Rethinking Schools: A Patriotic Act

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Rethinking Schools: A Patriotic Act

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Possibilities: the feeling permeates the minds of students, parents, teachers, and professors in the fall. The essence of the feeling is the potential for change, the desire for something different, something fresh. It’s the time when we give ourselves permission to reconsider and rethink everything we do. This keeps teachers believing in students and students believing in teachers—which by the way keeps teachers believing in students.

But as the days of September pass, the cultural rituals of schools and universities remind us of what we have done in the past. With this, possibilities morph into probabilities and quickly mold into realities. It’s a cycle driven by pragmatic considerations and habits. It’s a cycle that makes teachers and students often feel isolated and unable to entertain the possibilities, to rethink or reconsider why, what, and how they do things. And as pragmatic considerations of preparing students for state tests morph into practices, some teachers feel unable to change. It’s the isolation that fuels the movement away from possibility and cements the inability to rethink. As a result, teachers need help from organizations that will make the task of rethinking—or at least reconsidering ideas—easier.

One organization that has built its reputation on helping teachers consider new possibilities is Rethinking Schools (1). Over the years the organization has grown from a small local group of educators and activists in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to a national and international group that supports pockets of teachers interested in developing curriculum and practices that support social justice, equity, and the desire to educate students about ideas, issues, and perspectives that aren’t traditionally taught in standard curriculum.

In their own words, “Rethinking Schools attempts to be both visionary and practical: visionary because we need to be inspired by each other’s vision of schooling; practical because for too long, teachers and parents have been preached at by theoreticians, far-removed from classrooms, who are long on jargon and short on specific examples.” (2).
Like many grassroots organizations, Rethinking Schools began as a local organization, but over the years it has developed a national and international audience. One contributing factor to its growth is its message; it resonates with teachers who feel increasingly pushed to teach homogenized and standardized curriculum that lines up with state and national standards and tests.

Another factor influencing the organization’s growth has been their ability to create curriculum and resources for teachers that can be easily accessed on the Rethinking Schools web site. Clearly, the internet and telecommunication tools have helped grassroots organizations expand beyond their physical locations. This is important; but I would argue that providing original tools and resources for their supporters has been the most powerful change agent for grassroots organizations. The development of the Rethinking School’s curricular resources has helped expand their audience and move the cause forward.

Their publications bring an alternative perspective to classrooms. To share this perspective with students, teachers must have access to easy-to-use curriculum that is or can be linked to some state standard. Even though state standards can seem like barriers to creativity, most state standards in the social sciences are sufficiently broad and allow teachers to bring a range of material into the classroom. This is where an organization like rethinking schools can find a niche.

To this end, Rethinking Schools has created a number of valuable resources for teachers that provide an alternative perspective on some important and mainstream issues and concerns. For instance, their Teaching About the War collection (3) provides teachers with lesson plans, teaching ideas, suggested readings for teachers and students, background documents, and maps and geography activities.

In addition, they have created a deeply rich resource titled Rethinking Globalization (4). The publication includes readings and curriculum ideas about: the legacy of inequality and colonial roots, the global economy, poverty and world resources, global sweatshops, child labor, and consumption and the environment.

One effective thing that Rethinking Schools has done is to reach beyond its grassroots supporters. Grassroots supporters are likely to commit time and resources to the cause simply because they are politically aligned with the causes and they have time to commit to the cause. But, if a grassroots organization like Rethinking Schools wants to grow and have an impact beyond it’s base, the most important thing it can do is reach beyond the base and allow educators who are politically aligned with the rethinking schools movement access to the resources that will connect teachers and students with their causes. These folks might not be as publicly and politically active, but they might be willing participants in the activity of rethinking schools.

This is where the internet can be a secret tool. An organization like Teach for Tolerance (5) is a good example of this. Teach for Tolerance (5) has responded to the needs and desires of their
audience by having a consistent and resourceful presence on the web. They have provided current and constantly improving and responsive resources and curriculum to reach the audience that supports the cause but might not be willing to be as politically active as founders and front line supporters might be.

As the year begins, it’s important to recognize that possibilities also bring with them the burdens of a long-term commitment to change. This requires energy and time. Consequently, if Rethinking Schools wants to support new possibilities and alternatives for teachers, they must continue to upgrade their current resources and develop new ways to help teachers and students rethink schools, and create new possibilities for themselves and their students. After all, in an election year there is no more important and patriotic act than the thoughtful consideration of possibilities.

References:

(1) http://www.rethinkingschools.org/index.shtml
(2) http://www.rethinkingschools.org/about/index.shtml
(3) http://www.rethinkingschools.org/war/index.shtml
(4) http://www.rethinkingschools.org/publication/rg/index.shtml
(5) http://www.tolerance.org

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6 THOUGHTS ON “RETHINKING SCHOOLS: A PATRIOTIC ACT”

Górniak

on January 30, 2014 at 7:09 AM said:

This extremely answered my drawback, thank you!

naija social network

on January 30, 2014 at 11:37 AM said:

One additional procedure in favor of marketing your web site is posting comments on various directories as part of your blog link.
telewizja on February 1, 2014 at 2:16 AM said:

Thank you to your sharing! I have the same problem.

africa on February 4, 2014 at 10:19 AM said:

Good work…

nigeria entertainment news on February 4, 2014 at 10:31 AM said:

I haven’t seen the movie but, given the focus of this site, I found this quote from an Indiewire article interesting:

nigeria entertainment news on February 4, 2014 at 10:41 AM said:

Thanks , I’ve just been searching for details about this subject for your long time and yours stands out as the finest I’ve came upon so far. But, what in regards to the conclusion? Are you particular within the supply?