobilization of student/youth led activism by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) during the summer of 1964. Freedom Summer brought to bear the idealism and focused power of a generation and forced the purveyors of racism, hate, and violence to recognize their inability to deter change. SNCC was an organization founded on the heels of the gains of the student sit in movement that swept across the South beginning with the Greensboro, NC sit ins in February 1960. Also, SNCC would gain members from the famed Freedom Riders.

Ella Baker, veteran activist and a Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) co-founder saw the need for the strength and momentum of the student movement to be harnessed and developed into a force for social change in America. Ms. Baker organized a conference that brought student leaders from historically black colleges throughout the south to Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina in April 1960 over Easter weekend. This marked the founding of the SNCC and they went on to confront the social system known as Jim Crow "armed" with nonviolent direct action, an inquiry based nonhierarchical organizational structure, and a high level of political aptitude.

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A Letter from the Editor

Dear Educators,

On the opening day of school for Open Door, the first interracial/integrated kindergarten in Augusta, GA, someone asked my mom, a founder, "Aren't you afraid of the Klan showing up?" I have heard this and many other stories about the serious nature of education. The stories I have heard demonstrate the deep connections between education, cultural politics, and (un)just social policies. However, other individuals and groups comfortably and confidently create a distinction between education and politics. What they often say is, "This has nothing to do with politics, it's just about education." To me, education and politics are as close as brown on rice. I'll come back to mom's school, but first, let's further reflect on our understanding of education and politics.

I wonder if the distinction between politics and education is a matter of how they are each defined. For instance, some define politics as strictly based on political party affiliation or being politically left, center, or right whereas education is defined as neutral, with politics and education only intersecting during elections. Yet, even everyday conversations in a social situation can bring up strong feelings in people about education, schools, curriculum, school personnel, families, and students. Education is political, shaped by a combination of political, social, and cultural perspectives as well as power, privilege, and access. Education is not neutral. Here's why. If education were truly a neutral enterprise:

- Why deny people access to it?
- Why use it as a means to segregate or track?
- Why debate standards or curriculum content?
- Why legislate reform initiatives?
- Why do some schools have more resources than others?
- Why bother with private schools?
- Why use testing to compare, compete, or reward?
- Why a reason for academic freedom?
- Why and how can course content on the same topic be vastly different?

To this last point, another example of how education is not neutral happened while I was studying to be an English major. The course offerings I took were different from courses within the same major that strictly focused on a pre-established canon of predominantly White male presumed heterosexual (mostly deceased) authors. Fortunately, my courses not only engaged the so-called canonical texts but provided a much broader, historical, contemporary, and realistic view of literature based on race, culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, geographic location, citizenship status, and other dimensions of the human experience. In fact, those experiences reinforced the importance of providing balanced views, multiple perspectives, and critical analysis as integral parts of understanding the significance of being in a democracy and living in a world of enriching complexity. We might have all been English majors but we graduated with different experiences, different perspectives. Education is not a neutral enterprise.

Education that is presumed neutral reflects, through power and privilege, representations of the dominant group decision-makers who dictate the essentials and norms of society expressed through the selected curriculum content and particular teaching practices. This stance is political and by no means innocent or neutral. The status quo is miscast as being apolitical and all else is political. Consequently, rather than acknowledging this process as political, anything or anyone that deviates, stands against, resists, critiques, or subverts this presumed neutral enterprise is viewed as innocent (i.e., neutral) until proven political.

In the world of law in the U. S., "innocent until proven guilty" puts the burden of proof on the accuser/prosecution. However, in education "innocent until proven political" puts educators, who advance a critical education based on democratic principles, on the defensive about their practices. Hence, why someone even thought to ask my mother if she had any concerns about opening her school. Educators can be judged as being political as if being so is a negative and from the misleading standpoint that education could really be separate from politics.

In reality, separating education and politics is a false dichotomy. One that my ancestors and many members of my family seem to recognize. And mom's preschool/kindergarten, years later, it is still in existence today. Education can be used to liberate or incarcerate, that in and of itself affirms that politics and education are inseparable.

Vera Stenhouse



Community Focus



For more than 39 years Charis Books & More, the oldest and largest feminist bookstore in the nation, has played host to legendary programs and events. In 1996, it was created a separate 501c3 non-profit, Charis Circle, to continue and expand its program offerings. Together, Charis Books and Charis Circle create a forum for free thought, independent voices, and unique expression. As a non-profit, Charis Circle is funded mainly through individual giving efforts and foundation gifts. Charis Circle rents space from Charis Books and More to house its office, as well as to hold its programs and provide the only community feminist space in Atlanta that is open to the public 7 days a week. Charis Books & More is a for-profit, independent business that is funded through book sales.

In 2004, Charis Circle began sending all of its memorabilia from author events, community programs, and celebrations to Duke University for archiving. By doing so, Charis is preserving its place in history.

About Charis Circle's Programming

Charis Circle creates and co-sponsors programming in four primary project content areas: the From Margin to Center Literary Project, the Founding the Future of Feminism Project, the Strong Families, Whole Children Project, and the Urban Sustainability and Wellness Project. All of our programming is created with a commitment to sustainability via diverse and innovative funding sources, by nurturing partnerships across communities and geographies, and with an eye toward technical innovation which

will create and support accessible feminist communities beyond our physical location.

From Margin to Center Literary Project (FMC)— Building on Charis Books and More's thirty-seven year commitment to independent and marginalized voices, Charis Circle's literary project seeks to expand existing notions of literature, test cultural and discipline-based boundaries and traditions, cultivate written experimentation, encourage discourse between schools of thought, and build audiences for live literary experiences. With a primary focus on diverse and marginalized voices, FMC is a cutting-edge literary project that works to encourage "a place at the table" for all.

Founding the Future of Feminism Project (FFF)—works to build a sustainable and dynamic feminist movement facilitating regional networking and program development that challenges and seeks to dismantle all forms of oppression through an intersectional feminist lens. FFF organizes around a philosophy of wholeness, believing that all people have a right to be self-determining across the entire spectrum of their lives.

Strong Families, Whole Children Project—is dedicated to nurturing the next generation of strong, healthy, and whole young people (and the people who love them) who are committed to gender justice beyond the binary.

Urban Sustainability and Wellness Project— is designed to introduce community members to resources and programs that promote a healthy, vital, and sustainable world which rejects the predominate ideology of scarcity and promotes mutuality and sufficiency beyond capitalist models.

