

educational HORIZONS  
SPECIAL SECTION:  
**STUDENT INSIGHTS**

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## **STUDENT INSIGHT AND PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE**

Throughout my career in education, I have found that I often learned the most about the local school system through and from my children and their friends. Student perspectives offer an important source of information as we strive to determine what works and what doesn't about our education systems. Learners know what touches, engages, threatens, and bores them. Their views can provide signposts for reform efforts. Taken together with other perspectives (those of teachers, parents, administrators, researchers. . .), we have what we need to explore and create a clear map for reforming and improving education.

This issue of **educational HORIZONS** attempts to clear path and create space where student voices can be heard. Drawn from seven states (Massachusetts to Hawaii) and a range of grades (third through twelfth), the student poems, essays and comments included here are those that seemed to speak most powerfully on topics considered most important by the students. In an attempt to create a dialogue between students, teachers, and academics, we solicited or created feature articles that mirror the concerns raised by the students. Against the backdrops of these larger articles we have positioned the student pieces near areas in the article that speak to similar concerns. Sometimes the students' work supports the premise or offers it depth; in others it provides a counterperspective. By juxtaposing these viewpoints against broader educational themes we hope to create a kind of "text dialogue" that continually grounds and challenges each contribution while simultaneously encouraging the reader to think more deeply about the issues raised.

The first article was constructed around key themes in the student pieces underscoring the critical nature of the themes they raise regarding testing, assessment, and accountability. It highlights how teachers who use a variety of instructional techniques and take the time to connect with their learners manage

to engage learners and ensure learning. Barbara McCombs makes a case for why we need learner-centered education to better address learners and their needs. Student pieces comment on alienation, boredom, struggle for identity, motivation, and how teachers effectively engage students in learning. The next piece brings us back to the level of the learner's perspective as Alejandro Gac-Artigas takes us inside the mind and emotions of a young Latino boy and allows us to experience the sorrow and triumph of a learner trying to connect with his teacher and engage in learning in a trusting and meaningful environment. Student pieces mirror Alejandro's comment on intrinsic motivation, testing, self-esteem, discrimination, and acceptance. In the final article Christine Villani and Colin Ward echo the problems with schools heard in the previous pieces and focus in on the issue of safety as they outline their Synthesized Professional Supervision Model that extends the concept of positive supervision to the whole school community. Student pieces underscore their concerns for safety, both psychological, and physical, recognizing the links between teasing, isolation, and school violence and the importance of student rights.

It is our hope that we are at the beginning of a trend where educators not only solicit input from learners, but publish, share, respect, and utilize their insights to guide us toward responsive and responsible reform. To dismiss or ignore these perspectives is to proceed down a path lit only by our own understanding; a path that, while undeniably straight, is dim, uninteresting, impossibly narrow, holding neither space for others nor a chance of leading anywhere useful. As Alejandro's story should teach us, it is often when we proceed blindly on the assumption we are doing what is "best" for someone that we can be doing the most harm. Once we take the time to listen, communicate, understand, and work together, we will be able to ensure a safe, successful, and engaging learning environment.

—B.B.M.