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“A powerful book of intelligent defiance for which our badly battered teachers will be grateful. The spirit of activism is alive and strong within the pages of this volume. I am, personally, thankful to the authors.”

—Jonathan Kozol, author of *The Shame of the Nation* and *Fire in the Ashes*

Trade Review and Praise Sheet Attached

EDUCATIONAL COURAGE **Resisting the Ambush of Public Education**

By Nancy Schniedewind & Mara Sapon-Shevin
Foreword by Deborah Meier

On Sale: September 4th, 2012

In February 2005, Macario Guajardo, a Texas fifth grader, stood in protest and refused to take the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) state test. Marcario’s story, however, began in January 2004, when the then fourth grader developed an involuntary and uncontrollable head jerk. The culprit of his facial tic was TAKS. Marcario’s doctor and school district administrators acknowledged the physical and psychological toll high-stakes testing was having on Marcario and other students. Marcario’s assistant superintendent shares stories of other stressed children—one girl who literally pulled her hair out because of pressure, and another who would rub her rosary so hard her hands would bleed. “They’ve cut recess, they cut a lot of things that kids like to do, the fun stuff, and all they do is force us to study for the test,” Marcario explains. “I just don’t like what this test does to my school.”

Now in *Educational Courage: Resisting the Ambush of Public Education*, co-authors and educators Nancy Schniedewind and Mara Sapon-Shevin share a collection of essays about courage, hope and inspiration in the face of what corporate-driven education policies have done to students, teachers, and the educational system. The authors warn readers that the sound bites about “school reform” are deceptive, and argue that the educational system is being privatized, and in the process, democracy is being threatened. It provides stories of those who have resisted high-stakes testing, voucher programs, corporate-connected charter schools, test-driven teacher evaluation, merit pay, mayoral control, and national standards, policies that put private corporations at the helm of education, rather than the public. Readers hear from educators who tell us what it is like to teach in a kindergarten that has eliminated play, or forced to administer a state test they know their students cannot pass. Narratives of educators, writers, parents, students and activists, including Alfie Kohn, Bill Ayers and Curtis Acosta, confront the educational policies that are undermining public education, and offer ideas and inspiration for reclaiming public education for the common good.

The stories in **Educational Courage** document a decade of grassroots resistance to the ambush of public education that reflects, the authors argue, similar initiatives of tens of thousands of people across the country whose actions are not covered in the mainstream media. Latricia Wilson shares her personal story, revealing how a Tennessee high-stakes exit exam left her without a high school diploma. Having failed the math section of the TCAP exit exam by a few points, Wilson, a successful high school senior with a mild learning disability in math, was given a “special education diploma” at graduation—a diploma that technical, vocational, and community colleges and universities in Tennessee did not accept or consider valid. “I was shamed and silenced, just like thousands of students who fail these state tests every year.” Wilson went on to sue the state; her decision to challenge the system contributed to the elimination of TCAP.

Neha Singhal joined Teach For America (TFA) hoping to make a difference in the lives of students and have an impact on the educational system. Preparing to teach high school in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas at the U.S.-Mexico border, Singhal anticipated that her five-week training session would include “critical conversations with TFA staff and teachers on how poverty, immigration policy, undocumented status, and other border-specific issues would affect [her] future students,” but was disappointed when these issues were ignored. Her TFA training left her disillusioned with the organization. “We can do better for America’s children than providing temporary teachers and teaching to the test.” After three months, she said “No!” to TFA and has been raising her voice about the harmful and privatizing effects of TFA on public education while “pursuing a master’s degree in Social Justice Education, learning the tools and pedagogy an effective teacher needs”.

Collective actions across the country have been powerful in resisting the ambush of public education. Sam Coleman and Edwin Moraga describe the way teachers organized in Sam’s school to defeat a merit pay system proposed by the New York City school district. In a flyer to his colleagues, Sam laid out assumptions and implications of the merit pay program and encouraged discussion at a union meeting. Teachers realized that by accepting the plan they were encouraging the use of high-stakes testing and teaching to the test, since they only got money if students performed well on the test. They collectively said no to “bonus money” to discourage growth of a business model of public education.

Others’ stories evidence the collective power of parents. Taking on “grocery line activism,” Juantia Doyon, worked with Mothers Against WASL in Washington that made 30,000 two-and-a-half-inch anti-testing buttons with wording like “My Child is Not Your Data” and distributed them locally and nationally. Enlarging into the Parent Empowerment Network, the group provided information, testified at hearings, supported teachers who refused to give the tests and generated an opt-out form for parents. Juanita reminds us, “Resistance on the part of parents is never futile. In fact, just staying “No!” is the only sure thing. What if they gave the test and nobody came?”

Chicago was home to Arne Duncan’s school “reform” program that was a model for the Race to the Top initiative. It is also the home of PURE, Parents for Responsible Education, whose advocacy and research have called into question how successful the Duncan program --- which closed 60 schools and created 100 new charter schools --- really was. Julie Wolstenhoff tells the story of how PURE became the mid-west hub of Parents Across America, an influential national group that advocates for better schools for all children. “We believe that the antidote to the attack on our schools”, says Wolstenhoff, “is more organizing, more parent voice, more community action and more truth-telling”.

Recent actions to preserve democratic schooling have become more bold and public. Kim Dominquez was one of a number of students who was arrested when protesting Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signing of a law banning ethnic studies in Arizona public schools. “Being arrested is doing the right thing. Having a record is really a minor thing compared to the attacks that our communities feel. There are kids all over this country who don’t identify with their curly hair, their dark skin, their literature, their parents, their Chicano culture, their indigenous culture, and I think those things are far worse than being arrested. I offered a small piece of myself to the community.”

In the book’s closing essay, Bill Ayers leaves readers with hope. Listing “ten possible steps, campaigns, and connections,” he urges citizens and activists to take action and reorganize education in a fundamental way. “In schools as they could be, education would be constructed as a fundamental human right geared toward the fullest development of the human personality, and the reconstruction of society around basic principles of equality and justice and recognition.”

About the Authors:

Nancy Schniedewind teaches in the master’s program in humanistic/multicultural education at the State University of New York-New Paltz, where she specializes in multicultural/social justice education, cooperative

learning, and women's studies. Among her publications are *Open Minds to Equality* and *Women: Images and Realities*.

Mara Sapon-Shevin is professor of inclusive education at Syracuse University, where she specializes in and has published widely on issues of social justice education, inclusive schooling, and teacher education reform. Her publications include *Because We Can Change the World* and *Widening the Circle*.

Educational Courage

Nancy Schniedewind & Mara Sapon-Shevin

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