Hours of Operation

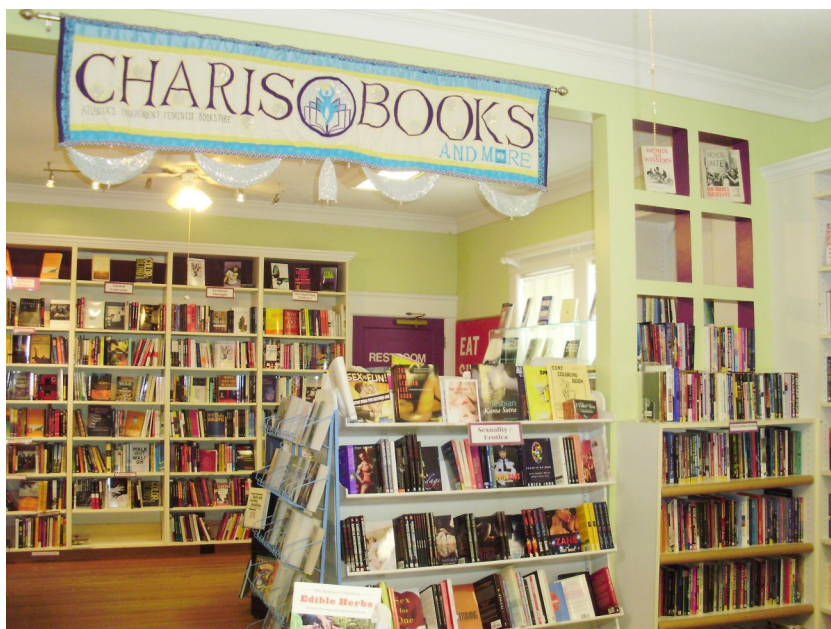
Monday-Saturday 11:00am-7:00pm
Sunday 12:00pm-6:00pm

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FREEDOM SCHOOLS CONTINUED

As SNCC grew, its members' willingness to imbed themselves in rural communities and face brutality and extra legal menacing while carrying out acts of **civil disobedience** earned them **respect** and a voice within the movement.

...disgusted by the state's use of education as a tool for oppression. ...The SNCC Freedom Schools pedagogical culture set an example of using education as a force for equity and social justice...

Within larger Freedom Summer history, we find the story of the SNCC Freedom Schools that were imbedded into the structure of the project to provide an alternative to Mississippi's institutional neglect of black school-aged students. The SNCC Freedom Schools pedagogical culture set an example of using **education as a force for equity** and social justice by using discussion and critical thinking as a way to inform its student's self-determination. During the planning for Freedom Summer, veteran SNCC field organizer Charles Cobb called for Freedom Schools as a component of the summer project. These temporary schools had been utilized to educate black children in places like Farmville, VA, where the segregated school system chose to shut down in response to the landmark *Brown v Board* decision. Cobb had already spent a great deal of time working with young people in Mississippi and was disgusted by the state's use of **education as a tool for oppression**. He saw the use of an educational component as an opportunity to reverse the oppressive structure by training the **students to question** and **think critically** about their circumstances and to engage in activism to **protest discrimination**. SNCC formed an educational committee that planned for a curriculum that would develop the student's ability to confront Mississippi's malevolent societal structure and to **organize them into action**. The curriculum was broken up into three categories: Academic, Citizenship, and Recreational and promoted the following principles:

1. The school is an agent for social change.
2. Students must know their own history.
3. The curriculum should be linked to the student's experience.
4. Questions should be open-ended.
5. Developing academic skills is crucial.

In addition, the use of Case Studies and various readings offered students insight into contemporary issues that made them into active investigators in every sense of the Freirean **consciousness**. Students were encouraged to ask interrelated questions such as:

Why are we (teachers and students) in Freedom Schools?
 What is the Freedom Movement?
 What alternatives does the Freedom Movement offer us?
 What does the majority culture have that we want?
 What does the majority culture have that we don't want?
 What do we have that we want to keep?

As the anniversary of Freedom Summer arrives, we must remind ourselves that education has been and always will be political, as it can serve as a site for oppression or equity and justice. We should continue to ask, "how do schools transform or constrain freedom and agency" for all those who have a stake in education.

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Teaching to the Heart for Societal Transformation: Reflections of a Brother Professor in the Academy

by Eric Bridges

Two of the most personally transformative works I have read are *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as told to Alex Haley and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire. These two works actually created a sense of coming of age in me, during a time when Reaganomics and the movie "Wall Street" actually shaped the zeitgeist of Generation Xers of which I belong. Oftentimes I will tell my students of Naomi Klein, the Generation Xer who is author of *No Logo* and *The Shock Doctrine*, and how she describes her budding sociopolitical development. We both came of age in North America (I in the American South and Klein in Canada) when there was an expectation that we would go to college, make a lot of money, and drive the global capitalistic economy through our rabid consumerism. There was not an expectation per se that we were supposed to critique the very systems that shaped our philosophies our roles in our own personal and collective exploitation. I often think back on what influences shaped my nascent sociopolitical perspective from one of personal cynicism and "get mine" attitude to a sincere questioner of societies that dehumanize the vast majorities of people on the planet and shapes my teaching philosophy.

Naomi Klein is the daughter of Jewish intellectual activists who came of age during the 1960s, the same time period my parents came of age. As teenagers, Klein and I both frequented malls, engaged in window shopping and fantasized of the day when we could buy our hearts' desires. When I started college, my majors were chemical engineering and economics. I chose these two majors because I was socialized to pursue money, to get paid. Neither of these disciplines interested me, but since I was socialized to get an education and to get a good job that paid excellent money, I did not pick my first loves, psychology and history, as majors because I did not think they would pay well. All this changed when I transferred to Georgia State University (GSU) in the late eighties.

Popular musical groups such as Public Enemy, KRS-1, Poor Righteous Teachers, Brand Nubians and X Clan spoke of knowledge of self, especially African-centered cultural knowledge and political awareness of social conditions of African Americans and other oppressed peoples within the confines of the American global empire. These artists linked African American experiences to victims of U.S. imperialism globally. What a magnificent time to be young, Black and gifted! Allow me the nostalgia of telling my personal story because my experience is directly related to my educational philosophy.

