

From Viewpoint-The Utah Special Education

## Time To Defend Public Education:



### At the Point of Contact

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Recently one of the writers had a pain in his stomach. At first he believed it to be discomfort caused by the irritation of reading the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. When the pain persisted, however, he visited his general practice physician. The physician decided to have a x-ray of the stomach and intestines. The x-ray indicated an obstruction in the large intestine. Upon examination of the x-ray the physician explored its possible meaning: a simple obstruction to be cleared by an enema, a cancerous growth, or Crohn's disease.

The physician wisely concluded that it was Crohn's disease. Next day the surgeon removed 10 inches of inflamed and diseased intestine and the writer's life went on. The important decision was not made by the x-ray, or any other test. It was made by a real life person - the physician!

The real live person in education is the teacher. The teacher, like the physician, is at the point of contact between the professional and the client - in this case the student.

Recent events have forgotten this simple lesson: education begins and ends at the point of contact. A teacher teaches reading for 185 days, knows all of her children, has evaluated each child's reading level and establishes how well each child can read. Then we have the audacity to "give a test" to validate each child's reading level. Which is more accurate the x-ray or the physician's judgment? Or in this case the "test" or the teacher's judgment?

Fortunately there are a few teachers who will not be intimidated by test requirements. The daughter of one of the writers simply refused to give the

"test" and established each child's reading level by an examination of each child's work and her own judgment. She did not lose her job.

What is happening today in education is ludicrous at best and criminal at worst. The evils of a society require that good people do something. Remember what someone once said: "Evil persists when good people do nothing." Well the time has come to defend public education At the Point of Contact; the critical decision made by teachers and not by miscalled "state standards tests."

Those who wish to destroy public education have done all they can to reduce the teacher to a low-level automated teaching machine forced to teach to an arbitrary test. Teachers have been Hunterized, given teacher-proof books and instructed to narrow the curriculum to the test. This is especially offensive to teachers of children with disabilities. Here teachers have multiple obligations, have terribly complex responsibilities and are told that they must now focus on "the test."

What we need at this time in our educational history is what has happened in other eras to fight evil: child labor, mine safety inadequacies, denial of the vote to women and injustices committed against African-Americans. The entire education profession should rise up and shout; "This will not stand." It is time for all of us to defend that education quality is at the point of contact. Anything that diminishes the duty and obligation of teachers to judge learning is an affront to their dignity, their knowledge and their right. If a million teacher march to Washington is needed, we stand ready to lead it and one of our daughters will be there with us.

It is only by eliminating this craze for tests that quality education can be preserved. We must give teachers the right to make judgments about what is and is not learned. After all, most teachers are more able than most legislators who write silly laws and most individuals who create stupid tests.

Americans can ensure that each boy and each girl (regardless of background, regardless of ability or disability, regardless of race) can live and grow and learn to become his or her best. This can only happen, however, at The Point of Contact. It is to that end that each of us and each educator must fight to defend public education. Teachers, like physicians, are the real live persons that educate our children by making judgments and not relinquishing this

obligation to x-rays or standards tests. And if the Supreme Court will not object, may God bless our teachers and especially those teachers who work with children with disabilities. They are the greatest! Amen!



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