

Going Beyond the Classroom: Activism as Racial and Cultural Competence
by Kitty Kelly Epstein (Chapter 10)

I found Ms. Epstein's essay to be quite intriguing. Several statements that she made were of interest. The first statement that caught my attention was that she "learned that rowdiness was not some natural quality of urban youngsters, but an unnatural product of schools dominated by adults who were very unfamiliar with urban neighborhoods and the youngsters in them". The statement followed 10 years of teaching at a public alternative school that was a result of the Civil Rights Movement. Ms. Epstein said she learned about race from the campus student movement, however, she credits the Black and Latino adults who taught with her for her competence in race and culture. Regardless of the school composition, a teacher must always be familiar with the culture of the school. Sociology is such an integral part of our education and, unfortunately, if my memory serves correctly, it is an elective offered on the undergraduate level. Perhaps this course should be part of required courses for education majors.

Ms. Epstein continues in her essay to discuss the qualities of good education and what good education would look like and in doing so she talks about outlining the bad policies. I agree that we need to find the right teachers and then help them to stay in the classroom. Current initiatives are being implemented to put people back to work in the country. Wouldn't it be wonderful if these initiatives included opportunities for the recruitment and retention of teachers coming from the most deprived communities so that those teachers, most of whom have a first hand experience, can educate the same from

those communities. In this way, our youth will be educating those from the same cultures and hopefully break some of the cycle of people in this country who are uneducated and are stuck in poverty.

The idea “allowing children to develop academic self-confidence in a developmentally appropriate way” presents interesting statistics that surprised me. I was not aware of the cognitive developmental inability of a child not being ready to read at the time that we expect a child to do so here in the United States. This idea alone may explain the increase over the years in our special education programs and, as she claims, the high dropout rate due to the diminishing confidence that a child has. I wholeheartedly agree with her statement “if you make a child feel stupid at any age, no amount of racial and cultural competence can rectify the situation”. That could not be any truer... whether the child is 6 or 16, the building of self-esteem is imperative in a child’s life.

The third idea in the essay states, “we need a program”. Every aspect of the 12-point program cited from Ms. Epstein’s book, *A Different View of Urban School: Civil Rights, Critical Race Theory, and Unexplored Realities* (2006) is steeped in democracy and equity for all. Her ideas are unparalleled with reformation and this reformation is so necessary in our country as we need to be more competitive in this global world. There are so many changes needed in our educational system. I am a strong proponent of her notion of “joy”. Students today are up against so many obstacles. Technology has afforded them limitless opportunities for knowledge while exposing them to a society that no longer has boundaries socially resulting in bullying and violence at a much higher level. Additionally, more of our children are growing up in single-family homes, have

parents faced with unemployment, and are exposed to drugs and alcohol at unprecedented levels.

I am a tremendous advocate for bilingualism for all and at as early an age as possible. As our world is now so global, those of us who are not bilingual will be at a tremendous disadvantage and it is not a handicap that our children should have.