GSU, during the late 1980s and 90s, was not the liberal bastion of educational excellence that many have come to know presently. African American students would encounter racial macro and micro aggressions regularly. I myself was kicked out an English class for questioning the lack of diversity at that time in the American canon. In 1993 I found a trash can with the words 'n****ers enter' stenciled on it. Between the historical indignities that African American GSU students faced and this incident, students became incensed, but organized. Over 200 students participated in a sit-in that led to

the formation of the African American Studies Department at GSU. I was never the same afterwards. For the first time in my life, I had seen the power of collective political organization and action of youth who combined knowledge and activism to create change.

Naomi Klein discusses a similar experience that ended tragically. While Klein was enrolled as an undergraduate at The University of Toronto at The Ecole Polytechnique, several students, all women, protested for the creation of a Women's Studies Program. They were shot and killed. This changed Klein in ways that can only be imaged. It is easy to become depressed and helpless after experiencing state sponsored violence. However, Klein went on to become an activist and author whose life work is to expose imperial power for what it truly is. The activist education she received from her parents and the death of the young women shaped her commitment to social justice.

I tell these two accounts because in my mind, social justice education has to inform the heart as well as the mind. The fallacy that teaching is apolitical does a disservice to people who have suffered state sponsored and sanctioned oppression. Education for the historically oppressed should provide the intellectual and affective tools to critique and dismantle the institutions that dehumanize them.

During European colonial expansion, European nations did everything in their power to destroy the educational and socialization practices of the people they attempted to conquer. This process had to be done, if the European powers were to succeed in their domination. The rich legacies and histories of the people had to be eliminated because a culturally aware and educated people are a rebellious people. African American enslaved peoples were forbidden not only to be taught how to read, when they were kidnapped from their homelands and brought to the United States, certain cultural practices such as drumming, were banned. The instigators of the slave system knew the power of the drum as a communication device and a spiritual tool in the rebellions that enslaved Africans could use to liberate themselves.

Today, teachers on all levels must be equipped with the modern day drum, which is culturally relevant educational pedagogy, to develop the sociopolitical awareness of young people who face the oppressive grandchild of slavery, globalization. Young people need an education that connects their plight within the U. S. with young people who struggle for their humanity internationally. As educators, we must not be specialists in one area, we must be able to connect our respective disciplines to the geopolitical contexts of struggle and resistance.

The Struggle Continues...

Eric Bridges is an Associate professor of psychology at Clayton State University.

The fallacy that teaching is apolitical does a disservice to people who have suffered state sponsored and sanctioned oppression.

BOOK REVIEW

by Mary Hollowell

Brynjolfsson, E. & McAfee, A. (2014). *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*. New York: W.W. Norton. ISBN 978-0-393-23935-5

The Second Machine Age is a thought-provoking book written by two business professors at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It has wide-ranging implications for education and society in general. The authors reinforce that we are now in a Technological Revolution that has spawned amazing inventions such as the Google driverless car which navigates complex roadways, writerless prose used by Forbes.com, and artificial intelligence such as Watson that beat top *Jeopardy!* players in 2011. They also introduce lifelike robots such as BigDog, which carries supplies over rough terrain for the military, and smaller Kiva robots that scuttle goods across warehouse floors. Honda's ASIMO robot can even climb stairs and kick a ball. An alternative to GPS is Waze, which collects information from a network of drivers and provides up-to-the-minute directions, traffic conditions, and gas prices.



Educators must encourage their students to consider the implications of modern technology and vastly-connected networks of people. Will new technologies be used for good or ill? Will they promote freedom or oppression? What is the best education for students in the second machine age? Will modern technology increase unemployment or will alternative jobs arise as work becomes more and more automated? Will the gap between the haves and the have-nots increase in our nation and around the globe? These are just a few of the crucial questions that are posed in *The Second Machine Age*.

The authors, Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, are optimists who punctuate their text with many graphs that are easy for laypeople to understand. As a self-described pessimist, however, I am more wary about modern technology. Brynjolfsson and McAfee recommend general policy changes to augment the second machine age: better infrastructure, higher taxes for companies that pollute, and more relaxed immigration policies to increase multicultural innovations. I find these points hard to argue with, myself. The authors also propose more federal funding of academic research in our nation but this reviewer believes that such funding, particularly by defense agencies, is probably already more than adequate. One of the authors' more radical suggestions is to begin adding "made by humans" labeling to goods.

As far as education goes, the authors recommend that schools facilitate more creative thinking and present more complex communication challenges in the form of projects. Interestingly, they point out that a disproportionate number of American entrepreneurs attended Montessori schools, where they had their curiosities peaked and were able to extensively pursue their interests. Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) are praised, in the book, for enabling the best college professors to reach as many as one hundred thousand online learners at once. If such broadcasts were used in the K-12 arena, they might displace live teachers. Certainly not all K-12 students are self-motivated learners, and many students benefit from face-to-face contact with authentic, enthusiastic, humorous, and compassionate teacher role models.

Is it too farfetched to imagine that one day artificial intelligence may outstrip human intelligence? And there are other weighty matters. On the horizon lies the novelty of drones delivering pizzas and other goods to our doorsteps, but currently drones are used in warfare. Computer networks can make our lives more efficient by recommending online books and movies but they can also facilitate cyberbullying and raise it to the level of electronic gang stalking. Multipurpose iPhones bring audio, video, references, and amenities to our fingertips but they can also increase incivility in our society. These and other moral and philosophical implications of new technology must be considered. Thanks to the authors and their publisher, W.W. Norton, for this intriguing new book, and let us use it as a springboard to discussions about technology in our nation and the world.

Past Highlight:



4th Annual Alabama NAME Region 3 Conference

Hosts

Courtney Bentley, Associate Professor, Teacher Leadership, University of Montevallo and Director of Alabama NAME hosted an engaging thoughtful conference. Bentley, along with her AL NAME team and with the support of her colleagues and students, provided an opportunity for counselors, educators, non-profits, and social workers to present on education issues, models, and approaches for advocacy, multicultural education, and curriculum development. Throughout the conference, it was evident why this committed, growing, and persistent award-winning NAME chapter, under Bentley's leadership, continues to successfully advance NAME's mission to "advocate for equity and social justice through multicultural education."



"We hope that today fosters critical dialog, forges new connections, and inspires us to be more culturally responsive in our practice."

March 14, 2014

**University of Montevallo
Montevallo, AL**

***Bridging the (Un) Common Core:
Balancing Rigor and Relevance for
Diverse Populations***

Featured Speaker

Tondra Loder-Jackson, Associate Professor, Educational Foundations, School of Education, University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB); Director, UAB Center for Urban Education has a forthcoming book *Schoolhouse Activists: African American Educators and the Long Birmingham Civil Rights Movement*.

For Loder-Jackson's morning keynote:
***Reflections on Sally, Dick, and Jane, The Bluest Eye,
and the Neo-Civil War on the Common Core***

See page 8, this issue.

Featured Speaker

Vera Stenhouse, educator, independent researcher, and GA NAME Leadership Team member, recently published *In the Service of Learning and Empowerment: Service-Learning, Critical Pedagogy, and the Problem-Solution Project*.

In the afternoon, Stenhouse presented ***Borders, Boundaries, Barriers, and Bridges: An Alliteration for Liberation and Equity***, a framework developed from a class assignment and extended it as a way to think about people's efforts to foster liberation and equity personally and professionally, writ large. After defining borders, boundaries, and barriers, Stenhouse concluded by sharing a variety of bridges that GA NAME has sought to build and cross in its work through various events, dialogues, and collaborations. A highlighted bridge was participating at the AL NAME Conference, which brought together two NAME state chapters in the U.S. south. As education advocates, working together supports dialog and fosters spaces for collective/collaborative agency towards addressing challenges and leveraging the affordances of engaging the work we do (too often) in silos.

GA NAME wishes to express its gratitude for the opportunity to build collaboration and share support with its regional relative Alabama NAME.

Watch for AL NAME's Call for Proposals for next year's Conference. Submit. Attend. Support.

Reflections on *Sally, Dick and Jane, The Bluest Eye*, and the Neo-Civil War on the Common Core

By Tondra Loder-Jackson

Recently, I was invited to speak about the polarizing topic of the Common Core State Standards at the 4th Annual Meeting of the Alabama Association for Multicultural Education at The University of Montevallo. I mentioned to the audience that the conference was a welcome opportunity for us to connect with likeminded people fighting for social justice in public education. Frankly, some of us, who have been in the profession for a while, are battle-weary with this never-ending fight. We have suffered some setbacks, and truth be told, some of us are succumbing to defeatism. Every now and then we need to steal away to a gathering place where our minds, souls, and bodies can be restored for the difficult days that are ahead of us.

Being literate and educated is very often associated with being powerful, or at the very least, feeling empowered.

Many of us in the South have been grappling with the Common Core State Standards, and what they mean for disenfranchised students who have been left behind by previous educational policies and experiments in this country. We have been bombarded with much political rhetoric about the Common Core. As I glean the opinion section of the newspaper for the "common man's and common woman's" perspectives on this topic, I am struck by their effort to cut through the rhetoric to get to the truth of the matter. Now, I do not promise to present "the truth" about the Common Core (if there is such a thing), but I hope my insights will inspire and challenge us to think more deeply about the charge and challenge of the conference theme, "Bridging the (Un)common Core: Balancing Rigor and Relevance for Diverse Populations."

I began my talk by reflecting on Toni Morrison's hauntingly brilliant novel, *The Bluest Eye*. In the late 1970s, a young adult church member introduced me to this gem of a novel. I was 11 years old at the time, and in the habit of pulling books off my parents' bookshelf, which were way over my head with respect to their adult content. I put my parents' two barstools together and covered them with a blanket to create a makeshift archive. I was convinced that our book shelf rivaled the home libraries of my schoolmates, and even the neighborhood public libraries until my father deflated this notion, when he explained to me that the students in my newly-integrated elementary school lived in homes with bona fide libraries. But he could not convince me that our singular bookshelf, which displayed Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Samuel Yette's *The Choice*, and Dick Gregory's provocative comedic analysis of the "N-word" (before this euphemism became en vogue), did not rival the home libraries of my classmates.

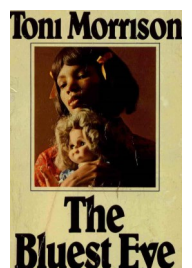
It was not until my church member gave me this book that I discovered the world of Black literature authored by and about Black females. Upon reading the first page of *The Bluest Eye*, I saw an all-too-familiar passage from my early childhood readers: "Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy." After the third rendition of the same passage, which loses its punctuation and runs together seamlessly, the novel begins with the tale of another family that is worlds apart from Dick's and Jane's family. It begins: "Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought, at that time, that it was because *Pecola was*

having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow." I stopped right there: "*Pecola was having her father's baby*"? Could that be possible, I wondered. The story's young narrator goes on to explain,

It was a long time before my sister and I admitted to ourselves that no green was going to spring from our seeds...We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as Pecola's father had dropped his seeds in his own plot of black dirt...Our innocence and faith were not more productive than his lust or despair. What is clear now is that of all that hope, fear, lust, love, and grief, nothing remains but Pecola and the unyielding earth. Cholly Breedlove is dead; our innocence too. The seeds shriveled and died; her baby too (Morrison, 1970, p. 9).

I was never the same again after reading *The Bluest Eye*. Being 11 years old at the time, I was far out of the range for the current Common Core recommendation of this book for 16- or 17-year old 11th graders. Admittedly, my Southern-bred working class military family was more similar to Dick and Jane's family than Pecola Breedlove's family. I had never met a little Black girl whose life was so tragic and so sordid. And it was not until I read *The Bluest Eye* that I knew that some little Black girls in America longed desperately for Shirley Temple's curly blond locks and blue eyes.

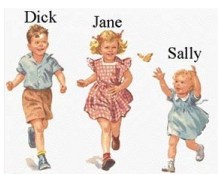
Traditional public schools offered me *Sally, Dick, and Jane*, and later, phonetic basal readers, but my family and church members introduced me to another world of



Reflections on *Sally, Dick and Jane, The Bluest Eye*, and the Neo-Civil War on the Common Core By Tondra Loder-Jackson CONTINUED

affirming, and sometimes haunting Black literature and history. Many of the books I was exposed to at home and in the community were not on the required reading list at my schools. Periodically, after I had my fill of Langston Hughes' poems and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, I asked my English teachers for special permission to select books off the list. Sometimes they obliged, but they mostly nudged me to read *Call of the Wild*, *Moby Dick*, and *Sound and Fury*. But whenever I was permitted to choose, I chose Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Zora Neale Hurston, among others.

As I reflect on my early exposure to reading, my 20/20 hindsight reveals my youthful negotiation of the academic standards of my day with my personal standard of what constituted "great works." Neither I nor my parents knew expressly about the new research that would replace *Sally, Dick, and Jane* with phonemic readers. We really did not know about the debates concerning what



books should or shouldn't be a part of the English literature canon. But there was a set of family- and communally-influenced "standards," if you will, whirling all around and about us.

Reading about recent controversies

surrounding the inclusion of *The Bluest Eye* among the recommended reading list "exemplars" of the Common Core for 11th graders has prompted me to reflect more critically on some aspects of my formal and informal education that I took for granted in my youth. Some of the commentary would have us believe that Common Core-adopted states are requiring students to read *Playboy* magazine! The state board of education president in Ohio – Toni Morrison's home state mind you – has labeled *The Bluest Eye* "pornographic." Morrison sounded off on a local NBC affiliate station, noting that the controversy is déjà vu given her book's ban in several other places over the years. But the criticism from Ohio seemed to hit home. Morrison responded: "I resent it. I mean if it's Texas or North Carolina, as it has been in all sorts of states. But to be a girl from Ohio, writing about Ohio, having been born in Lorain, Ohio, and actually relating as an Ohio person, to have the Ohio – what – Board of Education? Is ironic at the least" (Gates, September 13, 2013, ¶ 4). The Ohio school board president has taken special issue with the scene in which the novel's main character, Pecola, is raped by her father, commenting that the passage is not suitable for school-age children. (I'm wondering if any of them have seen the movie, *Precious*, or have read its inspiration, Sapphire's novel, *Push*?) The American Civil Liberties Union has stepped in,

calling for the Ohio schools to "use controversial literature as an opportunity to improve students' critical thinking skills and to create open dialogue between students and the community" (Gates, September, 13, 2013, ¶ 6).

When keeping up with the war on the Common Core, it is not always easy to determine what side people are on. On the one hand, there are national and state Republican political leaders who are archenemies of the Common Core, namely because President Barack Obama and

his Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, have included it as a part of the *Race to the Top* funding competition.

There are also some Republican state board of education

members who are against it. On the other hand, there are some Republican business and corporate leaders, particularly, chambers of commerce, that are avid supporters of the Common Core. Many state school superintendents, state education leaders, education reformers, and local educators are also supportive. However, according to one Gallup Poll, most Americans do not have a clue what the Common Core really is (Maxwell, August 21, 2013). So this neo-Civil War is not a cut-and-dry North versus South battle. The opposition to the Common Core appears to boil down to the following issues: the standards represent a federal takeover of American education; Common Core textbooks and recommended readings contain inappropriate materials; the new standards aren't as good as the old ones; the Common Core indoctrinates students with liberal thinking; and the standards lack moral values.

I cannot help but wonder if Toni Morrison's implicit critique of *Dick and Jane* has something to do with the hullabaloo surrounding the Common Core. In a *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison*, the author notes that Morrison's replication of the *Dick and Jane* book in the beginning of the novel is a "tacit critique of their family as normative and questions the damaging role that such foundational stories have on children who cannot identify with the portrait of life presented in the texts" (Gillespie, 2007, p. 308). Ironically, Toni Morrison thought *Dick and Jane* readers were damaging to students, and in turn, some state political and educational leaders think her work is damaging students. But even the authors and editors of *Dick and Jane* readers began to question the whitewashed stories and added a little color in 1965. A Black family moved into the neighborhood with their son, Mike, and their twin daughters, Pam and Penny. The family was portrayed on the front cover of *Fun with our Friends*. But the controversy about the inclusion of a Black family prompted publishers,

Many of the books I was exposed to at home and in the community were not on the required reading list at my schools.

Reflections on *Sally, Dick and Jane, The Bluest Eye*, and the Neo-Civil War on the Common Core CONTINUED

By Tondra Loder-Jackson

Scott, Foresman, and Company, to hide the Black characters on future book covers, replacing them with rare finger-paint art designs. Due to the continued controversy, which was compounded by new research heralding phonics over sight-reading as the best practice for teaching reading, the last year of copyright for *Dick and Jane* was 1965, although most schools continued to use the readers into the early and mid-1970s. (See Dick and Jane history.)

The demise of *Dick and Jane* was due to at least two interrelated factors: 1) the characters' shift from segregated to integrated neighborhood and school life during a period of violent and turbulent social change in this country; and 2) pedagogical debates about the best way to teach literacy. I say these two issues are interrelated because the education of African Americans in this country has always been linked to literacy and liberation. Toni Morrison makes this observation in another book titled, *Race-ing, Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*. She wrote: "In virtually all of this nation's great debates, nonwhites and women figure powerfully, although their presence may be disguised, denied, or obliterated" (Morrison, 1992, p. xix). We know that being both African American and literate was criminal during the slavery era and even beyond in this country. The threatening nature of African American literacy is always lurking underneath the surface of this country's dialogue about education. Being literate and educated is very often associated with being powerful, or at the very least, feeling empowered. Lisa Delpit addressed this issue quite poignantly in her critically-acclaimed book, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, which explicates the intricate relationship between literacy and power in the classroom and society. The ability to comprehend and grasp the oral and written language of those who are in power has opened the door to liberation for many oppressed people across the globe. Therefore, notions of power are always at the heart of debates about the education of African Americans.

Many observers believe the Common Core is a welcome counterpoint to No Child Left Behind, but we have got a lot of "filling in the blanks" to do with these new standards. Linda Darling-Hammond reminds us that we cannot simply overlay new standards onto old inequalities. She stated: "The bottom line quest for students, especially those of color, is whether investments in better teaching, curriculum, and schooling will follow the press for new standards or whether standards built on a foundation of continued inequality will simply certify student failure with greater certainty, reducing access to future education and unemployment" (Darling-

Hammond, 2005, p. 199). Likewise, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) chafes at our nation's obsession with the achievement gap. Our time would be better spent, she says, addressing the "education debt" that has accumulated over time.

The civil rights issue for the current generation is often touted as the fight for quality public education. As the 60th commemoration of *Brown* fast-approaches, public education continues to be bound by the unrelenting problem of the color line (DuBois, 1961), and is compounded by poverty. *Brown versus Board of Education* was a profound starting point, but this Supreme Court ruling took this country only as far as American hearts, minds, and wills would follow. Some

question whether it would have been better for us to have a well-implemented *Plessy v. Ferguson* (i.e., segregated schools that are actually

equal with respect to resources) or a poorly enacted *Brown*. As we forge ahead with our fight for social justice in education, let us remember W.E.B. DuBois' brutally honest depiction of our struggle: It has elements of "danger and revolution, dissatisfaction and discontent." To this depiction, I would add from *The Bible* a big dose of I Corinthians' "hope, faith, and love" to carry us through.

**...we cannot simply overlay new standards
onto old inequalities.**

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Standardized Testing: Reflections from China & the U.S.

By Chenyi Zhang

I was born and raised in China. I can still remember the very first standardized test I had in my life. It was my first year in elementary school. I was five. A year younger than most of my peers, I had to skip kindergarten because we did not have a kindergarten in my little village - a rural area far from the city. I loved my teachers and my school. Yes, my teachers did not have college degrees. And yes, the windows in my classroom did not have glass. And, each of us had to bring a large chair to school and use it as a desk. I enjoyed going there. When we had a class about trees, my teacher let us run around the village and collect leaves. I guess the windowless classrooms provided an open space for constructive learning, although winter time was miserable. I learned a lot. My teachers also loved me. My mother still keeps a poem that I wrote about a duck. She sometimes uses that poem to support her prediction of my career as a professor: "I knew you would be successful in academia one day, because you wrote a poem when you were five." My poem, maybe the very first publication of my life, was included in the class book that included children's writing works.

I sincerely believe my teachers were nice people...

They became harsh and somewhat inhumane because of the standardized test system.

But the first standardized test that I took at the end of first grade was a disaster. I can still remember some of the questions and the questions were very easy to me. But I failed. Why? Ok, let me confess. It was because the teachers who monitored the test were two very good-looking young female teachers. I just could not concentrate on my test. I asked tons of questions that I made up, and asked for two bathroom breaks so they had to follow me to the bathroom. When I got back home, the first thing I told my mom was, "The teacher in my class is very beautiful." When the scores were released, not my teachers, but some of my family friends expressed their concerns to my mother. They believed I should repeat first grade, and they suggested my mother transfer me to another school in the city where teachers were better. As a high school teacher, my mother did not buy that. But maybe she could only handle so much pressure from her friends and other relatives, so she decided to find a position in an urban high school so that I could get in a better school. Then the real nightmare started.

I was transferred to another school. I no longer needed to bring my own desk and chair, and the windows had glass. But once I started and all the way until the last year of high school, I was classified as a "lagging student". In other words, my standardized test scores were always lower than my peers. And because of me, the test scores of my class lagged. And my teacher could not get a bonus in salary, because my class did not perform the best. The most horrible thing was that my teachers frequently criticized my testing performance in class. One of my teachers called me stupid in front of my mother and my classmates when my mother picked me up from the school. I had no "status" in my class either. My classmates bullied me and my teachers never helped me. My teacher tried to push my mother to transfer me to another school so her class could do better on standardized test scores so that she could get a raise in salary. Luckily, my mother always believed in me. She bought me books, she took me to the library, and she let me learn to play keyboard when my classmates were in math training camp. I have to admit, because of my mother, although I may never be a good test-taker, I never lost my interest in learning new knowledge and exploring the world. But I was lonely. In China, you have to be good at tests so that you can be valued—at least in my time.

Fast forwarding to my experience to college, when most of my classmates were working days and nights for the "N+1" standardized test for getting into a graduate program in China, I chose to apply to a U.S. graduate program. Maybe because of my good writing score, maybe because of my passion reflected in my personal statement, or maybe God knows I am not a "lagging" student, I got the offer from the University of Missouri with a scholarship covering my tuition. My mother was more excited than me. She said to me, "maybe you could only be valued in the American education system, because they really read your essays and they really value your potential. They can tell you work hard." She said this to her friends, her colleagues, my relatives, and her students, because most of them were surprised and jealous: how could a "lagging" student be admitted by an American university?

CONTINUED ● ● ●

**Standardized Testing:
Reflections from China & the U.S.
By Chenyi Zhang
CONTINUED**



Today, when I was sitting in the meeting room [at the Learn In, see page 14, this issue], and listening to the discussion, my experience of being a lagging student struck my mind. It was the very experience, I strongly believe that no single child should have. And no single family should go through it as well. I cannot imagine how much pressure my mother had when my teachers called me stupid in front of her. I sincerely believe my teachers were nice people. Because they were parents too, they would never treat their daughters and sons like the way they treated me in class. They also worked hard as teachers. They gave us countless assignments to prepare us for the tests, which meant they also needed to spend their family time grading our assignments. They became harsh and somewhat inhumane because of the standardized test system. When you know your evaluation and your salary are purely based on the test scores, pushing children may be the only way to go. I think the most destructive part is that I have totally lost my respect for my elementary school teachers, even though I can understand their behaviors and actions now.

Freedom and the democratic culture of U.S. society can only be maintained if we continue to teach our children the values of having freedom and independent thinking. We teach them that there are multiple ways to learn, to explore the world. We guide them to construct their own understanding of the world. I also teach them to respect each other no matter where we come from. While the content knowledge may be captured by standardized tests, these other precious values of learning cannot be captured by the tests. I cannot even imagine that if teachers are going to be forced to only focus on content delivery, what might happen. Somewhere in a rural area a child might be considered a “lagging student” like me. But can his mother take similar pressure as my mother? Can his teachers take the pressure? Will he be asked to transfer to another school? Will someone read his poems?

I cannot tell you how excited I was the first time I visited a pre-school at Columbia, Missouri. When I saw children running around the playground and picking up leaves, I thought “great, I was in an American school doing similar things when I was living in the village.” It may be a sign given by God telling the 5-year-old me, the place I would be 25 years later.

Chenyi Zang is an Assistant Professor at Georgia State University.



**EDUCATORS,
STUDENTS, ARTISTS,
PARENTS/FAMILIES, ACTIVISTS-
YES, YOU.**

**Have something to say about
education?**

**Have something you want to
share with**

Georgia educators?

**Your story could be here in the
next issue!**

**Submit your story,
research, art, or experience to
ganame2010@gmail.com**

**For details,
see Submission Guidelines on page 19**

Educator Spotlight & Past Highlight:



Education Reform Learn-In

Testing Our Patience:

Gaining Clarity on Education Reforms in GA

Typically the Educator Spotlight features an educator sharing experiences that inform and inspire. For this issue, we focus on current education reform initiatives affecting all the educators and students in the state of Georgia and across the nation. These pages share the purpose of the Learn In, the panelists who shared their passion and expertise, the presentations that shaped the day, and the pictures.



THE PURPOSE

On February 22, 2014, GA NAME hosted a Learn In for professors, teachers, parents/caregivers, administrators, and anyone throughout Georgia who cares about public education. We hosted the Learn In because of our concern about critical issues facing our educators, not just nationally, but in Georgia specifically. The event highlighted High-Stakes Testing, K-12 Teacher Evaluation (e.g., Teacher Keys Effectiveness System), & Higher Education Teacher Evaluation (e.g., edTPA) affecting teachers, leaders, and teacher preparation programs across the state. Drawing from national and local perspectives, attendees were provided a context of education reform in GA, participated in small group work focused on enduring questions and possible actions on the issues.

Thank you to all who planned, organized, served, facilitated, and participated.

Educator Spotlight & Past Highlight:



Education Reform Learn-In

Testing Our Patience: Gaining Clarity on Education Reforms in GA

PANELISTS

TEACHER EVALUATION

Crystal Bradley is a Program Director for Georgia State University's T.E.A.M. AmeriCorps program, and a seven-year veteran in the field of Urban Education. Bradley develops educational programs and curriculum for institutes and organizations that strive to bring about educational excellence amongst economically and politically marginalized youth and communities.

Barbara Madeloni is a teacher educator who supported student teachers when they demanded the choice to participate or not in a Pearson-Stanford field test of a national assessment of student teaching.

Peter Smagorinsky is an educator, researcher, and theorist. He holds the title of Distinguished Research Professor of English Education at the University of Georgia.

STANDARDIZED TESTING

Anthony Cody is an *Education Week* blogger who spent 24 years working in Oakland, CA schools, 18 of them as a science teacher at a high-needs middle school. A National Board-certified teacher, he now leads workshops with teachers on Project Based Learning.

Emma Jean Davis is a facilitator, counselor, political action coordinator, lobbyist, (grand) parent and kinship caregiver advocate in Georgia.

Lisa Guisbond represents **The National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest)**, an organization that advances quality education and equal opportunity by promoting fair, open, valid, and educationally beneficial evaluations of students, teachers, and schools.



Bradley

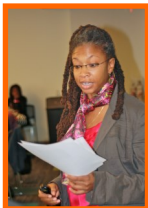
Smagorinsky



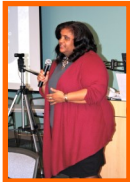
Davis



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GA NAME



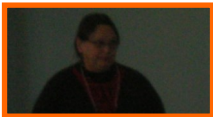
UGA



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EmpowerED GA



MAPS

PRESENTERS



GA NAME

National & Local Resources on Education Reform

During the latter half of the Learn In, attendees learned about national and local responses to education reform, followed by group work on areas they wanted to discuss. Below is a listing of various responses, resources, and outlets on the issues of testing, evaluation, and education reform shared during the event.



Administrators and Teachers

•Chicago Teachers - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8i4pdwJWNtY>

•Oklahoma Administrators - <http://www.okcfox.com/story/25322910/superintendent-defies-state-after-students-testing-exemption-denied>

State/National

•EmpowerED GA-<http://www.empoweredga.org/>

•Network for Public Education - Diane Ravitch <http://www.networkforpubliceducation.org/>

•Parents Across America - <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/>

•Save Our Schools - A national movement of teachers and parents to end punitive educational policies across the US. <http://www.saveourschools.org>

•Occupy the DOE- <http://www.occupythedoe.com/>

Testing and Evaluation

•Opt Out of the State Test - A national parent's movement to end high-stakes testing. <http://optoutofstandardizedtests.wikispaces.com>

•GREATER (Georgia Researchers, Educators, and Advocates for Teacher Evaluation Reform) - <http://greater2012.blogspot.com/>

•CREATE (Chicagoland Researchers and Advocates for Transformative Education) <http://www.createchicago.org/>

•National Resolution on High Stakes Testing- <http://timeoutfromtesting.org/nationalresolution/>

•National Center for Fair & Open Testing www.fairtest.org

•Seattle Teachers - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISU5Hvj-xLQ>

Parents/Caretaker/Students

•East Ramapo NY Students - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLvK1oMqtfc>

•Paul Robeson High Schools New York Students - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8FIQhJtLRQ&list=PLZrDJHO5cH6TwPcKJDsfBsvaSpYpe4qRc>

•East Ramapo NY Parents - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vp9WVE2EU2E>

Additional Resources

About edTPA: Goals, Outcomes, Status, Policies, Myths, and Facts. <http://edtpa.aacte.org/about-edtpa>

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). Response to NAME Position Statement. <http://aacte.org/news-room/13-press-releases-statements/101-aacte-presidentceo-clarifies-facts-following-name-position-statement-on-edtpa>

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National Association For Multicultural Education (NAME) Position Statement on the edTPA. (2014). <http://nameorg.org/2014/01/position-edtpa/>

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Educator Spotlight & Past Highlight: Reflections on Education Reform Learn In

Thank you, GA NAME, for gathering this community of educators, activists, learners, and thinkers. As a classroom teacher, education can be isolating...I get bogged down by all the stresses. This was uplifting. We have to continue in dialogue and insist upon it.

-Attendee, Testing our Patience: Gaining Clarity on Education Reform, 2/22/14

Have integrity in what you do as a teacher. Be motivated to work to benefit the growth and development of others. If we truly love our children, show it through action. Let us be realistic, pragmatic, yet bold to give them the best from what we were trained to do!

-Attendee, Testing our Patience: Gaining Clarity on Education Reform, 2/22/14

Excellent session. I will process information and become proactive in moving forward, individually and collectively.

-Attendee, Testing our Patience: Gaining Clarity on Education Reform, 2/22/14

What resonated? Despite the lack of support provided to teachers, they continue to press on for the sake of their students.

-Attendee, Testing our Patience: Gaining Clarity on Education Reform, 2/22/14

Thank you to those who supported and joined in our quest for ensuring a critical education for all.

~GA NAME Leadership Team

News Watch

Georgia 2014 Legislation Review

compiled by Cita Cook

IMPORTANT EDUCATION BILLS PASSED

(2013) HB 244, the Teacher and Leader Evaluation Bill, established a new process for evaluating teachers, principals, and assistant principals. Instead of the current two categories for evaluation results (Unsatisfactory or Satisfactory), it created four categories (Ineffective, Needs Development, Proficient, Exemplary), with requirements and potential penalties for those in the lower two levels. In addition, it prioritizes the extent of improvements in student achievement (value-added assessment) rather than how many individual students did or did not meet a set grade-level standard. The bill sets certain requirements for the weighting of different issues in the overall score, including 50% for required standardized tests. It also sets new requirements for multiple classroom observations by trained evaluators, as well as for individual pre-evaluation, midyear, and summative evaluation conferences. The results of these evaluations are supposed to become the primary basis for determining decisions such as dismissal, probation, rehiring, promotion, and placement. In April 2014, the Georgia Department of Education and the Georgia Board of Education will be establishing the specific ways in which this program will be implemented during the 2014-2015 school year.

(2014) HB 826 will fix some of the problems caused by the mandatory **Zero Tolerance Policy** by allowing some flexibility for determining which objects might be too dangerous for students to have at school. It defines all firearms as forbidden weapons but leaves the decision about what else to forbid to local districts.

NON-EDUCATION BILLS OF SPECIAL INTEREST WHICH PASSED

HB 60 ended up including enough of **HB 875** to become a **Guns Almost Everywhere Bill**. College and university campuses will still be gun-free, but K-12 Boards of Education will be able to authorize certain individuals to bring licensed guns to school. Churches will have to "opt in" if they wish to allow people to bring their guns to church; the penalty for those who ignore the ban at other churches will be a misdemeanor fine of \$100. Patrons of bars may also keep their guns with them, as may people in airports, as long as they do not try to go through security.

HB 772 requires **drug testing for applicants eighteen and over seeking Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and/or for Food Stamps (SNAP)** whenever there is "a reasonable suspicion" of the use of an illegal drug because of signs such as their "demeanor" or their having missed appointments. This bill is an attempt to bypass a federal court ruling that an earlier bill requiring all applicants to take a drug test was unconstitutional and may meet the same fate.

HB 837 enables **private probation companies** to take advantage of individuals convicted of low-level misdemeanors because they cannot afford to pay court fines and a probation company's supervision fees. The companies will now be able to extend probation peri-

ods for individuals who still owe money and to keep from the public some relevant information about their operations.

SELECT EDUCATION BILLS THAT FAILED

HB 717 would have given the **parents and guardians grades** of A, B, C, or F, according to whether they returned school correspondence and attended parent-teacher conferences; whether their children completed their homework or had too many unexcused absences; and whether young children arrived at school for the first time already knowing "colors, shapes, letters, and numbers." A House Education Subcommittee tabled this bill for good.

SB 68 would have called for the celebration in all public schools of "**Freedom Week**" during the week of September 17 (Constitution Day), as well as requiring at least three hours in each social studies class that week about the sacrifices made for freedom and the values, principles, and philosophies that were central to the founding of the United States of America. Its list of acceptable topics to consider using went on for many pages but was still quite narrow.

EDUCATION BILLS FROM 2013 NOT BROUGHT UP IN 2014

HB 123, the Parent Trigger Act, passed by the House and then stopped by the Senate Education and Youth Committee in 2013, would have allowed parents to ask a school board to change the school their children attend if 50% of the parents at that school sign a petition. One version also would have allowed teachers to have a secret ballot on changes they would propose. The idea came from Parent Revolution, a California non-profit that sent two of their employees to Georgia to raise support for the bill. The Annenberg Foundation has a useful study of the issue, including possible alternatives that would avoid the problems of this bill. (<http://annenberginstitute.org/pdf/ParentTriggerPolicyBrief.pdf>)

HB 327, the Flexibility and Accountability Bill would have required a district to have received at least an 80 from the evaluation system of the DOE before they could ask for key "flexibilities." It passed in the House in 2013 but was never approved by the Senate Education and Youth Committee. Since this means **HB 1209** (2008) is still in effect, districts will have to decide by June 30, 2015 whether to keep their current system of governance (Status Quo), become a charter system, or choose to have an IE2 contract which will grant them the right to receive some of the flexibilities in exchange for performing better than most districts.

Also go to www.EmpowerEDGA.com for additional information on education related legislature issues.

Submission Guidelines

Submit to

ganame2010@gmail.com Subject line:
Newsletter Submission

Your submission will be reviewed and considered for the newsletter and subject to editorial edits by Newsletter Team members. The content will be vetted by several factors including alignment with chapter/national mission, quality of the representation of ideas, language bias, and length.

Format

Submissions should follow the following format:

Include title of article, name of author(s), any affiliation(s), and contact information for lead contact person (email/phone)

Indicate section of newsletter for submission (See Sections for Submission.)

250-750 typewritten words (for written submissions)

12 point font (Times New Roman or Old Century Schoolbook)

Language/Terminology: Please refer to APA 6th edition for Reducing Bias in Language <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/14/>

Use of citations/References where appropriate (Include reference list)

Prior permission must be secured for use of visual images

Sections for Submissions

News Watch

Features commentary on current/timeless educational issues. Commentary must first include the various perspectives on the issues followed by the author's position and supporting argument.

Doing the Work: Educator, Community, Research

Spotlight on educators/teaching, organization in the community, or researcher(s) doing critical work on matters related to education.

Visual Art

Visual commentary on educational issues in the form of graphic art/cartoons.

Additional Arts representation

Arts-based commentary offered through including but not limited to poetry, monologues, written music/lyrics, and so forth.

Book Reviews

Reviews of books to inform and supplement understanding of ideas, concepts, and issues. Reviews should connect practice and theory.

Resource Highlights

Detail resources for birth-5 and families, educators, and students relevant to Multicultural Education

International/Global

Address issues in global/international education that affect local and national education trends in the U.S.

Content

Submissions should address the following considerations:

- ◆ Must speak to excellence and equity in education.
- ◆ May offer issues, concerns, or problems but must include solutions and problem solving ideas/initiatives or critical questions for further inquiry.
- ◆ Links to the genres of multicultural education within or across your content area/sphere of influence.



Upcoming Submission 2014
Themes & Due Dates

◆ **Student Perspectives on Education**
SUBMISSIONS CLOSED.

◆ **Teacher Wellness**
October 15

